

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Cleric at Sea

I KNOW very little of Canon D. Kennedy-Bell, but my attention was called to him by an article dealing with our need for religion. He may make a very admirable clergyman and deserve the kind of unconscious toleration which is indicated when a layman says of a parson "He is quite a decent fellow," and then adds "for a clergyman." Of course, there are quite a number of "decent fellows," and that makes the compliment the more distinctive. In its way we may accept the compliment as almost a truism, for from parsons to pirates some people must obey the social law, or society would drop to pieces. There is both wit and wisdom in Gilbert's description of his stage pirate as being the "mildest mannered man who ever cut a throat or scuttled a ship." Cohesion and obedience to some common rule—implicit or explicit—run from animal to man. To use a phrase belonging to the first Huxley, "Morality was implicit in practice long before it was explicit in theory." For this reason, I am not surprised when members of a Church—including the parson—are so found decently honest and exhibit all the symptoms of decent individuals. There is everywhere a "low" of conduct below which the majority of people cannot go without being called to order. These fundamental qualities of human nature were in operation before gods were heard of, and they will be in operation when gods are forgotten, and found only in museums as relics of undeveloped examples of the history of human evolution.

Canon Kennedy-Bell explains how he received a severe shock when looking at a bombed church. He heard a man say "It is a good job it was only a church instead of houses." That was a surprise to the Canon, but it was followed by a shock when the man added "We can get along without those things." That gave the Canon "furiously to think," and after carefully thinking, he decided that the man was wrong, and further decided that we really cannot get along without the Christian Church. Of course, there are some millions in this country who have no use for the Church, and outside this country there are many hundreds of millions who are not believers in the Church, but they also need not be considered. There are, the Canon explains, people who believe that the Church is a ghastly failure, but "the world is as it is to-day because the remedy provided by the Church has never been tried." That, if true, should relieve the Church of all blame, but it would also prevent the Church setting forth any claims for having ever done any good. It might do good, but it never has. People are not good enough to have risen to the moral heights that the "Church" demands. Christianity is a "never was"; at most it

belongs to the ranks of the "might be." No claim for having benefited the world can be made. Canon Kennedy-Bell is preaching something that has never been tried, receiving a salary for preaching something that has done nothing in the past, and is only *expected* to do something in the future. It really looks as though, so far as he represents the Church, he is committing suicide to prevent himself being slaughtered.

So our Canon falls back upon the New Testament Sermon on the Mount; but it is not an honest fall back, although we must not blame the Canon for this, because he is really following the practice of all Christian writers when it is a matter of "faith." Take one or two examples of this. Says Canon Kennedy-Bell: "The Bible contains regulations relating to the ordering of human life according to the will of God." Well and good. But by what standard do we judge the value of the will of God? The will of God can be presented to us only as is the will of a Prime Minister or the advice of a crossing-sweeper. In other words, our estimate of the value of advice given us by either gods or men must be tested by the rule of whether we consider it to be good or bad in relation to our experience. To say God is good implies that we have weighed his advice and his conduct in relation to what we accept as goodness. As an Atheist, I do not know whether "God" is good or bad, but I do know that God, like man, must be judged by those standards of human society that we adopt. And, knowing that, I cannot see how "God" adds anything to mankind's ability to "paddle his own canoe." If a thing is good, it is good and will remain good, whether God exists or not.

As things go, we may note in passing that a great part of human energy has had to be spent in the re-education of God. For he made his appearance when witches were in full cry, and in accordance with custom he ordered that they should be killed. And killed were many millions of men, women and children until science and common sense made people drop that form of Christian pastime.

Again, we have been horrified during the past six years at the evil behaviour of Nazism towards captured men and women who offended a leader who claimed to be what he was by the authority of God. But this was only a belated example of what God ordered his favourite people to do when they entered a conquered city. He said (I have cited it often, but it will stand another repetition):—

"When the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword; but the women and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself. Thou shalt so do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee."

I think the impartial reader will admit that Hitler did what he could to follow out the commands of God as laid down in Chapter XXX. of the Book of Deuteronomy. He followed the Bible, but he Allies thought that God did not agree with modern warfare—if we except the incident of annihilating a few hundred thousand humans by the aid of an atomic bomb.

Anyway, I think that most people will admit that we do not and cannot measure and take our rules from God; it is the other way about. Man accepts the god that comes nearest his own opinions, and develops the manners of God by the development of his own social life. God's advice to man is always in accord with the development that man has achieved. The pity of it is that man does all the work, achieves all the successes, and then, with a foolish magnanimity, praises God for coming more into line with a decent humanity.

Canon Kennedy-Bell's chief item is, as one might expect, concerned with Jesus Christ. He says:—

“Take the Sermon on the Mount. Wherever you go and whoever you talk to—men and women of all sorts and shades of religious opinion, and men and women who have no religious opinion whatever—everybody will agree with you in this, that if we could direct every department of our lives, individual, social, national and international, in accordance with the teachings of that sermon, we should find the millennium waiting on our doorsteps.”

That is rather extravagant, for I am quite certain that a great many people would shake their heads doubtfully, particularly if without religious belief. In the first case, we must insist that the training of God by man holds good here. We do not believe in the teachings, even in a general and truncated measure, but because our own feelings and ideas are in accord with them. Again I have to insist that it is not man who learns the value of certain teachings from God, or god-men, it is the gods who learn better ideas and better conduct from the development of man. If the Canon wishes—really wishes—to test the truth of the matter, he need only read the Bible and the New Testament to trace the changing character of gods as they come nearer to a better civilisation. The God of the early Books of the Bible provided for the holding of slaves. The New Testament says little about it, save to advise obedience of slaves to their owners. Canon D. Kennedy-Bell takes things upside down. He begins with the improvement of man and forgets its nature and cause.

But without entering into a lengthy analysis of the value of the Sermon on the Mount, or stressing the fact, there is plenty of room for adverse criticism. The Canon can find these same qualities plentifully sprinkled in the writings of the ancient Roman and Greek philosophers. The only difference is that in the pagan writings they are better expressed. For example, the “Any person may live happy in poverty, but few in wealth and power” of Epictetus is much better than the meandering “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” of the New Testament Jesus. That praise of poverty has had its day. The poor are not blessed, and the attraction of putting up with poverty and ill-treatment to reap a benefit in a world to come has had its day,

The Futility of the Jesus Slogan

But let us suppose that the Jesus of the New Testament is really an historical character, and make the equally absurd assumption that he gave to the world a teaching that cannot be equalled from any other source. What then? Are we tied down to the worship of a God? Not a bit of it. A truth of anything, once it is announced, becomes the common property of humanity. Who it was who first announced it is comparatively of no consequence whatever. The movement of the earth round the sun was announced, first by speculators in ancient Greece, and two or three other men, about four or five centuries ago. A theory of evolution was announced by a number of people in the last century, and it is specially associated with Darwin. But let us suppose that by some happenings no one can say who first announced these things. We have them, they are taught in schools and understood by us all. Does that rob the facts in any degree whatever? Not in the least. The facts remain; they are as useful as ever. Truth is not for ever dependent upon an elaborator or discoverer. Truth is finally independent of personalities.

Why, then, is there not merely a grateful feeling to those whom we may say first discovered these ethical truths, but it is urged that we must continue worshipping a mythical person who lived some two thousand years ago? Nothing more absurd was ever claimed.

What is at stake is not morals, but the safety of a demonstrated superstition. As clergymen, such men as Canon D. Kennedy-Bell are not really concerned with morals, they are not concerned with social truths. What they are concerned with is the perpetuation of a very, very ancient superstition. It is not Jesus the preacher of morals he is concerned with, but Jesus the miraculously born God, the worker of miracles, and the ultimate saviour of human beings from hell. One of the oldest and the most authoritative teachings of the Christian Church is that no man could be saved merely by good behaviour. Hell awaited all who could not plead faith in Jesus. But to-day hell is losing its force. People talk of hell and just grin. Like all religions, Christianity was born of the fear and ignorance of man. To-day the number of believers in gods is decreasing rapidly. People grin and hand them over to the anthropologists for dissection.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A PRIEST AND THE PRESS

DESPITE the widespread publicity given to the recent case of the Roman Catholic priest, whose trial took place in circumstances which evoked considerable adverse comment from Lord Goddard at the subsequent inquiry, and despite the repeated claim of “The Catholic Herald” (when dealing with certain matters) that that journal is primarily a newspaper, one noted the singular absence of any reference to the affair of the priest and the court as a straight news item.

In a journal which occasionally emphasises its “newspaper” complexion, one would have thought that so interesting and unusual a piece of news would have been given some publicity involving as it did considerations of serious public importance. Such a reference, of course, would have justified some editorial comment to balance the news item, and no doubt skilful editorial treatment would have maintained a proper perspective.

But it would seem that frank and outspoken treatment of scandals within the Church, or affecting the Church, is not the treatment prescribed for Catholic newspaper readers. Whether this is because such readers cannot be trusted to weigh a matter for themselves in the scales of news-plus-views, or because some "Higher-up" of the Hierarchy forbade Catholic newspaper references, it is difficult to know. In any case such questions of policy are for the people whose job it is to decide them. They know their followers best, and it is up to those followers to make any protest that may be necessary on the grounds of omission of important news items.

But when it comes to a question of what is published, especially in "comment" or "gossip," a wider horizon opens up. Although neglected in the news column of "The Catholic Herald," this Stoke-on-Trent priest case had received such wide publicity elsewhere that for very shame something had to be said in the nature of comment, and a contributor writing over the name of "Jotter" gave a paragraph. In my view it would have been better to have preserved a complete silence rather than write that paragraph, for it occurred to me that it was a subtle effort to apply the whitewash brush to an affair which had too many black patches on it.

The writer said: "Though naturally and properly it would be the Catholic desire to avoid all possible scandal in such a case, such a desire cannot be carried to the lengths of virtual conspiracy against the law. . . ." In that we see the usual independent assumption of the Catholic that he is somehow superior to others. Why should it be "naturally and properly" the Catholic desire to avoid scandal in such a case? Is a Roman Catholic priest a superior kind of being that any just person should worry more about the scandal in his case than about the scandal in any other case? Personally, I see nothing extra special in a priest being charged with indecency with a boy. Such cases merely indicate sexual aberrations that are to be found in numbers of other people, and so long as publicity or scandal attaches to the legal process of dealing with them there is no reason to worry about a priest than any other mortal. But there's the rub, probably, for such affairs do make it rather obvious that priests are mortal, after all, and that the ridiculous idea of celibacy may break down even with God Almighty behind it.

We know, and "The Catholic Herald" knows, that this is true in fact, but the ordinary man or woman may not be quite so familiar with the position, and one is led to suspect that the "natural and proper desire to avoid scandal" could be interpreted as an anxious desire to prevent a theological absurdity (celibacy and the purity of the priesthood) being blown sky-high.

Otherwise, why worry? There is such a solid answer to a situation of this kind if mere scandal was the only question. It could be pointed out for instance, if Catholic priests were honestly regarded as ordinary mortals, that the rarity of such cases in the priesthood corresponds with a rarity among the ordinary public, and that men of this type are more to be pitied than blamed, though of-course society must protect its boys from their class. Indeed, a really intelligent Catholic Press would recognise the problem as a whole, not merely when it affected priests, and would support the sex-reform movement in its efforts to secure a more scientific public attitude to such offenders, thus avoiding "scandal" and securing rational treatment for all offenders.

But I doubt if Rome would ever unload its sin-sex bunkum to give to ordinary persons the same accommodating treatment that it tries to whitewash when handed out to a priest. An enlightened sex-outlook is anathema to Roman Catholicism—except where erring priests are concerned. It is to be hoped that the public, as a result of the publicity in the case concerned, will not only perceive the theological aspect, but will also

recognise the tendency that still exists to treat priests as a privileged caste.

The really objectionable part of "Jotter's" paragraph, however, was towards the end, where he wound up by saying: "Anyone would have been tempted to do the same; it was the accidental error of judgment of one man which made this case." (His italics.)

Can it really be true that "anyone would have been tempted to do the same?" Are there no clerks of courts anywhere in the country whose sense of duty is high enough to avoid temptation? To be tempted involves at the very least struggling with the desire to do something we feel we ought not to do. Have we no men sufficiently honourable to do their duty without thinking about a despicable alternative? I can't believe that. And the imputation reflects badly in the direction of anyone who makes it. Moreover, to suggest that the affair was "the accidental error of judgment of one man" is an effort to whitewash by flying in the face of all the facts.

In view of Lord Goddard's report, and the evidence at the inquiry, how can it be suggested that there was an "accidental error of judgment?" And how does the idea square up with "Jotter's" own phrase about a "virtual conspiracy against the law?"

The affair was obviously a deliberate effort to cover up the misdeeds of a Catholic priest, by a Catholic who was in a position of trust. But it is not difficult to understand; when we have Catholic schools with a special Catholic atmosphere, and Catholic teachers, for Catholic children, it is not a far cry to the idea of Catholic courts, with Catholic clerks, and perhaps Catholic magistrates, for Catholic priests and others of the faith.

The idea is good—Rome All Over—but the whitewash is very, very streaky.

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

[NOTE.—The slight alteration in my signature is due to the fact that I am apparently sometimes confused with another member of my family. I do not mind others getting the kudos for anything good that I may occasionally do, but I draw the line at burdening others with my frequent sins committed in the name of Freethought. Hence, in future, I will sign my articles as I sign my cheques, so that they may be correctly "referred to drawer."—F.J.C.]

THE JEWS

A CONSIDERATION of this "Aryan fallacy" leads us to two so-called "race-problems" which are of immediate political importance—the Nordic and the Jewish. Beginning with the latter, we find that the Jewish problem is far less a "racial" than a cultural one. Jews are no more a distinct sharply marked "race" than are German or English. The Jews of the Bible were of mixed descent. During their dispersal they have interbred with the surrounding populations, so that a number of hereditary elements derived from the immigrant Jews are scattered through the general population, and the Jewish communities have come to resemble the local population in many particulars. In this way Jews of Africa, of Eastern Europe, of Spain and Portugal, and so on, have become markedly different from each other in physical type. What they have preserved and transmitted is not "racial qualities" but religious and social traditions. Jews do not constitute a race, but a society with a strong religious basis and peculiar historic traditions, parts of which society have been forced by segregation and external pressure into forming a pseudo-national group. Biologically it is almost as illegitimate to speak of a "Jewish Race" as an "Aryan Race."—From "Living in a Revolution," by Julian Huxley.

ACID DROPS

The Catholic Bishop of Maura, Brazil, has broken ties with the Catholic Church. He has publicly stated that the Pope is Fascist—a very obvious fact that is patent to anyone who will take the trouble to read any book on Fascism and then compare it with the teachings and practice of the Church. But these are the moments when the Vatican wishes to keep this from the public eye, and so has excommunicated the Bishop. The Bishop has retorted by establishing a new Church. He is discarding one form of imbecility for the purpose of establishing another. That is real religious progress.

Another man in trouble with his "spiritual" neighbours is City Councillor G. C. Joliffe (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa). He believes there are too many churches in the place and says bluntly: "The business is overdone." Naturally the churches are up in arms. They say that Mr. Joliffe is not speaking the truth, but if the South African preachers are like our home ones we would back the layman.

Faced with the uncomfortable fact that the Catholic Commission in 1939 settled once and for all that the first three chapters of Genesis must be accepted "in the literal historic sense," the "Universe" tries hard to explain to one of its troubled sheep that Adam may have had one more rib than Eve or the Hebrew word translated "rib" may not mean rib. That makes the situation rather interesting. For if the word translated rib might mean something else, so might anything else mean something entirely different to what is stated. Perhaps, for example, God meant his two pets to learn all things, good and evil, and not to remain in a garden for ever and ever. Or perhaps the word translated "God" should be Satan, and so forth. That really does make the Bible more interesting. It would serve as a capital parlour game when the long nights return to us.

Nearly 85,000 converts to Romanism were made in the United States during the past year, and numbers more were made in the Armed Forces. How many back-sliders there were in the same period we are not told, but it was probably considerably more. The number of Roman Catholics in the United States is nearly 24,000,000. In England it is about 2,400,000. In proportion, England has far more priests, 6,200 against 38,450, and probably also far more nuns. But one has only to read the trials and tribulations the flocks in both countries cause their bishops to realise that all is not quite so well as these statistics seem to show.

Whatever may be said of the rest of Ireland, Belfast is showing signs of awakening where religion is concerned. With the whole of the Protestant Truth Society against him the Recorder has actually allowed evening concerts to open on Sunday. Naturally, the P.T.S. is raving against such a desecration of the Sabbath. What can they make of it save that it is because God was so deeply concerned with winning the war for us—there would be no need for thanksgiving if this was not the case—that he quite overlooked what the ungodly were doing in Belfast.

We may as well rub it in, so we may point out that there are other signs in Belfast that probably have not been noticed. One is, there is a very active and capable body of young men in Belfast who aim at doing all they can to knock common sense into the heads of the people where religion is concerned. They seem to be making very capital headway. We wish them continued success.

On August 4 a farmer was sent to prison for refusing to pay Tithe dues. He went to prison by way of protest against any such charges. It may be noted that there are 13,000 tithe-paying districts, in spite of huge tracts being bought out. But it must never be forgotten that buying out the Church does not really do away with the payment. The money that was necessary to buy out the claims of the Church must be counted in relation to the market value of the money expended. That is continuous.

The "man-power" problem is worrying the "Church Times" re the difficulty of finding young men idiotic enough to believe in the real or true Christianity. "For a generation past" is the pathetic cry, "the Church of England has been slowly bleeding to death because of the diminished annual supply of ordinands." The war is naturally blamed for this, but "at all costs" this "lack of replacement" must be stopped, especially as the Church, we are told, is being inundated by young men who feel, as soon as they are out of the Army, the Divine Call. The difficulty here is their training, for naturally the Church does not want to spend good money on material which will never do it credit.

What the Church leaders have to grasp is the plain fact that the environment is largely antagonistic to real religion of any form. Always the Church has been a refuge for men of moderate intelligence, but the general run of knowledge and understanding was not so openly and so strongly against religion as it is to-day. In the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth, this gulf between religion and life was not so marked as it now is. Probably the last cleric of something approaching first class ability was Cardinal Newman, and even he was marred by a very marked streak of deplorable sophistry. The Church of to-day is on the horns of a dilemma. Either it must throw of its doctrines and openly disclaim the teachings that belong to the heart of religion, or it must keep to its historic doctrines and sink lower and lower in the minds of intellectual men and women.

At last the Methodist Church has agreed "to receive for ordination to ministry of the word and sacraments women who believe themselves to be called of God to this work, and who have proven themselves to have fitness and gifts required for the ministry." Time after time in recent years the Methodist Church has rejected the idea of having women as Ministers. At last it has had to give way—forced to do so by the weight of outside opinion and the scarcity of male applications for the Ministry. The only bar remaining is that when a woman marries she shall retire from the pulpit.

The fight for women to the right of the pulpit is not complete. The English State Church still declines to have women in the pulpit, so does the ban hold with the Presbyterian Church and others. They follow the example of Jesus who, in selecting his disciples, left women out. Women could wash his feet, but in other matters he evidently agreed with Paul that women should keep silence. When it was proposed a few years back to permit women to mount the pulpit, a manifesto was issued by London Churchmen that "to grant permission to women to preach in our Church is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and the general practice of the Church." The Methodists in England took the same ground, and in America the Methodist Church declared that "Woman is under a curse which subjects her to man . . . God has declared that woman shall not rule man but shall be subject to him." In 1894 and 1895, women were again rejected. But, of course, nowadays a woman can lend a helping hand when war is going on, and that makes a very great difference to a Christian Church. There is a long and interesting history of this religious subordination of women, but to the student of sociology there is nothing to cause surprise to find that in all cases the religious superstitions attaching to a woman's functions that was and still is religious superstition that has given strength to the social subordination of one half of the human race.

One of our religious journals says, very joyously, that "Science has not found a substitute for God." We agree. Science has not found a substitute for God, but it has done something better. Anthropological science has told us how gods came into existence. And Historical Science has shown us the way they go out of existence. What more do we want? When science gets hold of anything that works it holds on to it. It examines it, it tests it, and shows to what use it may be put. But science has never found any other use for God, but "I believe," and common sense asks at once whether what you believe is of value to yourself and others. The origin and decay of gods is one of the most glaring facts of human history. They exist only so long as mankind believes them to be of use, and the rate at which they decay is sufficient evidence that they are not worth preserving.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. STOCKON.—Thanks for letter. It will be useful with others on the same subject.

O.Z.—Thanks for correction. It is a compliment to us that the paper is read so carefully.

F. H. SIMPSON.—We agree with what you say. But it is the regular policy of religious advocates to push their wares under everybody's nose, while refusing the liberty of expressing dissent to others.

H. POINTEL.—We are bearing the matter in mind, but cannot promise anything at the moment. We have our hands very full.

E. M. ARTHUR.—The B.B.C. will continue to take its unfair course until men of ability and standing refuse to be either muzzled themselves or assist by their silence to muzzling. At present it is largely a tool of the Churches and a part tool of the Government of the day.

For "The Freethinker."—J. Gordon, £2 2s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We hope that all our readers received their copy of "The Freethinker." Late delivery was anticipated, remembering that two days were engaged in "celebrating." That two were inevitable, and may be taken as a rough measure of the strain under which all have been living. "Rough" has a curious suitability, but that again was inevitable. Men cannot go on for nearly six years planning to kill, bearing almost in silence the loss of friends and relations, without large numbers becoming to some extent roughened or brutalised. All things considered we may congratulate each other in the way in which the people have weathered through the strain of the world war. We have some cause to be proud of each other, and hope it will be equalled by a determination to prevent another outbreak of what would—if it occurs—be even more disastrous than the war that is now being brought to a close. But two things only can save us from another disaster—the determination to outlaw war and to see that there shall be a reasonable distribution of our social heritage.

If we may trust our religious leaders, God has been on our side ever since the war commenced. It was divine modesty, we suppose, that prevented God winning the war for us. Or was he waiting to make sure that he was on the winning side?

A friend writes us wondering what proportion of woman readers we have. We have no means of giving any exact proportion, but we are sure that they are more numerous than he fancied, and what will please him, as it pleases us, that this number is increasing. For our part, and we say it without desire to pay compliments, a movement that cannot attract women is not destined to develop. But women have always played a part in the N.S.S., and from its beginning the Society has never engaged in any sort of discrimination between the sexes.

Hysteria in some form or another was almost certain after more than five years of one of the most brutal wars the world has ever seen. But for sheer drivel the "Sunday Chronicle" takes an easy first. In its issue for Sunday, August 12, the leading article commences with the statement that Victory is "a debt we owe to God." Well, we have had six years of war, and a God who could beat Germany in less time than that must have lost his reputed vigour. Of course, he may have mistaken bombs for firework displays and only recognised the facts late in the day. If so, the fault is entirely his, because directly war was declared we had a day of prayer and should have told him what was the matter. We really think that if we were agitating for giving God another chance we would have been more cautious. After all there must be a breaking point at which men and women ceased to be fooled by phrases. Perhaps the editor of the "Sunday Chronicle" has not yet realised it.

The "Catholic Times" gives us the information that there were 62 Roman Catholic Churches in Berlin. They do not seem to have had any great influence on the Nazi governors. They were about as helpful for good as was the Papacy in Italy when Mussolini was attacking Greece and scoring a brutal superiority over Abyssinia. We think the Papacy imitates God and "moves in mysterious ways."

It is quite touching to learn that when it came to those elected to Parliament to be sworn in, the member for Ipswich was unable to take the oath because there was only a Protestant version of the Bible to hand. So Mr. Stokes had to wait until a Douai version was available. An oath taken on a Protestant Bible would have no binding power where a Roman Catholic is concerned. One day we may become civilised enough for a man's word to be enough. What a pity it is that a promise is not enough.

The Vicar of Earls Barton thinks that Jesus Christ was one of the greatest stage managers the world has ever known. His admiration, therefore, for Jesus knows no bounds. We may grant all that he says about Jesus as an advertiser, but look at the things he had to advertise. He had a mother, but no earthly father. He could raise dead men from the grave; could cure a blind man by taking some spittle and rubbing the eyeballs with it. The Vicar is also certain that if Jesus were here again he would do his own advertising. These be great things and we are not surprised at what the Vicar has to say.

But still the Vicar is not satisfied with the present standing of Jesus Christ. He complains that there are forty million people who attend cinemas every week, and only five million attending church. The Vicar might have said that while the forty million go of their own accord, and pay to go in, a large number of those who attend Church go from motives other than believing the religion that is preached. After all, there is a constant change in the performance in a cinema, while the performance in a church is a mere repetition of the same ideas. Finally the acting in the cinema is generally much better than the "show" that is put up in a church.

The English Church is at the moment seriously concerned about the future of religion. But religion has existed for some hundreds of thousands of years, and anything that is declining rapidly after so long a trial stands self-condemned. Moreover, one may easily map out the future of religion by studying its past. When the Copernican system of astronomy was adopted—much against the wish of the Churches—pietists consoled themselves that God at all events kept the planets in order. But the Newtonian law of gravitation relieved God from that task. Still God had moulded the world in the hollow of his hands, and that was something. That was destroyed by the development of geology. There remained the world of living beings. But then came the theory of evolution, which the late Professor Oliver Lodge said was "a word not readily applicable to the works of a God." One way and another the part of "God" became a sinecure, and in a reforming and intelligent age, useless things are likely to be put aside.

VICTORIAN MEMORIES

II.

IN his book "As I Remember," Mr. Kellett shows that in spite of the fact that many people owned (privately) that they were Darwinians, anti-Trinitarians, or even Agnostics, they still remained confirmed church-goers, in later Victorian times. And he refers to the very bad light in which the House of Commons appeared when, in his great struggle with that august democratic body, Bradlaugh was not allowed to take his seat with or without the oath though "everybody knew that among those who thus persecuted an honest unbeliever were many whose only differences from Bradlaugh, in this respect, were that they were dishonest." It is between sixty and seventy years now since that famous struggle took place, and the question of religion, which bulked so largely then, is more and more being relegated to the background as one of very little importance; yet I may be permitted to wonder whether things are much better now in the House of Commons? It is crowded with religious people, or people who claim to be religious, and I very much doubt whether in all its 600-odd members, there are more than there were in Bradlaugh's day who would, even privately, declare their Freethought.

There were always people in those quaint Victorian days who strongly and openly expressed their disgust at the way in which Richard Carlile, Robert Taylor, and G. W. Foote, were sent to prison on charges of blasphemy, though I agree with Mr. Kellett when he says that such "infidels" were also looked upon with horror and their punishment with approval. But I wonder how many of the "democrats" of either party in Parliament would rise up in wrath if a Freethinker these days was sent to prison for "blasphemy?" And the fifteen Roman Catholic members—is it not a fact that their beliefs at this day are even sillier than those of the rabid Protestants who helped to keep poor Bradlaugh out of the Chamber for nearly six years?

Mr. Kellett's memories of the Victorian Sunday, he says, "are by no means so gloomy as those of some of my contemporaries. On the whole it was a cheerful day. . ." Well, it is foolish to generalise on such a point. My own memories are that its reputation for being the gloomiest day of the week is thoroughly justified. He was lucky in having the solace of a large library, and could read "Ivanhoe" or the "Last Days of Pompeii" under "a sacred and bulky tome," if he wanted, or even Rousseau's "Confessions"; we had few books, and I devoured all I could borrow, equally on any day of the week.

Of course, we must not forget that what appears so dreadful to us in 1945 may have seemed heavenly bliss to people eighty years ago. They worked long hours, six days of the week, and it is quite conceivable that the enforced rest and quiet on a Sunday was just what they wanted; or at least what many of them wanted. It was the way in which they insisted on other people who did not share their views, to look upon Sunday as they did, that was the cause of the mischief. The people who liked the theatre never wanted to force people who hated it to go there; yet the theatre-haters always appear to have wanted to compel everybody to go to church or chapel. Some of their descendants—for example, the Lord's Day Observance Society—even in this year of grace are furious that they cannot force everybody to keep Sunday as they do, and the worst of it is, it requires a devil of a struggle to oppose them.

Victorian Evangelicals, however, not only opposed the theatre; for them dancing and playing cards were even more hateful. "A Quaker who danced," records Mr. Kellett, "ceased to be a Quaker, and a Methodist, in similar circumstances, forfeited his ticket of membership." This feeling even in his day was "evaporating," but there is still a lot of it about. I doubt whether such a journal as the "British Weekly" would mention even in these days that there was such a thing as a pack of playing cards, and it would never encourage dancing.

Stern Victorian Evangelicism tried its best to forbid such a dangerous tendency as the reading of novels, but they managed to be read in spite of that, Mr. Kellett himself being a living witness; yet if our grandfathers did not read novels they "had a large and fascinating literature of their own, which, if this generation would consent to read it, might drive out the detective novel." The books describing the work of the great explorers, even religious ones like Livingstone, certainly made fascinating reading, and I am inclined to agree that for a picture of country life what could be better than the "Dairyman's Daughter"—that once best seller widely read and yet now completely forgotten. I doubt whether a copy could be bought anywhere in these days.

But if novels were so strongly forbidden and the poorer people taken as a whole were more Nonconformist than Church of England, who was it that gave such enormous circulations to the lurid romances of J. F. Smith and G. W. M. Reynolds? Smith's serial stories were read in enormous numbers for fifty years—I believe I am right in saying that the "London Journal," in which some of them appeared, sold a million copies a week. His "Minnigrey" was actually a fine thriller, and it even received high praise from Prof. Saintsbury. Reynolds, whose "Pickwick Abroad" is an astonishing production for a young man of 25, and who was a master of melodrama, must also have had millions of readers all drawn from the working men of his day; were they not mostly Nonconformists? In any case, were Smith and Reynolds never read in middle-class homes?

There is one aspect of Victorianism I have never been able to defend, and that is their hymn singing—though I can console myself by saying it can be called Edwardian or Georgian with just as much justification. With one or two exceptions, nothing has ever moved me so ferociously as the terrible hymns which from my childhood I was compelled to hear. As Mr. Kellett says: "The hymn book still contained the verse:—

Shall I, amidst a ghastly band,
Dragged to the judgment seat,
Far on the left with horror stand,
My dreadful doom to meet?"

He thinks that though Hell was fervently believed in, there was no rejoicing "in the sufferings of the damned such as pollutes the pages of Tertullian, Augustine, or Jonathan Edwards." There was far too much sympathy, for those who were known to be heading straight for the Lake of Fire and every effort to rescue them from such a horrible fate. And he insists that "Evangelical religion, as I saw it, I repeat, was a cheerful and a joyous religion, and more joyous in proportion to its depth and sincerity." This may have been often the case in his experience; my own was quite different, though this was, perhaps, due to my being closer in touch with a stern and humourless Calvinism than he was. Even now in 1945, the grandchildren of the old Calvinist I knew as a boy are always ready to make their Sunday quite as gloomy and unlovely as his, and I am told that a similar spirit prevails in many northern towns and in Scotland.

It seems to me to be very difficult to make any real comparison between our own day and those, let us say, of Bradlaugh. An old lady I knew told me that though the girls of her youth were in many ways restricted, they really had a good time, and she denied that the modern girl with all her freedom was, by and large, any better off. I expect each age has its compensations, and many things passed 60 or 70 years ago as being quite normal which would not be tolerated now.

But be that as it may, any reader who would like to know something more about the days of his grandfather will find in the pages of Mr. Kellett's book a fund of experiences, observations, and comments, absorbingly interesting. I heartily recommend it.

H. CUTNER.

CORRESPONDENCE

PIONEERS.

Sir.—Some few weeks ago in "The Freethinker," you mentioned Carlile as a man who would break but not bend. Curiously enough among my tokens I have one of D. G. Eaton of the half-penny size of that time. On one side is a view of Newgate surmounted by the Gallic Cock and inscribed "Printer to the Majesty of the People, 1795." On the other side is a medallion of Eaton, and under it "Franges non flectes." Round the rim is "D. J. Eaton, three times acquitted of Sedition." This was not the last time Eaton was tried. A few times after this he was before the court in 1812. This was the occasion that excited the indignation of Shelley.—Yours, etc.,

AMBROSE G. BARKER.

NON-ATHEISM.

Sir.—I wonder if the intelligent type of Theist has ever tried to account for the part not played by the Deity of Christianity, as now worshipped in the ages of non-civilisation? What was then the attitude of this God towards humanity? The modern Atheist finds no difficulty in solving this problem. He, or she, replies that no God, of the past or present, has ever existed except as postulated by the mind of man. It is humanity that brings God up to date to keep pace with progress.

Until the Christian religion was deprived by the secular arm of the power to enforce—often by the cruellest persecution—acceptance of its theology, it was a source of some of the worst forms of suffering to which some human beings were subjected, not so very long ago. It countenanced the fate of so-called witches. The burning of helpless old women.—Yours, etc.,

MAUD SIMON.

"LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS"—B.B.C., 7.55 a.m.

Sir.—I have seen my doctor about the above, and he says I am to leave my heart alone.

This morning I listened to more rubbish. I was told that Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and had twelve basketfuls left over. Then the same voice told me that God placed man on this earth only after He had made ample provision for all his needs. But, God will do nothing for us unless we co-operate with Him. Nobody co-operated when He fed the five thousand, so which am I to believe? Shall I sit down on the grass and await His mercies? or, shall I go on working like hell to get my daily bread? Oh! for an age of reason!—Yours, etc.,

JOS. A. FREEMAN.

FAIR PLAY IN THE PRESS.

Sir.—In the article in last week's "Freethinker" by Mr. W. A. Gourmand I noted with satisfaction the reference to a letter of mine which appeared in the "Liverpool Post" in 1942. May I say that Mr. Gourmand's appreciation of my own humble efforts on behalf of rationalism is gratifying to me, and will remain a source of strength and encouragement in those odd moments when one feels almost alone in the fight?

With regard to the controversy in the "Post" at the time mentioned, you may be interested to know that a further letter of mine challenging the implication that human love, pity, kindness and the sense of justice, had their source in a Syrian desert, was not published. Apparently the "Post" having lifted the curtain on the retreat of the Church party was not prepared to have salt rubbed into the wound, and so decided to throttle the discussion. Nevertheless, I will say for the "Liverpool Post" when everything is taken into account, that it has extended to me personally, as full a measure of fair play as any Freethinker can expect in an area so impregnated with crude fundamentalism. This paper's degree of honesty and courage contrasts vividly with the abject servility of the National Press, and has earned the respect of many thinkers on Merseyside. The editor, however, would probably gasp if he knew the names of some of the people who have sent me congratulatory letters from time to time.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN McMANUS.

OBITUARY

MRS. LILY WILKS.

We regret to record the death of an active worker for the Blackpool Branch of the N.S.S., Mrs. Lily Wilks, who, after a short illness has died leaving her husband, daughter and son, along with others bereaved. The remains were cremated at Carlton Crematorium on Tuesday, August 14, a Secular burial service being conducted at the wish of all concerned.

JOHN V. SHORTT.

JAMES ARTHUR LANGTON.

We record the death of James Arthur Langton, a veteran Freethinker, 88 years of age, which took place on August 9. A reader of "The Freethinker" for many years and loyal to his principles he followed the progress of the movement with sincere interest. He laid stress on his wish for a Secular Service at the graveside, and his wish was duly carried out on August 16 at Highgate Cemetery when the General Secretary N.S.S. officiated before an assembly of relatives and friends.

R. H. R.

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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, 6 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., MESSRS. SAPHIN, HART, WOOD and PAGE.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13, I.L.P.).—Sunday, 3.30 p.m.: "Business and Religion."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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. CLAYTON will lecture.

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

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"A BENEFACTRESS OF THE HUMAN RACE"

IF anyone should want an example of a worthy, inspiring life, wholly uninfluenced by the frills or promptings of Christianity, it will certainly be found in Eve Curie's biography of her mother, "Madame Curie."

Quietly yet clearly does Eve recount the development of her mother in the shedding of all religious superstition. As a mere child Madame Curie suffered a number of family bereavements. It was in these circumstances that Eve writes of her mother, who was being brought up in the Catholic faith (a faith, we are told, in which Madame Curie's father had ceased to believe without knowing it):—

"Zosia was dead. Madame Sklodovska was dead. Deprived of her mother's tenderness and the protection of her eldest sister, the child grew older, without once complaining, in partial abandonment. She was proud but she was not resigned. And when she went to the Catholic Church where she was used to going with her mother, she experienced the secret stir of revolt within her. She no longer invoked with the same love that God who had unjustly inflicted such terrible blows—who had slain what was gay or fanciful or sweet around her."

Then, writing years later, after the mother's marriage, Eve says:—

"She did not have her daughters baptised, and gave them no sort of pious education. She felt herself incapable of teaching them dogmas in which she no longer believed. Above all, she feared for them the distress she had known when she lost her faith. There was no anti-clerical sectarianism in this. Absolutely tolerant, Marie was to affirm on many occasions to her children that, if they wanted to give themselves up to religion later on, she would leave them perfectly free."

Finally, in keeping with her long rejection of Christianity, the burial of Madame Curie is thus recorded:—

"On Friday, July 6, 1934, at noon, without speeches or processions, without a politician or an official present, Madame Curie modestly took her place in the realm of the dead. She was buried in the cemetery at Sceaux in the presence of her relatives, her friends, and the co-workers who loved her. Her coffin was placed above that of Pierre Curie. Bronya and Joseph Sklodovski threw into the open grave a handful of earth brought from Poland. The gravestone was enriched by a new line: Marie Curie-Sklodovska."

Madame Curie was born in Poland. Her maiden name—Sklodovski. Bronya and Joseph were her sister and brother. Her husband, Pierre, was a Frenchman.

Aided by her husband, Madame Curie was the discoverer of radium, and twice the recipient of the Nobel Prize—first for physics and then for chemistry. "A benefactress of the human race" is merely one of the tributes so widely paid her. From the first she utterly rejected the idea of taking out any patents for radium.

"Physicists," she said, "always publish their researches completely. If our discovery has a commercial future, that is an accident by which we must not profit. And radium is going to be of use in treating disease. It seems to me impossible to take advantage of that." Later she was pressed by an American visitor to reconsider the question of royalties. "Radium," she replied, "is not to enrich anyone. Radium is an element. It belongs to all people."

For anything like a conception of Madame Curie's benevolent, humanitarian activities in numerous other directions one must consult the biography itself.

Even after she had achieved fame Madame Curie lived very simply. She could never entirely discard the habits she had acquired when, in her early Parisian days, she was often reduced to the state of fainting from sheer hunger. When dis-

cussing with her two daughters, Irene and Eve, the provision she hoped to be able to make for their future, Madame Curie is quoted as saying, in the way of an afterthought: "There is something else; by sheer laziness I have allowed the money for my second Nobel Prize to remain in Stockholm in Swedish crowns." Briefly, Madame herself had not the least desire for money or decorations.

During one of her three visits to America she was given the freedom of New York City. Practically every honour within the gift of America was conferred upon her. She was also presented by the President, at White House, with a gramme of radium, the then cost of which—100,000 dollars—was promptly subscribed by her hosts of admirers.

Personal merit alone—merit, that is, in its beneficial, uplifting phases—commanded her recognition.

"One anecdote out of a thousand," relates Eve, "sums up beautifully the response of the Curies to what Pierre called 'the favours of fortune.' The couple were dining at the Elysée Palace with President Loubet. In the course of the evening a lady came up to Marie and asked, 'Would you like me to present you to the King of Greece?'"

Marie, innocently and politely, replied in her gentle voice, all too sincere, 'I don't see the utility of it.'

She recognised the lady's stupefaction—and also, with horror, perceived that the lady, whom she had not recognised, was in fact Madame Loubet. She blushed, caught herself up, and said, precipitately, 'But . . . but . . . naturally, I shall do whatever you please. Just as you please.'

FRANK HILL

GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

I HAD great religious fervour which persisted until shortly after my confirmation at the age of sixteen. I remember the incredulity with which I first heard that there actually were people, people baptised like myself into the Church of England, who did not believe in Jesus. I never met an unbeliever in all these years. As soon as I did, it was all over with my simple faith in the literal fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. This was bad luck on my parents, but they were doomed to it.

One married couple that I know, belonging to the same generation, decided that the best way in the end to ensure a proper religious attitude in their children was not to teach any religion at all until they were able to understand it in some degree of fullness. The children were sent to schools where no religious training was given. At the age of thirteen the eldest boy came indignantly to his father and said: "Look here father, I think you've treated me very badly. The other chaps laugh at me because I don't know anything about God. And who's this chap Jesus? When I ask them they won't tell me, they think I am joking."

So the long hoped-for moment had arrived. The father told the boy to call his sister, who was a year younger than him, because he had something very important to tell them both. Then very reverently and carefully he told them the Gospel story. He had always planned to tell it to them in this way. The children did not interrupt him. When finally he had finished there was a silence. Then the girl said, rather embarrassed, "Really, father, I think that is the silliest story I've heard since I was a kid." The boy said, "Poor chap. But what about it anyhow?"—From "Goodbye to All That," by Robert Graves.

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