

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Rationalising Religion

IN a quite friendly way one of our readers suggests that we might make more headway against Christianity if we were less drastic in speech and method. There is nothing new in the suggestion, and there can be said but little that is fresh by way of reply. But we would stress the fact that our opposition is not merely against Christianity. We are opposed to all religions, that is, all real religions, and we detest that misuse of language which uses religion as synonymous with ethics. Ethics, as such, have nothing to do with religion, and Christians up to yesterday were strong in their certainty that salvation could not be won by what the old theologians scornfully called the "rags of morality." As a matter of fact our leading theologians when discussing religion still insist that "mere morality" is not sufficient. We have evidence of this in the way the Churches have fought, and with success so far as Parliament could make it, in the Education Act. It is under cover of the value of ethical conduct that the clergy have again, by proxy, re-established the Churches in the national schools.

It is also worthy of note that, while not Christians in fact, these advocates of gentleness have a suspicious fondness for religious terms. They do not believe in a God but they take care to avoid telling their friends that the whole idea of God in even its most modern presentation is a survival of primitive mentality. They appear to live under a delusion that the use of kind words to Christians, and by an assumed admiration of Jesus Christ, they will revive the miracle of the young Christian lady who is presented in an ancient Roman Circus leading a ferocious lion round the arena. Sometimes these people are not satisfied with turning one cheek after the other has been smitten; they will bend their backs so as to offer a wider area for castigation.

Of course the Christian dove is not quite so easily caught as these amiable non-believers pretend. They assume that their hooks are so carefully concealed that no genuine Christian can refuse to take the bait. But the Christian fish belongs to a class—irritating to a fisherman—that sucks off the bait and leaves the hooks untouched. To those who are likely to be led away from Christianity, the Christian says "Look how even the unbeliever pays tribute to the beauties of our religion and the glorious ideal that is laid before the Christian? What justification have we for surrendering our glorious heritage when even our enemies are forced to admiration for it?" The correct answer is naturally, "None at all," and the Christian hangs to his belief with many expressions of pity for the poor devils who are so near to the truth and yet so far from salvation.

Now we happen to be obstinately convinced that you cannot win over an intellectual opponent by agreeing with him or

by falling on his neck and calling him "brother." He is more likely to look upon you with contempt. When Shakespeare said that a rose would smell as sweet by any other name he did not mean that you could transform the smell of an onion by calling it a rose. Things will be what they are no matter what be the change of names. The Christian is quite in order when he uses religious terms and values in the sense laid down or implied by his creed. The Freethinker is as distinctly out of order when he deliberately, even gratuitously, uses words charged with religious meaning and implications to express ideas that are not religious. No one can be justified when he uses the language of intellectual freedom in order to bolster a creed of intolerance. Words are living things; they are the children of the past and the parents of the future; and the marriage of totally unsuitable and genetically different couples is fated to produce some very ugly progeny.

Atheism Inevitable

We have been writing with our mind mainly on the use of the word "religion." But there are almost as many different meanings of "religion" as there are systems to preach. One common meaning is "belief" in an ideal. That is quite a good phrase, but its utility is affected by the fact that it would cover anything that a man wishes from an overdose of whisky to a struggle after high art. A famous definition of religion in the "seventies" was "something not ourselves that makes for righteousness," which meant anything or nothing, but it sounded well. A recent definition from a well-known source is "What a man does with his 'Solitariness.'" Quite interesting because while it is taken to mean the gratification which man feels in worshipping God, it stands just as well for "getting blind drunk when one feels lonely." There are plenty more definitions but all these definition-makers shut their eyes to the fact that definitions must do two things. They must manifest both inclusion and exclusion. In other words they must describe at the same time what a word or a sentence means and what it does not mean, and you cannot set about the first without touching upon the second. But the important aspect is that every definition marks out limits and the sharper the limits the more valuable the definition. To put one final illustration. To say that there is an object before us is to say merely that something exists. If we say it is a living thing it increases our understanding since it separates it from the world of inanimate objects. If we can say it is a four-legged animal we place it among the quadrupeds. As we narrow the object we extend the quality of our understanding.

But with regard to gods the more we know the less reliance we place upon them. The process fits into what we have already said. The earlier gods are frankly descriptive. They cause the rain to fall and the corn to grow, or, in reverse, create a drought or destroy the corn.

The gods of the ancient world may have had too much to do, but their particular jobs were outlined and they stuck—while they lived—to their task. But the gods got fewer, and having too much to do, became careless in their deliverances and more reckless in their conduct. When the gods were thinned down to one the muddle became intensified. The one god had to be ultimately responsible for life and death and all that lies between the two extremes. In terms of our generalisation "God" became everything and so ended in being nothing.

Why a Religion?

Now I do not believe that it is the task of unbelievers to go about trying to create a "reasonable religion" or "a religion of brotherhood," or any other religion. The history of religion has made the word poisonous to complete mental honesty and the sooner it is set aside by responsible-minded men and women the better. If Freethinking reformers are searching for a "rational religion" there are a fair number of established Churches in which they may loll in security and comfort. But our aim is not to purify religion; our work is to destroy it. Honestly, you simply cannot make religion commendable to men and women of courage and intelligence. You may make established religions a little more humane than they were, and for those who admire the clear air of a London fog, that is a desirable achievement. You may make established religion a little less troublesome but you cannot make it fundamentally useful or intellectually clean. The work of the real reformer is not to rationalise religion but to end it. His task should be not to persuade his Christian neighbour that he is on the same line as himself, but to make it quite clear that they are working along parallel lines that never, never meet. I have heard it said many times that one day Christians and Atheists will be sitting down together. I prefer to look forward to a time when there will be no Christians to sit down with. Our work should be not to make religion "rational" but to make it intellectually impossible.

The process of disintegration is proceeding apace; but it can be and should be hastened. Gods are of use only as they learn from mankind.

The best way to do this is for the Freethinker to stand on his own feet. The measure of the real respect that the Freethinker will get from the religious world will ultimately depend upon the amount of respect he has for himself. If the other foxes will wear tails, there is no reason whatever why a man who is born without one, or who has lost the one he had, should acquire an ornament that adds nothing whatever to his dignity. Of course, as I have said, this involves a man's learning to stand alone. At the best it will mean that he must be content with the company of a few; but in this matter one has to decide whether one wishes to be in front or to be with the crowd. The certain thing is that one cannot be in front with the crowd. Above all, if we really believe in the value of truth-speaking, and in the importance of marrying language to exact thought, we must see that our terminology is as free as possible from misleading connotations. There is plenty of liberal thinking about to-day; our growing need is for exact thinking; and when we have achieved this, the courage to express it without hesitation and without ambiguity.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SOME NOTES ON ARCHEOLOGY

III.

ANCIENT papyri have been found in the most extraordinary ways—for example, in a cemetery of sacred crocodiles. Lots of great finds were expected in the vicinity, and nothing turned up but these mummy crocodiles one of which, in sheer disgust, was thrown away by a workman. It broke in pieces and was found to be actually stuffed with papyri! So were most of the other mummies, and a large number of valuable documents came to light after being thus buried for something like twenty centuries.

Not only Biblical texts but many rare Apocryphal ones were thus discovered, including the famous—forged—correspondence between Christ and King Abgar. This was written about A.D. 200, and says Dr. Cobern in his book, "The New Archeological Discoveries," "while plainly apocryphal" the discovery "caused deep satisfaction." The fact that it was a rank fraud did not worry the religious discoverers in the least—anything, it appears, which is excavated containing any mention of Jesus is hailed with great joy, fraud or no fraud. In this particular piece of good tidings, Jesus gives his portrait to King Abgar who wanted one, though it need hardly be said here that no portrait of "our Lord" exists. "We must be content," says Dr. Cobern, "not to know how Jesus looked. His portrait almost certainly was never painted." Still this forged correspondence is a great discovery, and "caused deep satisfaction."

Among the Oxyrhynchus texts, as they are called, is one by a poet writing in the second century B.C., who discusses "how the facts of life can be reconciled with the view that the so-called gods are at once just and powerful. If Zeus is the Father, why are some of us treated in such a step-fatherly fashion?" Here then is the idea of God the Father known before Christianity, yet we are always being told that it is a distinguishing feature of the teaching of Jesus. And this author actually challenges such a conception in true modern style. "He "ridicules the deities who have neither hearing nor sight . . . He utterly repudiates the fictitious gods of the astrologers . . ." and so on. He was obviously an Atheist like Lucretius.

Also among these texts is one showing how Isis was worshipped throughout the Roman world. It is a pity that Robert Taylor did not have this document before him when he was writing on the Virgin Mary for nearly everything he said over one hundred years ago which his clear critical thinking divined is here confirmed. Isis was the great protectress of voyagers, the "Stella Maris" of sailors, and actually was worshipped in Arabia, Asia Minor, Cyrene, Crete, Cyprus, Palestine, and many other places. Hymns were sung in her honour and she is called many-shaped "Aphrodite, gentle, affectionate, immortal, ruler, saviour, almighty, holy, divine . . . by whose command images and animals of all the gods are worshipped . . . the lady of war and rule, easily destroying tyrants by trusty counsels."

It is not difficult to see how the cult of the Virgin arose in such surroundings and when the worship of Isis is examined.

Nearly all the most ancient fragments of the New Testament have been found in Oxyrhynchus (Behnesa) in Egypt, an astonishing fact for those who refuse to agree that the Gospels were probably manufactured by Egyptian monks. This town contained in the early centuries of our era many heathen temples, perhaps a Jewish synagogue, and even Christian churches. The fragments found in such a community have given the excavators rare knowledge of the way in which the people lived—and surprisingly modern it was, far more so than the way in which Christians lived during the Dark and Middle Ages.

The papyri also show how the people thought and wrote, and they shed a flood of light on the literary value of the Greek used by the New Testament writers; there is very little Semitic influence—if any at all it is because the Greek Septuagint was

used more than is commonly supposed. But one thing the papyri have made plain and that is "the close relation between the Pauline and mystery vocabularies." Or, to put it another way, Paul was a Gnostic, his Epistles reek with Gnosticism but, as Gerald Massey conclusively showed, they were edited against his ideas and ideals by his bitterest opponents. Paul is the great witness for the historicity of Jesus alike for Christians and many Rationalists, but even his early editors could not hide his meaning altogether. Paul's Jesus was never anything else but a "heavenly being," a mystery, and this is confirmed by Dr. Deissmann who, "after a careful study of the papyri, shows the depth and originality of the term 'in Christ Jesus' as used by Paul. Here we find the mystic indwelling of God in man unmistakably and constantly declared in a sense utterly inscrutable to the heathen." Deissmann might have added also to those gallant defenders of a lost cause, the Rationalist believers in a Man Jesus.

How the writers of the New Testament used current phrasing is dealt with lengthily by Dr. Coburn, and I should like to give some of the vocabulary in proof but space forbids. Here, however, is one instance: "The exact phrase by which deity was ascribed to Jesus, 'Great God and Saviour' (Tit. ii. 13; 2 Peter i. 1) appears letter for letter in an inscription 2 B.C., in which the Emperor is given this title; though of course the difference in meaning as read by a Christian and by a heathen was heaven high." The last sentence shows how Dr. Coburn is obliged to gloss over this very damaging admission.

According to Deissmann "the Lord's Day" simply meant "the Emperor's Day," while "Christian" really meant originally an imperial slave. It is all very illuminating.

What the excavators were, however, hoping for, was to get as near the "autographs" of the New Testament writers as possible, and even to find these autographs. What was the exact text of the Gospels was and is the ultimate aim of all the Bible Exploration Funds and also to confound the sceptics with brilliant discoveries showing that their blatant criticism and infidel speculations have been blasted out of existence by the truth. And not only that. If we could find early texts much earlier than those we have, it would settle the eternal squabbling as to which is the true text, the Western, or the Neutral, the text of which the Vatican Codex is the basis (that followed by the Revised Version) or that of the early Latin translations (before the Vulgate) or that upon which the Authorised Version is based. The variations in phrasing are enormous and nobody knows which is the true one, the one inspired by God Almighty. It is a pretty detective problem and it is this which makes these discoveries almost as fascinating to read about as a good crime story, perhaps more so. And the difficulties are greatly enhanced because the scribes appear to have been mostly "mechanical" copyists, not understanding what it was they were copying, and making hopeless blunders on almost every page. It will prove interesting to readers to see how much has been discovered which "confirms" the Gospel story.

H. CUTNER.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREETHOUGHT

IT is a matter of what might almost be described as historical accident that modern Freethought has become so concentrated on the battle against religious obscurantism. It so happens that Freethinkers (and no one else, as far as I can see) appreciate the need to get the fundamental basis of one's thinking straight before the details can be set right. And, while the fundamental basis of so many people's thought is tied up with supernaturalism, it is almost impossible to get sense into their heads on ethics, politics, economics, or so many other topics which are of such vital importance in this twentieth century world of ours.

Take, for instance, the latest and most horrifying of all recent scientific discoveries—the so-called atomic bomb, in which for

the first time the principle of nuclear fission has been applied to some practical end. In peace time scientists work for a miserable pittance in the majority of cases, their work is either ignored or sneered at by the supercilious, "superior" politicians, and such government organisations as the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research are starved for lack of funds. Yet, when a war starts, and everything is concentrated on the maximum of destruction in the minimum of time, as much as five hundred million pounds are spent on the gigantic piece of research which eventuated in the invention of the atomic bomb!

What, you may ask, has this to do with Freethought? Well, as I view it, there is a valuable lesson for us all. Mr. Churchill's official statement, giving the details of the project, as far as it is at present considered advisable to release them to the public, concluded that we must pray that this tremendous advance in human knowledge would be used for human advantage and not merely for purposes of destruction. The vital word is "pray." No Freethinker would ever pray that good should come of a scientific discovery; he would take all steps to ensure that this were so.

You may now understand what I mean to imply by heading this article "The Philosophy of Freethought." It is only by a correct philosophic outlook that the world can be set right. If we close our eyes, fold our hands meekly, and expect God to do all that is necessary the world will degenerate, and such civilisation as we have painfully built up over a period of thousands of years will disappear overnight. That, frankly, is what the atomic bomb means.

The matter is vital, and it is urgent, and no appeal to God can help. Fortunately we have a Labour Government in this country, and the outlook of the International Socialist Movement gives one hope that a reasonable view of things may perhaps be taken yet.

We hear so much nonsense talked about the way in which man's inventiveness has outstripped his moral strength that one occasionally despairs of human progress. But it seems beyond all doubt that Freethought is stronger now than ever before in its history. We may be a minority of the people, but a minority which is conscious of its power and its destiny can do much to bring about valuable changes. All of us, from Mr. Cohen downwards, have always insisted on the sheer stupidity of war as a method of settling international disputes, and now the arrival of the atomic bomb provides us with the strongest possible argument. We have to get our outlook home among the people. We can exercise a vast influence on the future of mankind if we imbue the masses with a Freethought philosophy. Missionary work is needed, not this time for the "pale Galilean" but for the sane, rational outlook of the Freethinker. We have had good comrades through the ages; we have good comrades in every country in the world to-day. We should become conscious of our high mission, and let our friends know that we have found a philosophy of life which provides us with an answer to all the stupid riddles presented by an irrational civilisation and an irrational religious philosophy. Everything, from witch doctors to atomic bombs, can be ultimately understandable in the light of Freethought. Nothing can be understood in the light of religion. There was much sane sense (and much irony) in Herbert Spencer's famous dictum that science was responsible for all that was known and all that was knowable. The province of religion was what was entirely unknowable. Religion sits back and prays to God to deliver us from evil. Science—which is ultimately Freethought—recognises the evil and suggests what is to be done about it. That is the difference between the two attitudes to life, and our main job, at this period in human history, is to see that the right steps are taken to control the powers for destruction which man has evolved. We must be constructive in this task. Otherwise the advocates of prayer will win—and that will mean the end of all we hold dear as soon as some criminal lunatic likes to start another war.

S. H.

ACID DROPS

The Rev. Arthur Howard, of Stoke-on-Trent, is giving up his Rectorship. He says he gets no help from his parishioners. Officially he has a following of 900, providing only two to the services, and Mr. Howard does not find the situation attractive. Perhaps the preacher hasn't been sufficiently venturesome in his sermons and tried to stick to Christianity—real Christianity. But what a number of vacancies there would be if all our preachers worked on the same principle as Parson Howard.

God has again let one of his followers down with an almighty bang. The Rev. Charles Long of Los Angeles, U.S.A., assured his followers that the world would end at 10 o'clock on a definite date. But God did not play up and the world went staggering on. But there are plenty of fools left and plenty of rogues to fatten on their folly.

There is fear in the papacy concerning the concordat with the Italian Government. With a reconstruction of the State it may easily happen that the Government will not recognise the Pope as the head of a State, a position which he should never have been permitted to occupy. The papacy is not the head of a State it is merely the head of a band of religionists, and this applies to Methodists or Sabbatarians. But in the case of the Roman Church it is a dangerous assumption since it issues orders on many matters that may, and do in some instances, make for nothing but social disorder. The Roman Church has no moral right to claim more than the freedom to follow whatever form of religion it pleases. But nothing else.

It is said that the papacy "fears the total suppression of religion in the schools, and there will be no freedom of worship." It is quite interesting to find the papacy leading the way in "Freedom of Worship." There is no freedom of worship wherever the Church has been strong enough to prevent it. Sometimes the Church is forced to permit a certain degree of liberty of expression, but even then—as in Spain and elsewhere—the liberty of non-Catholic sects is curtailed. "Equality" is not a term that flourishes where any Christian Church rules.

A religious contemporary remarks that people are in error when they endeavour by their prayers to "alter the purpose of God." Well, we agree that the prayers of the pious do not alter the course of events. But in that case why pray? Things will be what they are whether we pray or remain silent. If things remain as they are, or will go their course as situations do, to pray is merely to deceive one's self. On the other hand if God is influenced by our reminding him of what he might do or ought to do, then man should be credited for having pulled God up to the mark.

There is an old maxim that clothes makes the man. That is not always true, but we admit that it was only after Adam took to clothing that he was able to do anything worthy of note.

One of our readers thinks that we devote too much time in dealing with the Roman Catholic Church. We appreciate the motive that instigated the writer, but we cannot agree with him. After all, the Roman Church is the oldest of established Christian organisations, and more to the point, it is the most dangerous of Christian systems. In politics it works its followers into all sorts of public positions, and its influence in the political field is not to be set on one side. There is still vitality in Bradlaugh's prophecy that the final conflict lies between Atheism and the Roman Church.

One of our readers asks: "What do we think is the main use of universities?" We are not certain, but at a guess we would say that the most vital service is to prevent students understanding too much.

The parsonage is getting desperate. Fourteen ministers of religion at Blaenau Ffestiniog have set out to tour the public houses and drink with customers. They promise to take only "soft" drinks. We take it there will be other things beside the drinks that deserve to be labelled "soft."

At Blackburn the Watch Committee has decided that there shall be no cinema shows open on Sundays. The Church of England does not appear to have taken part in this piece of impudence, but there was a good muster of Nonconformists. They pleaded that the English Sunday was a national institution. But that is a lie. The people as a whole are not opposed to Sunday pictures. If they were they could shut the cinemas by staying away. But they do not stay away. They go in their thousands and we would wager that where cinemas are open they are better filled than the Churches. The mass of the people would welcome Sunday entertainments if a clean and honest poll could be taken.

It is worthy of note that a portion of the profits made by Sunday cinemas is taken by way of a tax. We hear no cry from the Churches and Chapels that this is "tainted money."

The Rev. John S. Davis, of Bingley, Yorks, is resigning his church. He says he has found more "practical Christianity in the tavern and the public-house than I hope to do in the Church." That is a back-handed kind of a compliment. We should expect, on the face of things, to find more sense in the ordinary "pub" than we should in the ordinary church. The incentive to speak common sense is greater.

The newspapers have been filled with accounts of "Thanksgiving services" for the victory of the Allies over their enemies. Considering that God only finally decided which side should win after nearly six years fierce fighting, we may take his decision as deliberate. No one can accuse him of rushing things.

The "Church Times," faced with incontrovertible facts, in a recent number admitted that "humanitarian issues have often been initiated by the unbelieving," but hastened to soften the blow to its very religious readers by pointing out that those humanitarians "miss the crux of the problem of the good life" if they do not believe in "sin" and "Christian remission." We know that Christians are not always rated as being gifted with too much intelligence, but we can hardly believe that they will be taken in with such sorry apologetics.

Take the Church's story of the faggot and stake, its tortures, imprisonments and its ruthless policy of extermination of "heretics," and contrast this with the prime object of the "unbelieving" humanitarians—the promotion of happiness for the peoples of the world, irrespective of creed, race or country. That is a story in which the world takes pride. Does it take pride in the other?

One of our religious papers suggests the severity of this last war was God's method of ending all wars. Well, if the Christian God exists and if he took it into his head to end war, that is the stupid plan he might adopt. When he made the world he "found everything good," only to realise later that things were very bad. Then he sent his son to be crucified so that all might be saved, only for that plan to send untold millions straight to hell. Then he thinks he will end war by one of the worst conflicts that history has known, and the world is left in a glorious mess. If we believed in God we think we should do what we could to keep under cover for awhile.

At the luncheon in honour of Admiral Cunningham and on the presentation of the Freedom of Hove to the Admiral, the Vicar of Hove offered the toast "For what we are about to eat thank God and the British Fleet." We wonder what quantity of food would have been available if the matter had been left to God. It was certainly strange for a priest to put a mere sailor on a level with God.

The local rural deanery of Hull protests against the barring of a clerk in holy orders to serve as a regular teacher in the State schools. So far as we are concerned we would like to see the permission allowed. It might serve to bring us a step nearer to the religious clauses in the new Education Act. There is a limit to what the churches should be permitted to go.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. WILLIAMS.—Your high appreciation of recent issues of the "Freethinker" is pleasant reading. The only regret we feel at present is that we simply cannot meet the demand.

C. L. F.—We should be very pleased to see a strong branch of the N.S.S. in Sheffield. There are plenty of Freethinkers there and it is time they did more towards the cause than merely subscribe to the "Freethinker."

C. H. WALTERS.—There is no set rule we know of that determines our leading universities conferring honours on people. Often it looks as though it is done to create notice and advertise the universities. We must remember that Oxford rejected Shelley and conferred an honorary degree on "General" Booth.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

Searching some volumes of the "Freethinker" we came across some comments we passed on the last world war. The date of that issue is January 26, 1916. They formed a part of our weekly "Views and Opinions":—

"I have no hesitation in saying that a nationalism that does not point to internationalism fails in its education function and promises ultimate disaster. What—taking all the statements made about Germany at their face value—is the cause of this war? Is it not an intense nationalism which has fostered the stupid notion that German life and thought is the only one of permanent value to the world? It is this, we have been told by thousands of British writers and speakers, which is at the root of all the trouble. And that is true what is the value of that kind of nationalism to the world? The truth is that nationalism is no more than a stage in the evolution of humanity. It is as much a passing phase as is tribalism. The line of true growth is expansion from the herd to the tribe, from the tribe to the nation, and from the nation to a phase of life which treats national boundaries as no more than lines of political demarcation. That we are in the penultimate stage only does not affect the general truth. The truest national life is that which educates a people to the point of outgrowing it, just as the best teacher is one who teaches his pupil to walk alone. Nationalism itself, sanely and profitably viewed, is a high road to internationalism. How far each nation has actually advanced along that road is a question of detail. The general truth remains unaffected."

We received the other day a rather lengthy letter and a very dull one. We doubt whether we would have gone through it but for a few words that caught our eye. The writer of the letter wished to know why we hated God. The answer is "Not guilty." We do not believe God exists; how then can we hate, or even

dislike, the non-existent? And if we are wrong in not believing that God exists, who is it that suffers? Not us certainly. Is it God? But how can our own disbelief hurt God? If we believed in God we think his existence would be a very miserable one. He has nowhere to go because his followers say he is everywhere at once. He knows everything and so has nothing to learn. He is unteachable. For his sake let us hope that he is not. His existence seems without purpose.

One of our readers sends us the following transformation of a soldier's day into a cluster of religious hymns:—

- 6.30 a.m., Reveille, "Christians, awake."
- 6.45 ,, Rouse parade, "Art thou weary, art thou languid?"
- 7. 0 ,, Breakfast, "Meekly wait and murmur not."
- 7.15 ,, C.O.'s parade, "When he cometh."
- 8.45 ,, Manœuvres, "Fight the good fight."
- 11.45 ,, Swedish drill, "Here we suffer grief and pain."
- 1. 0 p.m., Dinner, "Come ye thankful people, come."
- 2.15 ,, Rifle drill, "Go, labour on."
- 3.15 ,, Lecture by officer, "Tell me the old, old story."
- 4.30 ,, Dismiss, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."
- 5. 0 ,, Tea, "What means this eager, anxious throng?"
- 6. 0 ,, Free for the night, "Oh Lord, how happy we shall be."
- 6.30 ,, Out of bounds, "We may not know, we cannot tell."
- 7. 0 ,, Route march, "Onward, Christian soldiers."
- 10. 0 ,, Last post, "All are safely gathered in."
- 10.15 ,, Lights out, "Peace, perfect peace."
- 10.30 ,, Inspection of guards, "Sleep on, beloved."
- 11. 0 ,, Night manœuvres, "The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended."

A lady evangelist who has been concerned with 52 missions has come to the conclusion that the way to convert England is not by mass meetings and rallies but by "face to face and heart to heart talks" with individuals in their homes. Her letter to the "Church Times" on this pregnant subject is followed by that of a vicar who is almost if not quite certain that "a house-going parson" does not necessarily make "a church-going people." In his opinion even a crowded Sunday school "may still betoken an empty church later on." From such expert and thoroughly contradictory opinion it looks as if the question of converting England is beginning to face far more formidable difficulties than even our bishops are aware of. Still, they have one consolation—they can command the B.B.C., they can still broadcast the glorious "truth," and thus even convince themselves that all is well for the Faith in this otherwise not-so-well old England.

The Glasgow Secular Society holds its first meeting this season in the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, on Sunday evening, October 14, when Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture on "God and the Atomic Bomb." The lecture begins at 6.30 p.m.; admission is free, with some donation tickets which may be had at 75, George Street, Glasgow, and at Collett's Bookshop, 15, Dundas Street, Glasgow, C1.

To-day, October 7, Mr. J. V. Shortt will lecture in the Mechanics' Institute, Bradford, on "How Nature Works and Why God is Unnecessary." The lecture begins at 6.30 p.m. and is part of the attractive syllabus which the local N.S.S. branch has prepared for the indoor season. Mr. Shortt will travel from Preston and is certain to give a good address and those who have heard him before are sure to make a point of being present.

The Vatican newspaper says that there are no Spaniards who fought with Hitler now hiding in the Vatican city. May be not, but we should not hurry to believe it. Of course, they might not have taken shelter as soldiers of Hitler. That is the kind of distinction for which Holy Romo has always been famous.

THE NEW MORALITY

THESE are days of immense change. Since the beginning of this century events have been tumbling upon each other in a manner which may be viewed as exciting or alarming. It is certain that the historian of the future will regard the twentieth century as being without parallel; a turbulent link between the Old and the New World; a vital epoch of incredulous transformation. Of the multitude of contributory features of this great change, one of the most significant which research will reveal, will be the changing outlook in ethics.

For decades the idea that life could be rooted to a static and final conception of morals in the face of change, obtained wide and staunch support. Such a concept has not yet been surpassed, but a new morality is beginning to impose itself on social practice.

In the Western World the traditional morality is derived from Christianity. The moral laws of this religion were subscribed to in the belief that no matter how hard or encumbering they might prove, it was necessary to adhere to them if the individual wished to achieve spiritual survival. Such was the coercion, and many people still exercise this moral code to-day, obtaining a mental exultation from the sacrifices which it demands. But the belief in survival after death is waning; men are now less inclined to suffer earthly ills and discomfort, for without theology there is no sense in so doing. Happiness and welfare here on this earth is the cry, and morality must yield something to this end.

In the past marriage was regarded as inviolable, sanctified by God; cleavages were rare. To-day the divorce courts yield an increasing number of annulments, while there comes also the plea that soon provision will need to be made to deal with this new burden on the courts. The simplification of divorce is thus admitted. Those tied to the traditional morality frown; in their eyes standards are deteriorating, humanity is giving itself over to licentiousness. But the humanist has other views on this subject. The unhappily married are social units which represent an evil potentiality. The community may well be injured by them, for in their trail comes emotionalism, discontent, and avarice. The humanist rejects the traditionalist's suggestion that sincerely held religious convictions on the part of man and wife would suffice to create love and affection where it does not exist, or to rekindle it where it has declined; the hard field of human experience has revealed otherwise. The problem of the unhappily and unsuitably married is one which will neither be resolved or abated by keeping them together. For the humanist divorce is the heaven to smoother social life. The traditionalist is shocked; he cannot dispel the horrible nightmare vision of debauchery and free-love which looms before him. But such a view is absurd. For millions marriage is an expense; debauchery is relatively cheap and much simpler. And while marriage remains monogamic and is held by society to be the sole form of sexual intercourse to which it will accord respectability, it will be difficult for this ancient and worthy institution to become an instrument of licentiousness. The traditionalist may resort to the argument that to suffer unhappy marriage uncomplainingly and steadfastly, is a virtue with important character-building features. Perhaps so, but humanity cannot be provoked bodily to adopt the virtues of the best of us. In such circumstances most men and women react badly; needless cohabitation often results in ugly scenes and a degeneration of temper and character. It is, of course, possible to quote great writers, artists, composers, and poets whose adverse marital condition and consequent unhappiness was a spur to their genius; but few men are likely to be geniuses, and genius finds its own way, so for the masses their happiness is surely the prime consideration. In the main there is nothing to be gained from enforcing those unsuited to each other to continue

their union, notwithstanding the fact that their discontentment can have an ill effect on the happiness of others around them.

The modern practice of birth control is, likewise, contrary to the old moral code. The traditionalist, especially the Roman Catholic variety, views it as an offence against God's works. But the sociologist has assembled a strong case in favour of the regulation of population, showing poverty and disease to be the inescapable consequence of non-compliance. Even the traditionalist has to reluctantly admit the principle of birth control. But such an admittance is merely a "save-face" for the traditionalist opposes modern methods and advocates methods which are neither practical or reliable. The foremost recommendation of the Catholic Church is strict continence between man and wife. Only an organisation run by men and women who deny themselves the experience of normal human relationship (surely by so doing they invalidate their claim to pass judgment on such a matter) could show such effrontery and lack of understanding of human problems. Strict continence on the part of the married is not a demonstrable condition in anything other than individual cases. Even the Catholic Church, which applauds and recommends its practice, can only provide examples under the stress of artificial conditions such as the male or female segregations of monastery or convent, or by the canonical law denying the clergy the right of marriage. In the same reluctant manner as it makes all concessions the Catholic Church advises—for the benefit of those who are unable to ascend the mighty heights demanded by the first measure—sexual intercourse during the "safe period." Among intelligent people little further need be said except that this fully illustrates the insincerity of the Catholic Church. Little wonder the general trend among Catholics is still to have large families—families which often they cannot afford and thus ultimately become a burden on the community.

The stigma which the old morality had woven around sex is being steadily removed. In despair the traditionalist peppers mankind with warnings of the debasement of all human values, of the wild abandonment of man and the final holocaust to which he is approaching. The humanist is unmoved by such appeals.

In the political field the New Morality is also showing itself—the intervention here being perhaps its latest manifestation. Socialism, which has engendered such wide works in opposition to some of life's greatest inequalities, revolves largely on the principle of private enterprise being immoral. Taken to its logical conclusion it views with disapproval even the smallest patterns, and would disperse them all in the interest of Socialist morality. But the New Morality is more concerned with practices which are likely to achieve useful results, than morality for its sake alone. Hence Socialism becomes the rough draught for a socialised society, and contemporary events tend in this direction. Among modern states the general trend is for the State to take over the larger monopolies, usually those serving the peoples' basic requirements, while controlling lesser economic units and urging them towards public service. The spirit appears to be that it does not matter about the fundamental ethic of private enterprise if it can be made to serve the community.

For centuries the old moral codes endured because of the coercion of supernaturalism; it was this which enabled them to remain largely unchanged. But this is a changing world, and the temper of that change is swifter than ever known before; thus systems and ideas which are not pliable are like fish without water. The New Morality belongs essentially to this age and contains qualities which were not possible in the old moral systems. It is empiric, for it rests on trial and experiment; it concedes to experiment because it is not bound by supernaturalism, because it is pursuing the ideal of happiness for mankind here on this earth. Its manner and method mark it as being utilitarian. It is the morality which springs from Humanism.

R. A. RASMUSSEN.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD IS JESUS

THE "Converted Catholic Magazine" is an American publication edited by former Roman Catholic priests, that is, by men who having decided to throw in their lot with the Lord in the Roman Catholic Church discovered they had been misled and directed to the wrong job. One can well understand the bitterness of such men in having worked with enthusiasm for many years only to find out they were on a dud enterprise for a rival firm. Because of that we are prepared for the spiteful attack and accusations which the converted priests hurl at their unconverted fellow Christians remaining in the old firm.

From the September issue of the magazine it appears that Evangelical Christianity is the real thing, but it is in direct opposition to Roman Catholicism, and true to Christian tradition mutual hatred dominates these brothers in Christ.

With fervent evangelical courtesy are the Romans smitten and accused of corrupting human nature in Italy to an almost unbelievable depth. Drunkenness, prostitution, poverty and Roman Catholicism are good companions, and even war and Communism cannot weaken the hold of that religion upon the people. In Communist headquarters in many cities crucifixes and statues of the Virgin Mary hang side by side on the wall and worse still at Caivano, near Naples, the Communist mayor has a huge crucifix and a portrait of Joseph Stalin side by side in his office. That should be comforting news to some of our British Communists. In fact such was the state of things in Italy where the Roman Church prevailed that many American protestant soldiers wrote home to say how glad they were not to have been born Roman Catholics. What a pity there was not a Freethinker soldier near at hand to save them the trouble. No human being is born a Roman Catholic or any other branch of Christianity. Religion is an affliction acquired from the parents at a later stage when it follows the same sectarian symptoms as in the parents.

Hitler and the Pope are shown to have been good chums with a great deal in common, and at the very moment when the American and Russian armies were knocking Berlin into rubble the R.C. Bishop, J. A. Griffin, came out with the suggestion that President Roosevelt's death was the result of Russian foul play. If the report is true, and had gathered strength, it is easy to see what an enormous help it would have been to Hitler if the combined attack on the German capital could have been diverted into hostilities between the American and Russian forces.

From every angle of publicity in this country to-day, radio, pulpit, Press, and posters, comes forth the clerical chorus of Jesus, more Jesus, and still more Jesus as the one and only guarantee for decent, personal, and social conduct. If the prescription gave the results claimed then the clergy should be outstanding examples. Definitely they are not, and that damns the prescription. Examples of failure are far too numerous and well known to need quoting, but an instance quoted in the magazine is well worth reproducing here. It is taken from an article written by the Rev. Dr. Walter W. Montano, a former Dominican priest but now converted and an Evangelical missionary in Peru. He tells us the people of Peru conceive God as an old man with a long white beard, who is very tired and physically weak, unapproachable, and given to meting out punishment, then he goes on to say: "Here is one of the many examples of the moral and spiritual conditions of the people. A few years ago the police were sent to track down a dangerous criminal. After a long search he was found and sent to jail, but before giving him the prison uniform he was sent to take a bath, and to the surprise of the warden it was discovered this man had seven images tattooed on his body. The Virgin Mary of the Rosary was on one arm, the Virgin of Carmel on the other. On one side of his chest was a cross and on the other the Sacred Heart of Jesus; one of his legs bore the image of a rooster,

while upon the other was the image of a horse. And then, as though all this was not sufficient, he bore on his back the sinister image of the devil. When the warden asked the criminal the reason for all these images, he replied 'The images of the Virgin Mary give me strength to fight the police, while the cross and the Heart of Jesus on my chest make me invulnerable to their bullets, the rooster awakens me when the police draw near and the horse enables me to escape them.' 'But what need have you of the image of the devil?' the warden asked. 'That,' he said, 'is my last resource, if all the other images fail to protect me I ask the devil to make me invisible in order that the police cannot find me.' The power and influence of the Christian religion on character and morals is so clear and simple in this case that any further elaboration is quite unnecessary. So let us leave it at that and always remember that in all walks of life the light of the world is Jesus.

R. H. ROSETTI.

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 Ebury, SAPHIN, HART and WOOD.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. W. KEETON. M.A., LL.D.: "Cabinet Government in England."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (173, Church Street).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m.: "Crimes of Christianity"—Part 1, Christ to Constantine.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORTT (Preston): "How Nature Works and Why God is Unnecessary."

Bristol Branch N.S.S. (Crown and Dove Hotel, Rupert Street, Bristol).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. G. THOMPSON (Bath) will lecture.

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What is the Use of Prayer? Deity and Design. Did Jesus Christ Exist? Agnosticism or . . . ? Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. Atheism. Freethought and the Child. Christianity and Slavery. The Devil. What is Freethought? Must We have a Religion? Morality Without God. Gods and their Makers. The Church's Fight for the Child.

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SLUMS, SLAVERY, AND — LIVERPOOL!

THE following is a poem by Sir William Watson. He was invited to go to Liverpool in order to write a poem to assist a fund for the building of the Liverpool Cathedral. He went, but he was so shocked by the misery and squalor which he saw there—children begging workmen for pieces of bread—that it evoked the following scathing protest:—

LIVERPOOL.

City of merchants, lords of trade and gold,
Traffickers great as they that bought and sold
When ships of Tarshish came to Tyre of old,
City of festering streets by misery trod,
Where half-fed, half-clad children swarm unshod,
While thou dost rear thy splendid fane to God!

O rich in fruit and grains and oils and ores,
And all things that the feastful earth outpours,
Yet lacking leechcraft for thy leprous sores!
Heal thee betimes, and cleanse thee, lest in ire
He whom thou mock'st with pomp of arch and spire
Come on thee sleeping, with a scythe of fire!

Let nave and transept rest awhile; but when
Thou hast done His work Who lived and died for men,
Then build His temple on high—not, not till then!

Liverpool was shocked, as well it might be! Sir William Watson was a frank and fearless man. He missed the Poet Laureateship three times. Not very surprising! He died neglected. The wealth of Liverpool was founded on the slave trade—the transport of “black ivory” to America. Its ruin was freely predicted if the slave traffic were to be abolished. When the Bill for abolition was finally before Parliament a petition was drawn up, signed by 2,000 merchants and citizens demanding its withdrawal. Foremost amongst those who gained fame in Liverpool as champions of slavery was the Rev. Raymond Harris, cleric of the Church of England. He published a pamphlet: “Scriptural Researches of the Licitness of the Slave Trade showing its conformity with the principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, as delineated in the sacred writings of the Word of God.” He was one of many of his creed, one of whom was the Rev. John Newton, author of “Olney Hymns,” and Rector of St. Marys, Woolnoth, who commanded a slave-ship whilst studying for the ministry. Why not? The Very Rev. W. R. Inge has recently stated that it was “an interesting though disconcerting fact the close association of Christianity with cruelty.” The Dean himself must be an interesting and disconcerting fact to his Christian brethren! It is also an interesting fact that the slave-ship in which Hawkins commenced the slave trade was named the “Jesus.” And by the way, one of the best known of the “Olney Hymns” is “How Sweet the Name of Jesus sounds!”

The above items of information are taken mainly from Cha. n Cohen's “Christianity, Slavery and Labour,” the “Daily Herald” and “Forward.”

ARTHUR HANSON.

A PERSONAL PROBLEM

IN the course of this article I am inevitably going to be personal. The problem which I am going to state is, in fact, one which is facing me to-day, and which will face me more searchingly in future. I am sure, however, that it faces a number of other

Freethinkers no less urgently, and I should like to know just how they are dealing with it.

It happens that I have been a conscientious Freethinker for many years past, as has my wife. We have not admitted the right of the Churches to have any control over us. We were married in a Registry Office (much to the horror of our orthodox friends, who thought that there must be something “shady” about such a wedding). We have gone to Church only on the rare occasions when there has happened to be a speaker there who seemed to us worth hearing. And our child has, naturally, not been baptised. He is now nearly two years old and is (I think I may say without being too blinded by paternal pride) of reasonably intelligent stock, with the result that he is beginning to talk and to take an interest in everything which is going on around him.

In two or three years' time he will go to school. Before that time, of course, he will be asking me questions about the way in which the world works, and I shall answer these questions to the best of my ability and in terms which I hope will be within his comprehension. In other words, where there is a straight scientific answer to any question which he asks I shall try to give it to him. When his question is of such a nature that no satisfactory answer is possible (e.g.: “Who made the world?”) I shall tell him that no one knows the answer to that question. I know that this is all very easy to discuss theoretically on paper, but I can assure the sceptical reader that I am resolved to try as hard as I know how to put it into effect in practice. But now I am coming to the main point. If my boy goes to school as he presumably will at the age of four or five years, he will have had no religious training. Both his mother and I are resolved on that. Unless he has asked definite questions about religion he will have been told nothing about it, and I think it is quite likely that a child who is told nothing about religion will not ask questions about it. As to that, we shall see. But when he goes to school all this will be altered.

In all the schools which are in any way in receipt of public funds a compulsory inculcation of religion now takes place, thanks to the unscrupulous way in which the Churches took advantage of the concentration of the nation on winning the war. And, even if my boy has been guarded from these things for his first four or five years, will he be able to stand up against the concentrated attack of teacher and parson from his fifth birthday onward? Or if I decide, because of the careful indoctrination which is taking place in the public elementary schools, to send him to a private school, shall I succeed in finding one where some sort of compulsory religion is not provided? I have my doubts on that score.

There, then, is the problem. I am sure it is one which is shared by a large number of parents who are Freethinkers. The suggested solution of withdrawing him from the lessons in scripture is not one which I feel inclined to take, as I know the innate conservatism—in a non-political sense—which is shown by the majority of schoolboys, and I do not want my boy to be exposed to the scorn which is poured on the boy who is in some occult way “different.” I should, however, be interested to learn how this difficulty has been overcome by other Freethinkers. My boy is, as I have said, not yet two years old. Could any parents with children of five, six or seven give me the benefit of their experience? I am sure that the editor would throw open the hospitality of his columns to anyone who has useful advice to offer on this point, since this is clearly one of the most urgent issues of the day. If we are to prevent the most ignorant and bigoted of superstitions from being carefully drilled into our children's heads, we have to get a definite policy ready. And what that policy is I am not at all sure.

“FREETHINKING FATHER.”