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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Church and State

LAST week I dealt with the surprising fact that the B.B.C. had permitted a lawyer of standing to say and to offer proof that England could no longer be counted as a Christian country. Against this I have been stressing the fact that England never was a Christian country in the legal sense of the phrase. The correct description would be that England was a country which gave the Christian Church certain power and privileges. But the secular power reserved its own legal independence, particularly when we come to deal with common law. An illustration of this is found in the fact of the State divesting the Church of all power and confiscating its property. It was a case of "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." It was the same Lord that gave and took.

Curiously enough it was the Christian Church that created the distinction between the secular and the religious. The gods of the ancient world lived side by side with a substantial amount of good humour. There were different gods with different functions and they appeared to get on as comfortably as human beings. A god stood as one among a crowd. They were rather more humane than the Christian deity and did not demand as much grovelling. Lecky has pointed this out, in other words, and also that toleration of each other was inevitable. The ancient gods were on the whole picturesque. And new gods were often dull.

But Christianity from its first appearance was marked by intolerance and a consequent refusal to join in the common life of the people. The Church did not deny the existence of the pagan gods—that did not take place until the sixteenth century—it separated life into parts, one that belonged to the Church and was essentially connected with the after world, the other belonging to this life under the name of "Secular."

It is a curious fact that to-day the Christian Church should be struggling might and main to justify its quality as a *secular force*. That, of course, may properly be taken as an example of the extent to which Christianity has lost ground. It had for centuries enjoyed complete domination of the Western world, and the result may be gauged by the fact that history has written down the first thousand years as the Dark Ages. And in spite of the attempts that have been made to whitewash the record of the Christian Churches, that description stands.

I may step aside here to quote from a charming and important book, "The Creative Centuries," by H. J. Randall, which made its appearance recently. Mr. Randall seems to be under no illusion of the influence of Christianity on life, at least in the periods when the Church had things its own way. Dealing with the Dark Ages—a term we must

remind readers that covers a period when the Christian Church had the least opposition—Mr. Randall says:—

"The Dark Ages were long ages, and on any calculation cannot be confined to within less than six centuries, at least as long as the time between our first Edward and our seventh. It was as long as the whole modern period and half the mediæval together, yet it created nothing, and accomplished little. Such a tract of time cannot be dismissed lightly as a mere interlude. Six centuries are six hundred years, and no effort of forgetfulness will make them less. No specious reasoning can obscure their squalor, and no perverted imagination can gloss their barbarity. In our country in particular it is necessary to compare the material remains of a town house in a country villa of the Roman period with an Anglo-Saxon hutment to visualise the depth to which civilised life had fallen. Town life had gone, the amenities and even the elementary comforts had disappeared, the countryside was little better than a gigantic slum."

This is, of course, voicing the words of Gibbon's, "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," which still holds its own although it was finished a century and a half ago. His faithfulness as an historian has never been shaken. Nor can we wonder when knowing the malignant quality of the Christian Church that in the last chapter of his great work he says, "I have described the triumph of barbarism and religion," and contemptuously writes in words that are seldom quoted, in refutation of the common statement that the sacking of Rome was due to the invasion of the Goths:—

"Fancy may adopt a pleasing romance that the Goths and Vandals sallied down from Scandinavia, ardent to avenge the flight of Odin . . . that they wished to burn the records of classic literature. . . . But in simple truth the Northern conquerors were neither sufficiently savage nor sufficiently refined to entertain such aspiring ideas of destruction and revenge. The shepherds of Seythia and Germany had been educated in the armies of the Empire. . . . With the familiar use of the Latin tongue they had learned to revere the name and titles of Rome; and though incapable of emulating they were more inclined to admire than to abolish the arts and studies of a brighter period. . . . The Goths evacuated on the sixth, the Vandals on the fifteenth day, and though it be far more difficult to build than to destroy, their hasty assault would have made a slight impression on the solid piles of antiquity. . . . From these innocent barbarians the reproach may be transferred to the Catholics of Rome. The statues, altars and houses of the demons were an abomination in their eyes; and in the absolute command of the city, they might labour with zeal and perseverance to erase the idolatry of their ancestors."

There is much more that might be quoted, but that will be enough and I hope that at least it will set more people reading Gibbon, bulky as it is. But it is time there was created a much larger body of serious readers than exists to-day. There is too much boiling down, when one would rather have a stirring up, for boiling down often means no more than stuffing up, and stuffing up whether it is concerned with food or teaching paves the way for indigestion. We all acquire much knowledge when our real need is understanding. And the upshot is that plenty are getting stuffed and mistake it for getting fed. I think it is either in the old Bible, or among the ancient Egyptian wisdom, "Get knowledge but above all get understanding."

I have just space for one more point. If the reader will turn back to the quotation from Mr. Randall's book he will find his very scathing account of the Christian Church in the Dark Ages and will see the terrible indictment it is. But we must remember we are dealing with a religion that came to maturity when surrounding it was the culture of Greece, Rome and, though not always mentioned, of Egypt. There were schools of both science and philosophy in each of these countries, and in addition there was a growth in liberality of mind that was not to be seen again in the larger part of the world for centuries. The Dark Ages were substantially of Christian origin. Christianity gave the world the Church as substitute for Greek philosophy and the rule of the Monks for Roman Law. And when the awakening came it was due to the influx of scientific learning from Mohammedan and Jewish sources.

Of course, Mr. O'Sullivan would probably say that I ought not to blame Christianity for this. Suppose we were to grant that, the deadly truth is staring him in the face that if the Church did not create the Dark Ages, at least the Church did not prevent them. And then he would have to remember that it was not from the pagan books or practices that Christians found the authority for the depression of the human mind for a clear seven or eight hundred years. Roman and Greek writers criticised current religious ideas and generally did not suffer in consequence. Greece gave us the foundation of scientific medicine, the Church banned the doctors and substituted the dirty saint, and the ignorant priest. The Greeks gave the world a starting point in modern astronomy. The Church punished men centuries later for treading the road that Greece indicated.

But the most serious indictment of the Christian Church is that the impetus for better did not come from any form of research or from any established Christian Church or organisation. It consisted essentially in a direct turn back to the ancient world, with whatever improvements had been made by the better followers of Mohammed and their Jewish allies. What would the world not have saved had Christianity never been heard of?

I daresay that many readers may think I have departed somewhat from my main theme. Second thoughts may enable them to see that I have been merely painting a background that may give a more complete understanding of what I have already said, and what I have yet to say. Ideas and practices do not spring uncaused from the air. They have a parentage and they give birth to the good and the bad. Centuries of struggle have weakened the power of superstition. The fight over the blasphemy laws is a page of history. How victories were won will be the thesis that is to follow.

CHAPMAN COHEN,

THE SHAMMERS

A Fable for Young People

ONCE upon a time there used to be held great feasts called the Feasts of Election. These feasts were held so that the people could choose men and women to go to the local and national Parliaments, to do the thinking for the people who sent them. This was because the people could not think for themselves. Now you might think it was a good idea to send a man to do your thinking if you could not think for yourself, but there was a catch in it. If people could not think for themselves, how could they think about which men and women to send?

But this trouble was got over by holding the Feasts of Election, at which the people who wanted to do the thinking for the others, and who were known as the Vote Shammers, gave the rest of the people a great feast. After these feasts many of the old Vote Shammers left the Parliaments because the people said they did not want them, and many new Vote Shammers went into the Parliaments because the people said they did want them. Now you might wonder how the people could decide such a matter if they could not think, so let me tell you.

In those days everybody had been told at school that Democracy was a wonderful thing, which they ought to have. So, of course, everybody knew without thinking that they wanted Democracy when they went to the feasts. But at the feasts there were two or three sorts of Democracy, offered by different sets of Vote Shammers. So the people used to sit down at what was called the Table of Political Promise, and they were fed on cream buns, vanillas, and other sugary sundries, and those Vote Shammers who put on the best feed of sugary promises were picked to do the thinking.

But after the Feast of Election (when the Vote Shammers had been picked) the people always felt sick from having had too many sweets, and yet they were still hungry for some of the bread of Democracy. The trouble was that the fancy stuff did not really feed them because it was not solid. It was only hollow promises, with nice shells but no insides. These hollow promises were the easiest sort of food to give the people when the Vote Shammers were in a state of auto-intoxication, from which they always suffered at the Feasts of Election. People who suffer from auto-intoxication have hallucinations that they want to do wonderful things for other people, and when they come out of the condition they have severe headaches, just like people who drink certain liquors which give hallucinations first and headaches afterwards.

So the fancy stuff that the people got at the feasts was really nothing to feed upon. Yet the bread that they needed, but did not get, had been lying all the time under the Table of Political Promises—only they did not know it. It was called Education, and at that time it had not really become bread. It was just sad, sour dough, in those days. It would not rise up into a round chubby mass, like mother's dough, because it lacked the fermenting agent that would make it rise. Mother's dough needs yeast to make it rise and bake into good bread; but this Education stuff needed a fermenting agent known as sound principles. There was plenty of dough—heaps of it, in fact—but nothing to make it work. And the trouble was that none of the Vote Shammers seemed to know what was really lacking. Worse than that! As they didn't understand how to make Education work and rise, they had allowed some other Shammers, known as Original Sin Shammers, to pour their mixtures into the dough. But this only made things worse, and the dough became even sadder and sourer.

Now some of the Vote Shammers were worried, but the Original Sin Shammers didn't care. And when they were told by people

called Freethinkers that they had poisoned Education they just laughed, and in private they patted each other on the back, and said, "It's only the dough we want."

These Original Sin Shammers used to wear their collars the wrong way round, and this was why the Vote Shammers dare not challenge them as they poured more and more poison into the Education mixture, and pulled out dough by the handful. The reversed collar used to have a magic effect on Vote Shammers, and their knees would knock and their faces would go pale whenever they met one. But Freethinkers were made of better stuff than Vote Shammers; they knew that the Original Sin Shammers were the worst Shamblers of all. They knew that the idea was to prevent the dough of Education from working itself up into a substance that could be baked and given to the people to feed them properly. The Original Sin Shammers were afraid of that happening, because if people were fed on good Education bread they would start thinking for themselves, and then a lot of Shamblers of both sorts would have to do some honest work, and perhaps might have to dirty their hands.

Things went from bad to worse for a long time. The Vote Shammers suffered from knocking knees more than their fathers had done. Then one day the Original Sin Shamblers invented a new password. It was just two simple words—"The Vote"—but that password struck terror into the minds of the Vote Shamblers, and haunted their waking hours. Knocking knees developed into a worse disease known as humbug-parsonitis, with a violent form known as windy-priestomania. The first was an itch which made sufferers feel uncomfortable, but the second attacked the nervous system in a terrifying fashion. Things went on like this until one day those Vote Shamblers who really wanted to do something for the people realised that the Original Sin Shamblers were threatening to get stronger than themselves.

So some of them remembered the Freethinkers who didn't care tuppence for the reversed collar idea, and they called them in for advice. Here is a cutting from a report in the Press of that time of what the Freethinkers told them:—

"The progressive movements of this country at one time enunciated with great wisdom the proposition that it is impossible to have democracy except on the basis of an educated people, and that religion—the opium of the people—is the great obstacle to education, being a weapon for the subjection of the masses to divine authority in the event of the failure of others forms of subjection. This proposition of early reformers is as true to-day as ever, but you reformers have altered greatly. You have failed to note its truth, and you have vied with each other in gushing out pious humbug which demonstrates your own subservience to priests and parsons, and your lack of real interest in the people and their children. You have lost sight of principles because you were scared by the idiotic password, 'The Vote'; you have won your places dishonestly, and consequently you have behaved dishonestly. You say one thing in private and another in public. Hypocritical leaders can only produce hypocritical people. Get back to principles, cast these religious old-men-of-the-sea from your backs. Stand up and be men, and then perhaps the people, inspired by courage and honesty, will also become thus."

When the Freethinkers had left the Vote Shamblers there was a long silence. They all agreed with what had been said, but they were still afraid—not really afraid of the Original Sin Shamblers any longer. Just afraid of each other! Then one spoke up. "Those Freethinkers were right," he said. "The Original Sin Shamblers must be cleared out of Education. Their dirty paws must let go of the dough." This gave the rest courage. One by one they jumped up and agreed. And in a body they went back to their Parliament to tell the other Vote Shamblers—even to fight on the question if necessary.

But in Parliament they got a surprise. Once it was seen that a number of Vote Shamblers were determined to beat the Original Sin Shamblers, nearly all the Vote Shamblers rose up to support them, and new Bills were quickly passed to get the poison out of the dough, to put in principle, and make it work.

And all the Vote Shamblers laughed with joy and great relief because at last they realised that it had never been the Original Sin Shamblers they had feared after all—they had just been afraid of each other!

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

A FREE MAN'S TESTAMENT

THERE is something intensely annoying about an article which recommends an out-of-print book. Yet it is impossible for the critic who happens to come across a worthwhile volume to refrain from passing on the information. After all, the reader may strike the work in a second-hand bookshop. It is in that mood that I write. The book which has driven me to writing this article is Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon." It was published by Jonathan Cape, at 8s., in 1941, and is almost certainly unobtainable except second-hand. Yet I must say that I hope every Freethinker who reads this will try to get hold of a copy.

Koestler has attracted wide attention in recent months, partly because what he has had to say has intensely annoyed the strict "Party-line" Communists of the Stalin school. Yet he has done what none of the so-called proletarian novelists have been able to do—he has written a novel which frankly faces a political problem, and which nevertheless grips from the first page to the last.

The problem which it faces is this: in Soviet Russia we have seen old leaders of the Communist Party debasing themselves before a biased court, admitting all kinds of hideous crimes against their comrades, and asking for the death penalty to be imposed on them as a lesson for those who might be tempted to future treachery. Even in the recent trials of Nazi criminals the same thing has happened. In the British zone of Germany the men from Belsen have pleaded "Not Guilty," and the resultant trial has been so long drawn-out that the papers have apparently ceased to report it. In the Russian zone the prisoners have usually pleaded "Guilty" in the approved Russian manner. Koestler, as far as I know, is the only writer to suggest the explanation. He does not believe, like so many of our erstwhile anti-Soviet commentators in the Tory Press, that physical torture is often applied to produce a confession. He believes that by a mode of "Third Degree" worse than that applied in the other home of "freedom," the U.S.A., a man eventually reaches a state at which he will confess anything in order to be given rest. And his hero, Rubashov, provides a case in point. Deprived of sleep, repeatedly examined and cross-examined, the man is driven almost crazy, until finally he is prepared to sign anything which is put before him.

Now, why did I say that this book should be read by all Freethinkers? Well, first of all because it is a first-rate novel. But secondly, and perhaps mainly, because it provides a brilliant commentary on the Totalitarian State as we know it to-day. It shows that the State, if given all power, is bound to act like a criminal lunatic. It proves, as far as anything can be proved, the truth of Acton's famous dictum "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." And so it gives the rebels and the Freethinker new courage to fight against the tendencies of the day. Only if we are able to emancipate ourselves from the tyranny of State and Church can we be free to work out our own philosophy and our own economic salvation. That, as I see it, is the lesson of Arthur Koestler.

H. L. S.

ACID DROPS

Well might one say to the Bishop of Southwell: "Out of thine own mouth do you stand condemned," for the Bishop, speaking at St. Peter's, said that "the world was suffering from Spiritual starvation." And the full reply is that for many, many centuries the Christian Church counted as a great influence for the direction of the life of the people. And now we are informed that the world is "exhibiting the well known symptoms of neurosis." The Bishop, of course, prescribes more Christianity. It is equal to a drunkard taking big doses of whisky in order to prevent drunkenness.

Another piece of wisdom from the bishops. This time he of Nottingham. His discovery is that "while the country, on the face of it, is Christian, more and more it is following pagan principles," which being interpreted means that the older and the better educated and the wiser people are, the more easily they begin to understand Christianity and give it a more correct valuation.

The Catholic priests in this country are foaming their foam against the new Poland for what they call the persecution of Roman Catholics. That is another way of complaining against the existing government not permitting the Roman Church to rule the roost. There were no complaints when Poland was substantially a Fascist State, and the Roman Catholic Church did as it pleased.

We do not make it a point to pick out for special notice the criminal conduct of followers of Christ and him crucified, mainly because we never saw grounds for denying Christians a fair share of common criminality. We are more impressed when Christians make really good social men than when they are bad ones. But occasionally there are cases that deserve special mention. A Polish ex-airman was recently charged in Glasgow with having a loaded automatic pistol and a number of food and other coupons that were not his. The police say that he is a well-known character and they "know him to be extensively engaged in black market activities." He also receives from the British Government a sum of £16 per month. The Pole was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and ordered to be deported to Poland. But deportation to Poland where the Roman Catholic Church no longer rules was too much, and the black market specialist protested against being sent home.

As the wonderful discovery of the proof of the Crucifixion fizzled out and was no longer "news," the newspapers were perhaps glad to detail another piece of good news—this time from America. A nine-year-old son of an Italian labourer has been seeing the Virgin nightly for two weeks in the Bronx district of New York, and no doubt the good lady was able to use the kind of Americanese familiar to us through the cinema—and sometimes almost unintelligible—in her long conversations with the divine boy. Over 20,000 people turned up the other evening hoping also to be favoured, some even coming from Philadelphia over a hundred miles away, and they all saw the boy reverently kneel on a blanket while the sick and the crippled crowded to touch someone whom the Virgin had thus signally honoured.

Later, he showed his hand burned by a lighted wax candle given him by the Mother of our Lord, and he insisted that she would appear on the 16th night. Of course, the boy whose name is Joseph Vitulo, never saw the film, "The Song of Bernadette," in which the little girl at Lourdes goes through a similar performance—which was bound to impress some excitable religious temperaments. At least that is what he says—just as Bernadette swore she had never heard the words "the Immaculate Conception," though in her day every Catholic was talking about the new dogma. Whether the Church will allow such an unblushing rival to Lourdes to exist is another matter. Lourdes is a flourishing business, and competition is definitely frowned upon. Besides, it pays the Church to be healthily sceptical sometimes.

By a "very narrow" vote the members of the Newport Athletic Club refused to permit its members to play games on Sundays. No one was compelled to play if he was not so inclined. But probably those who for various reasons did not wish to be caught playing on Sunday felt that as they could not enjoy Sunday games others should not. Of course, the clergy objected to Sunday games, but that was pure business. More people playing healthy games on Sunday, meant still fewer people going to Church, and the motto of most clergymen is "Business first."

In Glasgow, a Church made an attempt to bring people to church by way of getting Sir Harry Lauder to entertain. This he did, but the mixture of comic songs and solemn prayers grated on some of the pious, and Mr. W. D. Crombie wrote to the "Glasgow Herald," complaining that if people can be brought to church only by turning a church into a music-hall the outlook for Christianity is very black. We agree, but there is an old saw that beggars cannot be choosers. To millions the religious side of life is played out.

From the same source comes the complaint that in a large church, he heard a minister preaching to a small audience on "How to spend a summer holiday." This Christian concludes: "If it were not sad it would be comical." What we should like to see is a serious, intellectual and honest man who can listen to any pulpit preacher without smiling.

In a picture proudly reproduced by the "Universe," we are shown Mgr. Arnold, the chief of the U.S. chaplains during the war, with the rank of Major-General, grovelling before an altar around which are collected some very indifferent priests. It would be difficult to show in any other sphere but religion (except of course among some savage tribes) such abasement of human dignity. But naturally, that abasement is necessary for all true believers.

At last Catholics are forced to explain why so many children, brought up in the strictest articles of their faith, are responsible for such a high record in crime. It is not, moans Fr. Geary in the "Universe" because of their religion but because "of the degrading conditions under which they are forced to exist." That is all very well, but one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity is "faith without works." Are we to understand then that, after all, religious teaching can be completely discredited by environment? If that is so, what then is the good of a "divine" religion which cannot stand up to the test of hard circumstances?

Fr. Geary wants "youth clubs," but not the kind in which "altar boys play ping-pong." But why in the name of all that is right, shouldn't an "altar boy" play ping-pong? Has he to be condemned all his life to play only what a Catholic priest thinks he ought to play? What this hopeless priest actually wants to see is "Christ nailed to the Cross" standing up in the slums! This has been tried—with the results that crime delinquency among Catholic juveniles in these slums is higher than anywhere else. Fr. Geary and his like never learn, but perhaps that is after all his business.

Canada is notorious for its reactionary Roman Catholicism, the latest example of which should be recorded for the benefit of those English Catholics who are always loudly advertising their tolerance and freedom under the Church. A Bill to make divorce easier was presented to the Canadian Parliament but it was "talked out" by four Quebec M.P.s—all, needless to say, staunch members of the faith. "Divorce," claimed one of these men, "was a national curse, in fact it was suicide." Why a man or woman who wishes to be free from a marriage distasteful to both, or why a person married to a lunatic, or a murderer should be refused because a "Church" somewhere or at some time was against divorce, is one of those "divine" mysteries which can only proceed from sheer superstition and impudent intolerance. No one wishes to impose divorce on those married Catholics who ought to have it, and it is heartbreaking that they can and do impose their out-of-date shackles on other people who wish to be free.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Someone who appears to be suffering from a bad attack of the poorest form of Christomania tells us, through sheets of newspaper, that no Atheist can face death with the sense of peace that a Christian possesses. We, in return offer him the following from George Bernard Shaw's "Major Barbara":—

"Like Frederick's grenadier, the Salvationist wants to live for ever (the most monstrous way of crying for the moon); and though it is evident to anyone who has ever heard General Booth and his best officers that they would work as hard for human salvation as they do at present if they believed that death would be the end of them individually, they and their followers have a bad habit of talking as if the Salvationists were heroically enduring a very bad time on earth as an investment which will bring them in dividends later on in the form, not of a better life to come for the whole world, but of an eternity spent by themselves personally in a sort of bliss which would bore any active person to a second death. Surely the truth is that the Salvationists are unusually happy people. And is it not the very diagnostic of true salvation that it shall overcome the fear of death? Now the man who has come to believe that there is no such thing as death, the change so called being merely the transition to an exquisitely happy and utterly careless life, has not overcome the fear of death at all; on the contrary it has overcome him so completely that he refuses to die on any terms whatever. I do not call a Salvationist really saved until he is ready to lie down cheerfully on the scrap heap, having paid scot and lot and something over, and let his eternal life pass on to renew its youth in the battalions of the future."

It seems impossible for editors of a newspaper to write in defence of religion without making fools of themselves. Here is an example. In a recent editorial in the "Daily Mirror," the editor with all the folly that may be, remarks: "In our opinion the religious form of marriage is the real form." But there is no such thing in this country as a legal religious marriage. That was abolished years ago. People may have a service in a church if they desire it, but the State takes not the slightest notice of it.

The "Mirror" also says that "solemn vows are taken in a sacred atmosphere and will not lightly be set aside." And that is just nonsense of the most obvious type, to say nothing of it being a gratuitous insult to those who do not go to church to be married. A man and woman who get married, with rare exceptions, do not get married with any other view but to live happily together. It is only when experience shows that to be impossible that the question of divorce occurs. And we challenge

the editor to give any evidence in support of his ridiculous assumption. We have little doubt that the writer of that "leader" knows that it is nonsense. The article is an insult to his readers.

In an issue of "The Sigh," a Church magazine, we found the query put to the editor—usually the parson—whether he has the right to refuse to marry a divorced man while his wife was alive. The answer given is that as the law stands, it would not compel the priest to marry a divorced person. But this is plainly and obviously untrue. To begin with, as we have so often said, a priest, as a priest, cannot marry a man and a woman. There is now no religious ceremony at law where marriage is concerned. And a priest can only marry a couple by dropping the priest and becoming for the purposes of the marriage, a civil servant licensed to register a marriage between A and B. And the marriage may take place in a church only when the church, for the purpose of converting it into a registry office, is licensed to perform a secular marriage. The question of whether the man is divorced or not, cannot influence the registration.

Then as to the question of a judge issuing a writ compelling the priest (now a registrar) to register the marriage. He certainly could. Of course, he might advise that another priest of not so bigoted a character perform the marriage. That is all. But every English-born person has his legal rights, and one of these is that we are all members of the English Church. Only one thing more. If the conditions the law demands are fulfilled, the bride and bridegroom may stand on their heads, or sing at the top of their voices. "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road." The law is not concerned with any humorous or religious display.

Sir Stafford Cripps has written a book, "Towards Christian Democracy," in which he expresses a wish, not that the Church should become a political party, but that "courageous Christians" should enter political life. Well, whether they are Christians or not, most of our M.P.s are certainly chary of even commenting on Christianity if they can avoid it. They do their utmost to leave it out of their political life, but are always ready to take part in prayers and National Days of Thanksgiving to the Lord—probably with an eye to future votes. Although the Bishops are quite certain England must be converted to Christianity, our M.P.s take very good care to act as if the country as a whole was still as religious as it was in the Golden Age of the Church. It is all very mystifying.

We have no grounds whatever for objecting to Sir Stafford Cripps writing or speaking on behalf of certain religious ideas; but it is certain Sir Stafford cannot avoid using his political post to push his religious notions. We note the situation to suggest to these politicians who are not religious to meet Sir Stafford, and others, with a declaration of their Freethought. To men of high principle it would be distasteful to use a political position for advancing as solemn truths doctrines that are rejected by large numbers of people. There are enough non-believers in the House of Commons to kill this parade of religion on a political platform.

Archbishop Griffin is amazed and hurt that the Government hardly mentions religion in the Ministry of Education pamphlet, "Youth's Opportunity." In fact, no time is set aside for religion at all in the syllabus for further education after school days. Every other subject is taught, but to miss out religion—"Is this the way to bring up Christian youth?" asks the Archbishop in dismay. Well, if it really is the way the Government has decided, we think it a very good way.

The "Daily Express" lives to educate, or amuse the people. It was this sense of duty that led the "Express" to announce on the front page, with a picture, that the Princesses and some girl friends went to the theatre, sat in the stalls—via a side door—and laughed just as though they were human beings. Somehow we felt different when we read the news. Three cheers for the "Daily Express"!

"THE ROAD TO ENDOR"

ONE of the books which we Freethinkers should never, if we can help it, allow to die is "The Road to Endor" which was first published in 1919. It is only fair to add that since then over 16 editions have been called for, so that the book is still very much alive; but in these strenuous days there is so much that is new to think about that one is very likely to forget this scathing exposure of credulity and gullibility.

The "thesis" of the book is very simple. Its author, Lt. Jones, with another comrade, Lt. Hill, wanted to escape from a Turkish prisoner of war camp where they were confined in 1918, and they set up an elaborate "mediumship" through which they hoped to bamboozle the Turkish camp commandant and others in search of some Armenian buried treasure. How this was done is very minutely explained in the book, and the interest for us lies in the way in which Lt. Jones "developed" his mediumship with the most barefaced ease—and fraud.

By this I do not mean it was all easy going. You can't simply take up Spiritualism and go ahead hoodwinking and outreaching all and sundry without arduous preparation. It requires elaborate study, colossal cheek and, particularly when one is dealing with one's enemies and captors in time of war, outstanding courage. But one has only to look at the records of those who have gone out of their way not only to expose what they considered false in Spiritualism, but how they, at the same time, repeated and even bettered the "phenomena" to realise that "mediumship" and the ability to humbug others has to be learnt and mastered.

Even for a master of magic like Houdini, it was not easy to make people believe that he was hoodwinking them with his spoof spooks. One classic example is the stage illusion in which Houdini walked through a brick wall. He always took good care to have a committee from the audience to see that everything was fair and above board, and that the brick wall was solid throughout and did not conceal a marvellously designed trap-door. When they were satisfied, he had two screens placed on either side of the wall, and then went into one and came out from the other. It really was a first-class illusion but so strongly was Sir A. Conan Doyle impressed that, staggered by his inability to explain it, he claimed that Houdini turned himself into a spirit, got through the wall (perhaps like a radio wave) and turned himself back again, on the other side, into a man. I expect that even if he had known the true *modus operandi*, he still would have claimed Houdini for the spirit world.

Another great example—he is unfortunately nearly forgotten these days—is the "spirit" slate-writing of S. J. Davey. The forerunner of this method of making the spirits useful was "Dr." Slade who, though caught over and over again in the most blatant fraud, was nearly always considered by believers to be a "martyr." One of his followers in this country was W. Eglinton whose performances were considered by Davey (an excellent amateur conjurer) at first to be quite beyond suspicion. But later his scepticism was aroused and he decided to try his hand at producing similar "spirit" manifestations through the more prosaic means of mere sleight of hand. His success was astounding; indeed, so great was it that Davey managed to make some people think that he had discovered a new form of electricity, that he really was helped by genuine spirits, or that, for the sake of money and notoriety, he became a renegade medium. He managed to do more things than slate-writing—materialise a woman's head in strong light, reveal the half-length figure of a bearded man disappearing through the ceiling, and even the production of a long message in Japanese for a Japanese marquis. It was all trickery, though most spiritualists may even at this day believe the contrary.

That was one of the difficulties which Lt. Jones and Lt. Hill had to counter—the difficulty of making even their best friends see that their own incursion into mediumship and the occult generally was unmitigated fraud. It was all done with such perfection that one must not be surprised so many people, including the Turkish authorities, were completely taken in. But they never made a step without long and very careful rehearsal. They used a Ouija-board, and the messages the Spook managed to get through this way are astonishing. Moreover, the Spook was put to many drastic tests, the most formidable that could be devised in the hope of catching the "mediums," and the way they come through it forms some of the most entertaining pages in the "Road to Endor."

Both Hill and Jones commenced their experiments with an open mind as far as spirits are concerned and they had only one view in using "Spiritualism"—to escape from their prison. They went through incredible hardship to accomplish their aim which was determined all the more strongly because in April, 1918, Germany looked like winning, and the English prisoners of war contemplated years of imprisonment in Turkey with horror. It was not the fault of the two lieutenants that after the most ingenious plans and self-torture they managed to get exchanged only a week or so before the Armistice.

But however interesting is all this part of their narrative, the real point of the book is its exposure of human credulity, and how this credulity can be fanned into flame by a locus-poens engendered by the blind belief in an "after world" or "Summerland" inhabited by "spirits" who can be summoned at will with a Ouija board, or through the twisting of a coat button. Commenting on this, Lt. Jones adds:—

"We had many opportunities of seeing the deplorable effects of belief in spiritualism. When in the atmosphere of the seance, men whose judgments one respects, and whose mental powers one admires, lose hold of the criteria of sane conclusions and construct for themselves a fantastic world on their new hypothesis. The messages we received from 'the world beyond' and from 'other minds in this sphere' were in every case, and from beginning to end, of our own invention. Yet the effect both on our friends and on the Turks was to lead them, as earnest investigators, to the same conclusions as Sir Oliver Lodge has reached, and the arrival of his book 'Raymond' in the camp in 1918 only served to confirm them in their views. We do not know if such a thing as a 'genuine' medium exists. We do know that in the face of the most elaborate and persistent efforts to detect fraud, it is possible to convert intelligent, scientific, and otherwise highly educated men to Spiritualism, by means of the arts and methods employed by 'mediums' in general."

Lt. Jones has nothing but the utmost contempt for the average sitter—"the same sort of stuff pleases them all alike, children and grown-up sitters . . . if you can describe the palace of an imaginary princess, you can also describe the sixth, or seventh or eighth 'sphere.' . . . Advanced investigators of Spiritualism are like sword swallows. They can take in with ease what no ordinary mortal can stomach. For in matters of belief, as elsewhere, 'Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coute.' . . . We in Yozgad had not yet acquired the capacity of an Oliver Lodge or a Conan Doyle, but we were getting on very well for beginners. The stage of 'True-believerdom' was in sight . . ."

I could quote, and indeed would like to quote, dozens of passages, the sane reflections of a man who spent months in perfecting an almost fool-proof Spiritualism which was, all the same, utter fraud right through. But the "Road to Endor" is a book readers should get for themselves, for here it is not just mere theory but something which passed the test of hard experience. Complete sceptic that I am, I feel pretty certain

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that if I had been faced with the tests myself, I should have been very hard put to explain the "phenomena." And I have read very widely on the question. Still, in spite of everything, we have always the gullible among us. That is why Spiritualism still flourishes.

H. CUTNER.

AN EXPLANATION

ONCE again I am free to express my somewhat liberal views at risk of publication by reason of the termination of work I have loved, under restrictions which I consider reasonable if not inevitable.

Whilst on the staff of the B.B.C. I have been able, so to speak, to see the other side of the picture, and feel that there is far more to be said for the policy of guarded traditionalism which you have so consistently attacked, than appears necessary at first sight.

At least a change in policy, were it to come about, would have to be gradual, unless untold injury be done. What the average Freethinker seems to overlook when attacking the general "Christian" policy of British broadcasting is the nature and scope of the instrument concerned, and the delicate issue inherent in the average listener's profound faith in the voice which comes to him inside his home. Whatever the larger issue may be, England is still nominally a Christian country, and listening is essentially an intimate and personal matter in the vast majority of cases. Can you really suggest in all seriousness that children for instance, being brought up in the tradition of their country's faith should be subject at any moment to flat denials of its truth from what, to them, must often seem something like the voice of authority itself?

If an approach to liberalism in broadcasting is to be made as it will no doubt in due course, it seems essential that it should be indirect, at present at least. And many recent talks and discussions could arouse little criticism from Freethinkers on that score. I often feel that on the strength of pure humanism, any attempt to abolish at least a reasonable number of religious broadcasts, having regard to the vast scope and range of the radio generally, would be to deprive countless people, especially the old, infirm, and invalids, of a comfort, however spurious, which nothing could replace.

Readers will recall the story of the old monk who had fallen into the error of "thinking of the Eternal as a being like himself, fashioned in human form." His friends gathered round him to thank God for his deliverance from the grievance anthropomorphic heresy, when in the midst of their prayers the old man fell in tears on the ground with the pathetic cry "Woe's me, wretched man that I am; they have taken away my God and I have none to hold to or worship or pray to now."

And having committed myself to that heresy, a word about the Atomic Bomb.

At the moment the United States of America have the world at their feet. Happily there is not the slightest danger of any direct advantage being taken of a position unique in all human history, but what an opportunity lies before them for the forcible, yes forcible imposition of a World Government clearly the only thing which will save mankind.

Imagine a sudden ultimatum from Washington calling for the immediate disarmament of all the nations on the earth by a given early date, with the promise that she herself will follow suit as soon as the last warship, the last plane, the last tank and the last war plant is handed over to the keeping of a provisional body destined later to represent the Free States of the World. With the direct threat of instant annihilation to any defaulter. No possible moral objection could effectively meet the challenge in such a cause, and the time is short.

Six months from now it may be too late and all will be lost.

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

GLORY TO GOD

Glory to God in the Highest,
And Peace to His children below,
Peace and Goodwill towards humans,
Tho' atomic bombs they do throw.

His be the Power and the Glory
For the victory our sacrifice won,
And His be the Joy and the Honour,
They died: and the Lord's Will be done.

Glory to Him and His angels,
And "Heaven be praised," be our cry,
The preachers still yell from the pulpit,
And we turn from their words with a sigh.

Now Heaven protect our great Empire,
And His be the Hope and the Praise,
Sing Glory to God in the Highest,
And starve for the rest of your days.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.

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SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday 12 noon, Mr. ERURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., H. L. BEALES, M.A.: "The Quality of British Citizenship." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., Prof. G. D. H. COLE: "The Future of Freedom of Expression."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. KENNETH CAMPBELL: "Dialectical Philosophy and Democracy."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., COLIN McCALL: "Materialism: A Scientific Philosophy."

A Pioneer of Two Worlds

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"THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC" — A MISAPPLIED TERM

WIDELY admired in Australia is the distinguished writer-philosopher, Professor Walter Murdoch, for his radio talks, Press articles, and collections of essays published in book-form.

Speaking or writing, he has an easy, confident style; and penetrating—illuminating and stimulating—are his comments in dealing with a range of subjects that appears to embrace everything of human interest.

Added interest is imparted to his utterances by an irrepressible sense of humour which, from time to time, he is not in the least averse to directing against himself.

I write this by way of a personal, preliminary appreciation to the following extract from one of Professor Murdoch's wartime published essays:—

"A friendly correspondent warns me that I am becoming a menace to the community and ought to be suppressed. Of course it is very flattering to be taken so seriously. But, unfortunately, the reasons on which my correspondent bases his flattery are not such as I can swallow.

"'Week in, week out,' he writes, 'you preach that this war is being fought in defence of Christianity; and this is a very dangerous doctrine.

"'What about all the people in our midst who do not believe in Christianity? What about Rationalists, Agnostics, Atheists—are they to come out and fight for a religion in which they do not believe? The great majority of Australians, and especially of young Australians, are not churchgoers, and the doctrines preached in the churches leave them cold. They will certainly not enlist in the fighting forces if they suspect that they are being asked to risk their lives in defence of what they consider obsolete dogmas and outworn creeds.

"'We are not fighting for Christianity at all, and you are only perturbing people's minds when you suggest that we are.'

"There is more to the same effect; but this is the gist of my correspondent's contention."

Even more interesting, in a wider sense, is Professor Murdoch in what he has to say in reply.

"I have never maintained," he states, "that we are fighting for Christianity—never once. What I have maintained, with a persistency which you may well have found wearisome, is that we are fighting for the Christian ethic, which is a very different proposition. We are fighting not for a certain doctrine or a certain set of doctrines, but for a certain way of life.

"It doesn't very much matter, perhaps, what label you attach to this way of life—this tradition of decent human behaviour towards one another.

"If you say that this tradition dates from long before the beginnings of the Christian religion, you are saying what every one knows who has thought about the matter at all.

"A man should love his fellow-man as he loves himself. When he sees his fellow-man hungry, he feeds him; when he sees him cold, he clothes him; ill, he nurses him; dead, he buries him."

"This is not a quotation from the New Testament. It is an utterance of the Chinese sage, Meh-ti, who lived and taught in the fifth century before Christ.

"Thousands of such pre-Christian statements of what we nowadays call the Christian ethic could be collected from various countries and various ages, if it were desirable to prove the obvious."

Further comments by Professor Murdoch directly to the point are:—

"Let it be enough for our present purpose that a certain tradition has grown up in that part of the world which used to

be called Christendom—a tradition of the sort of behaviour to be cultivated if people are to live together with some chance of happiness on this planet.

"This tradition which we have inherited is what for convenience we call the Christian ethic. But if you object to that name let us find another. There is no point in quarrelling about labels. Let us say, if you prefer it, that we are fighting for the fundamental decencies of life. We all know, roughly but sufficiently, what a man means when he tells us that another man is a decent sort of bloke—and also when he tells us that another man is a crook.

"Well, if you think 'Christian ethic' too vague or too high-sounding or too academic or something, let us say (what really means exactly the same thing) the way a decent bloke lives or, at any rate, knows that he ought to live."

Possibly the writer of the protest to whom Professor Murdoch replies may feel that by "the Christian ethic" he had implied—in earlier talks, articles or essays—something more than he (Professor Murdoch) here states. With this we need not concern ourselves. The point is that the foregoing comments shatter what has been—and still continues to be—a blatant Christian imposition.

In this way.

It is the pretence by churchgoers that "the Christian ethic" is the essence or spirit of Christianity, and that to Christianity is due all the social and moral advances we have made up to our present stage in life. By churchgoers, therefore, "the Christian ethic" and Christianity are represented as convertible terms—in other words, the same thing. But Professor Murdoch shows, whatever he may think of Christianity, that what has become known as "the Christian ethic" does not derive from Christianity. The two things are something entirely apart. Further, he emphasises that thousands of pre-Christian statements—from all countries and all ages—have come to be embodied in that term, and that "the Christian ethic" is, in short, nothing more than a label which implies the decent things of life.

"There is no point," declares Professor Murdoch, "in quarrelling about labels."

But to "the Christian ethic" there is very sound reason for objecting. By that label credit is directly given to a religion which is manifestly not entitled to it. Consequently it is a flagrant deception to seek to identify "the Christian ethic" with Christianity.

All churchgoers may not be conscious of this fact.

But it is quite understandable that to foster acceptance of a rapidly declining creed, the interested promulgators of Christianity have knowingly and eagerly appropriated the advantages of a label which, if the same thing were done in ordinary commercial life, would promptly be followed by public exposure and exemplary punishment.

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

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