

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Christianity as it Was

I AM asked by one of my readers if I can tell him exactly what are the "Blue Laws" of which we have heard so much in connection with the agitation conducted by religious cranks in the United States. These survivals of the Stone Age are at present working for all they are worth to get the States run on what they declare to be Christian lines. They are not only opposed to anyone drinking and smoking, but there are to be no games of any kind on Sunday and only a limited amount during the rest of the week; cinema shows are to be closed as instruments of the devil, and above all, "blaspheming" of religion will be prohibited, by which is meant that no one will be allowed to write or speak in a way that does not please a particularly detestable type of American Puritanism. If these people have their way it should settle America's immigration question. She will no longer have to think of how to keep people out, but how to keep them in. But what, after all, were the Blue Laws? In 1781 a Rev. Samuel Peters published a "History of Connecticut," in which he gave what purported to be a code of laws set up in that State. They were of a ridiculously intolerant character, and his account of these laws was shown to be misleading. But there were a set of laws dealing with religion that were in force in the State of Connecticut, as well as in other States, or colonies, which are known as the "Blue Laws." And these laws are the more instructive because they were the creation of men who had gone to America, in the main, in the name of religious liberty, and as a protest against persecution at home. That is, professedly. Actually, with rare individual exceptions, there was a very common agreement as to the right of the State to persecute in matters of religion. There was only one question at issue, and that was which party should do the persecuting. Then as now, Christians were only able to agree upon what was wrong. Upon what was right they showed endless differences.

### The "Blue Laws"

The Blue Laws of Connecticut—in the main they represent the laws of the other colonies—were printed in 1673. They are quite biblical in tone, and fairly represent what the laws of a genuine Christian community ought to be, and what they have always been to the extent to which Christians have been permitted to have their own way. The death penalty is very prominent, noticeably in connection with religious offences, and in each case the biblical warranty for the punishment is indicated. Thus, if any man or woman shall have or worship any other god but the true God, he shall be put to death. If any man or woman be a witch, they shall be put to death. Anyone behaving contemptuously towards "the word preached, or the

messengers thereof . . . shall pay five pounds to the public, or stand two hours openly upon a block or stool . . . with a paper fixed on his breast written with capital letters, 'An open and obstinate contemner of God's Holy Ordinances.'" There are fines for anyone who is absent from Church on public fast days and on Sundays. If any person shall profane the Sabbath by travel, playing, or shall keep out of the meeting house, he is to be fined or to sit in the stocks. No Quakers or heretics are to be permitted to live in the colony. There was five pounds fine for anyone giving any "necessary entertainment" to such, and no one was permitted to keep any books or manuscripts belonging to them, or to hold any discourse with them. It should be noted, to the credit of the colony, that there was a law against the making or publishing of any lie. For this the penalty was five shillings. The difference between this and the punishment for heresy, staying away from Church, or speaking disrespectfully of the parson is very significant and throws a strong light on the Christian scale of moral values. And it should be noted that it was these people who had been shrieking against the tyranny of the Church in this country. And it was of these people that our prominent men at the usual "Mayflower" celebrations were writing and speaking, and praising them as having laid the foundation of American freedom and enlightenment. Thus is history written by Christians for Christians.

### Sunday as it Was

The present agitation in America is concentrating on the restoration of the Puritan Sunday; if that is gained, all else may be expected to follow. What the "Day of Rest" was like when these sad-faced and miserable minded people had their way is hardly conceivable to anyone living to-day, but one can safely say that if a similar state of things could be shown to exist to-day in Russia it would be pointed to as an intolerable tyranny. An interesting picture of the times was drawn some years ago by Alice Morse Earle in a work entitled "The Sabbath in Puritan New England," and from that I take most of the details that follow, although it should be borne in mind that in this respect New England is typical of the bulk of the other colonies. Gloomy as was the Sabbath among the Puritans in this country, it was still more gloomy in America. Here there were the traditions of a more human day of rest, and some degree of pleasure was left in many quarters. But in a new country the kill-joys had it all their own way. Legally, everyone was compelled to attend Church, and once in there was no escape. The doors were locked, and at Salem three constables were placed "to keep ye doores fast and suffer none to go out before ye whole exercise bee ended." Even a quiet snooze during service was prohibited. An official "awakener," armed with a long knobbed staff, was there to rap over the head or the knuckles anyone who availed themselves of nature's last refuge against dreary

sermons. In some towns it was ordered that "a cage be made or some other means be invented for such as sleep on the Lord's Day." And he must have been a man of more than usual courage who, being reprimanded by the preacher for sleeping, answered, "Mind your own business, and go on with the sermon." For the boys, who were kept in a group by themselves, special men were told off to watch them, and were ordered to "use such raps and blows" as seemed in their discretion necessary.

### The Joys of Religion

Playing on Sunday was, of course, forbidden, as it is to-day by our own councils, and there were various cases of young men and others being brought before magistrates charged with that serious offence. Sometimes the charge was that they "sported and played, and by indecent gestures and wry faces caused laughter and misbehaviour in the beholders." Tabatha Morgan was charged with laughing and playing on the Lord's Day, and was fined three shillings and sixpence. Deborah Bangs was fined five shillings for a similar offence. In another case, "His Majesty's Tithing man entered complaint against Jona and Susan Smith, that on the Lord's Day, during Divine Service they did smile." A wicked fisherman was fined for catching eels on Sunday. Two sweethearts, John Lewis and Sarah Chapman, were fined for sitting together on the Lord's Day under an apple tree in Goodman Chapman's orchard. Perhaps they also did smile. Elizabeth Eddy was fined ten shillings for hanging out clothes. A citizen of Wareham was fined five shillings for pulling apples. Much more serious was the offence of Captain Kemble, of Boston. He was guilty of kissing his wife "publiquely" on the doorstep of his own office on the Sabbath. His only excuse was that he had just returned from a three years' voyage. We have had complaints in our own day that undue attention to sports on Saturday leads to people staying away from Church on Sunday. The New Englanders were quite alive to this aspect of the matter, so they solemnly decreed that all labour was to cease at three o'clock on Saturday, and the rest of the day was to be spent in "Catechising and preparation for the Sabbath such as the Ministers shall direct." The master of a vessel who had just landed in Boston was followed to his lodgings by a constable and dragged off to prison. His offence was that he had walked about after sunset on Saturday. Providence also endorsed these regulations. The next day his child fell into an open well and was drowned, and the father "in open congregation did acknowledge the righteous hand of God for his profaning His holy day." Religion appears to breed the same mixture of cowardice and egotism in all ages. One would have thought better of the father if he had had the manliness to stand up and give the Lord a good rating for His behaviour. But camels and Christians both kneel to be burdened.

### What of the Future?

There are just a few indications of better things on the part of both ministers and laity, but deplorably few. We read of a Mistress Oliver who was forced to stand with a cleft stick on her tongue for "reproaching the elders." One raises one's hat to Mistress Oliver, as also to the New Haven man who said, "I would rather hear my dog bark than Mr. Bellamy preach," to Philip Ratcliffe, who was

whipped for speaking against the Churches, and to William Hawes and his son for saying that such as sing in the congregation were "fooles." All these paid for their open speech, but in a Christian community honesty and independence have always been expensive luxuries. But there are indications of better things with even the ministers. To the credit of their humanity it must be said that they sometimes got the better of their religion. We read of jollifications in connection with ordinations, and although there were complaints from certain strait-laced laymen of the intemperance of some of the gatherings, these did something, in the eye of the historian, to redeem their character. Thus, when we read that out of a bill of £5 9s. 8d. for entertaining ministers at a Hartford ordination, £2 18s. 10d. was for wine and toddy, one feels that to be the healthiest bit of human nature in the whole proceeding. As with Presbyterianism in Scotland, the pleasure of getting drunk was probably the chief thing that helped to keep a little human feeling alive in the midst of such a dreary and inhuman religion. How much the world has moved since the days when these unlovely people had it all their own way may be realised from the fact that the reading of their rule now appears to be in the nature of a burlesque. But events show that we have not developed so far as to quite preclude the possibility of a return. Many a cultured Roman some two thousand years ago might have laughed at the idea of the world being overcome by a deluge of ignorant superstition such as was represented by primitive Christianity. But the deluge came, and the savage was enthroned for centuries. And widespread as is our culture, solidly based as it appears to be, there is always at least the possibility that the choked fires of superstition may break through the veneer of culture which the world has and submerge all civilisation in its flow. It is against that danger we must guard; it is against the age-long enemy, superstition, that Freethought holds the pass.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### DEATH AND LIFE

IT comes as a frequent criticism, from the more moderate members of the clerical fraternity, that Freethought implies a pessimistic outlook upon life—pessimistic because the Freethinker can see before him only a journey towards death, which, for him, must always remain as the end of the road. His conception of life is thought to be the stereotyped one of a winding mountain path, to be ascended on the stout limbs of youth and ambition, but from whose summit he can discern the gloomy valley below, where the track he must needs follow loses itself gradually among the deepening shadows. There hangs the night, impenetrable and eternal, waiting to receive him into her infinite bosom.

Quite apart from the fact that, even were this a true impression for us to form, it would not represent life as a depressing prospect, nor supply the reason for making it a faint-hearted endeavour—quite apart, I say, from this—the conception will be found, on examination, to be more acceptable to poetic fancy than to philosophic reflection. And it is my object in this article to suggest, in a general way, some reasons why we not unnaturally fall into this way of thinking, and to indicate, also in a general way, some differences in outlook which result from a more logical arrangement of our ideas.

At the outset, let us observe that, when the average man speaks of life in the sense in which we are now dealing with it,

he is not referring to a biological relationship, but to a personal experience. And when he is considering the phenomenon of death, he is not concerned with a biological condition, but with a personal contingency.

Now, if any of you wanted to form an idea of what it was like for some particular thing to happen to you, there would be two ways in which to do so. One would be to allow the thing to happen to you, and then you would know all about it. The other would be to allow it to happen to someone else, and then, by observing him, or hearing his account of it, to imagine what you would have felt like had it occurred to yourself. Why is it that, when we wish to form an idea of something that has happened to someone else, we invariably imagine what we should have felt like in similar circumstances? It is because experience is a two-sided fact. It has an objective and a subjective aspect, and I do not believe we ever find them existing independently. Thus, whenever we experience an object or an event, we experience at the same time some nexus of feeling arising out of it. The psychological, if not the logical consequence of this is, that we cannot think of anything happening to us, without at the same time imagining our sentient ego as part of the event. So, in the case of others, we cannot perceive them as objects, without at the same time thinking of them as subjects. And this, not from the mere force of habit, but from the sheer incapacity to imagine an absolutely novel condition of things.

Consider, now, how these conditions of thinking will affect us when we come to reflect upon the subject of death. Paradoxical as it may sound, death is, in a sense, an incident in our lives. I say "in a sense," and that reservation is very important. It is only an incident in our lives, in so far as we observe it in other people. Let us express this by saying that it exists for us only in an objective way. We watch other people die. We see them when they are dead. We recognise that something has happened to them. That is the sum total of our experience of death. But we cannot get rid of the natural tendencies of thought. We cannot help imagining what we should feel like if the same thing happened to us. We cannot help trying to form an idea of death as a possible experience, with ourselves as subject. And that is where we go grievously astray, because we have no experience whatever upon which to base an analogy. At this point, it might occur to you to object that I have overlooked the very important condition of sleep, together with states of unconsciousness in general. This objection will serve to develop and illustrate our thesis. What is our experience of sleep? Surely no experience at all. What we, as subjects, experience is not sleeping but waking up. And the sense of having slept (apart from the refreshing effects) is produced by the discrepancy between the events just before sleep and just after, when considered as a continuous sequence. What gives us the feeling of a hiatus is not the gap itself, but the fact that the two sides of the gap do not fit together. In other words, the events before and after sleep do not form a perfect continuum. But you will easily see that in order to get this feeling, we must have both sides of the gap present to the mind. That is to say, we must wake up. The same principles, of course, apply to all states of suspended consciousness.

Now what will be the position of the man who attempts to study death along these lines; that is to say, who commences with ideas from life, as a personal experience, and hopes to understand death by applying them with the force of an analogy? He will inevitably obtain a confused notion of death as a condition comparable to sleep or unconsciousness. Vague ideas of his own personal identity will persist through his conceptions of decease. He will talk about what is to be done with him after he is dead, and what he would not like to think was being done with him. One man will say he would revolt at the idea of being underground. Another cannot tolerate the idea of being cremated. A lover of nature and the open spaces will tell

us he would like to be buried on a mountain side, with his grave-stone beaten by the west winds. And so with them all.

To such men, death, illusive though it may be, represents some sort of reality. And even though they may be Freethinkers, and are able to say, with Sir Arthur Keith, "death ends all," yet they retain, in their conception of it, the idea of a contingency which, if final, is still somehow positive; and life, to them, will be a journey towards this positive conclusion.

If this is not right, where have they gone wrong?

I suggest that they are studying the problem upside down; not in consideration of chronology, but in consideration of a clear understanding of their subject.

Commence, not with life, but with death. Understand from biological science the disorganisation, the disappearance of psychological relations, which it implies, and what is left? A state which, considered as a biological abstraction, has a positive meaning; and an equally positive, if different, meaning, when considered as a contingency in the life of another person; but, considered in relation to an individual, and from the point of view of that individual, has no conceivable significance whatever. For what is the significance to me of a state of which I can never have an experience, and never form an idea? I say that, to me, that state is nothing. Admittedly, it appears to be something when I am found making arrangements or provisions which concern my decease. But really these measures are all from the point of view of other people, to whom alone my death is a reality. If I do make arrangements from my point of view, such as directions for some form of burial I have a mind to, then I am looking at death as if I were to be present as a sentient being at the ceremonies of my own funeral. I am committing the very errors that we have just been discussing.

But what if I take my view-point from the direction of biological science? If you will permit me the use of a paradoxical, but therefore emphatic, illustration, I shall see death not as a gap analogous to the gap of sleep, but as a gap with one side missing. For, if we are to believe the findings of biology, once we are dead we do not expect to wake up. But what is a gap without one side? It serves me tolerably well for an idea of nothing.

To a personal being, then, death is simply nothing. It is no point on the journey of life. You cannot journey towards nothing. It is nowhere on the road, and from our point of view we cannot really feel that we are approaching it, because we can never get nearer to nowhere. Taking thus, as our subject for study, not "life and death," but "death and life," what effect has a right view of death upon our feelings about life? I say the effect is not to take anything away from us, but to give something to us. And that something is an enhanced and intensified sense of the reality of life. We are mortal only to others. In a sense we are immortal to ourselves. Life then seems not to be closing down upon us, but to be ever expanding before us in depth and richness. We never think of death, because we know that we cannot. And more important still, we cease to waste our energies in quest of some other and illusory existence. Having the unique and self-sufficient possession of life as a personal fact, we are able to turn, with undivided attention, to the task of life as a social fact. And with a philosophy of life, in place of a theology of death, we hope one day to raise society above that level of attenuated barbarism which at present passes under the name of civilisation.

C. CARMICHAEL.

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## ACID DROPS

Rome has lost its hold on Poland, and is bound to weaken considerably in Germany. The more reason for the Papacy to find all the good it can with regard to Spain. It can find no fault with its double-dealing ruler and naturally regards the "Christian laws" in Spain as coming very near the ideal. It even has nothing to say against the Spanish prisons. That one can understand for they are well filled with men and women who have been fighting for freedom. But for those who wish to get a reliable insight into the quality of the prisons and the "crimes" for which they are imprisoned should read "An Interlude in Spain," by Charles d'Ydewalle. They have, to be sure, not the sickening character of the German prisons during the war. Still, of the two religious systems Hitler would not be ashamed of his brother in Spain.

We are indebted to the Roman Catholic "Universe," for the information that four of the Catholics on trial at Nuremberg have four Catholic priests—by request—to look after their spiritual welfare. Religion will out.

In the same issue of the same R.C. paper we find the Pope warning parents to "Beware of deceiving children with explanations that are false. Do not falsify the truth. Think of the emotional crisis that will arise on the day when they find that their natural credulity has been imposed on." For downright impudence that beats anything we have read for a long, long time.

If Viscount Cranborne understood the implications of what he said to the House of Lords he gave the Christian Church a very, very hard knock. Dealing with the debate on foreign affairs he said, "The fundamental unity of European civilisation, cultural and spiritual, has been temporarily destroyed. We are back to the Middle Ages, and almost the Dark Ages." The archbishops and bishops present must have winced. For the Dark Ages was the period when the Christian Church stood without a rival and when kings and rulers bowed before the Holy and dominant Christian Church. The Middle Ages covered the recovery of the philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome and were indications of Jewish and Mohammedan science which was penetrating the Christian world. We wonder whether Viscount Cranborne intended to make such a terrific indictment of the Christian Church.

The Scottish Churches are again agitated over the question of permitting women to take the part of elders. The agitation is scething in many places, but Aberdeen is one place that is for the moment attracting attention. The voting against placing women in higher positions in the Church was three to one against the women. We are not surprised at the hubbub. If one thing is clear in Christian history it is that women are, theologically, an inferior and dangerous class. Christians should reflect that woman was the—religiously—cause of all our troubles. Jesus selected twelve humans to carry on his work, but not one was a woman. After his resurrection Jesus would not allow a woman to touch him, but he permitted a man to put his finger in the hole in his side to prove that he was really alive. St. Paul said clearly and categorically that women were to be silent in the Church. Right through the ages the Christian rule has been to keep women in the background. The Church of England will not permit a woman to occupy the pulpit. The Aberdeen Churches should be careful. Christianity has had to give up so much in late years that it really cannot give away any more.

Just consider this, written not by an Atheist, or even a wandering preacher, but by so great a character as John Knox, who in his day was substantially ruler of a great part of Scotland:—

"To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority or dominion over an empire, above any realm, nation or city, is repugnant to nature, contemptible to God. . . . By the order of nature, by the malediction and curse pronounced against women, by the mouth of St. Paul, the interpreter of God's sentence. . . . God hath rejected woman from all rule, dominion and authority over man."

And if the reader wishes more, and he has the good fortune to have access to the five huge volumes, published in the first

quarter of the 18th century, of Bayle's Dictionary, he will find there an account of a solemn congress of Christian leaders discussing whether woman was a human being or an animal. It was only after a very long conflict that it was decided she was not an animal, but it was quite plain that she was not too much of a human.

We often wonder whether our leading ecclesiastical dignitaries ever think carefully about what they say. For instance, what can we make of Archbishop Downey, who says that "Worldly wisdom in the form of Secularism has failed to bring peace and tranquillity. . . . Instead it has brought hatred, strife, war, hunger, disease, misery and death." There is a lot more, but we might put the matter in another way and ask, what has religion done? After all, religion in one shape or another, has had a good innings, and only a priest of the oldest form of Christianity would have the glaring impudence to lay the blame of existing evils on non-Christians. If there is a God he cannot well be considered free from responsibility for what has occurred.

In this matter we have humbug after humbug before us. Consider that while wars could be run on a small scale the majority of Christians raised no protest—neither, for that matter, did men and women in general seem to be seriously upset. The horror of war, the futility of war, did not appear to the majority of people as a foolish way of settling disputes. It was only when wars became serious enough to threaten all alike—winners and losers—that war became something that was horrible. But war with old-fashioned weapons was the same war that meets us to-day. More are now killed certainly, but a thousand deaths are a thousand individual deaths whether it takes a few minutes to kill a thousand, or a few months.

We should particularly like to ask Archbishop Downey one question. When and where did the Roman Church, or any other Church of wealth and power, denounce war as war and decline to take any part in it? Or let dignitaries of the Church of England note the number of warlike figures which decorate places of worship. They are not there to illustrate the foolishness and the brutality of war; there is not a word to call attention to the horrors and futility of war as a method of settling disputes. They are rather used as encouragements for others to go to war when occasion demands. We shall learn nothing much from this war unless we insist on more than the deadliness and expense of war; nearly all disputes that are silenced by war could have been settled by judicial methods. When we really recognise this it will not be through the cant and lying of the pulpit, but by the development of the very outlook that Archbishop Downey so stupidly denounces.

A rather curious case is reported in the "Birmingham Gazette." A woman aged 63 was charged with burning the body of her father who died at the age of 93. Here is the woman's statement:—

"I made the bonfire in the garden and lit it. I dragged dad to the fire and put him on it. He burned for half an hour. I tied the rope round the body and dragged him into the hole. . . . He told me he didn't want any black jackets worn, and no flowers, and he wanted to be cremated."

There is no suggestion of foul play but the woman was committed for trial on the charge of "having buried the body of her father, aged 93, in order to prevent the coroner holding an inquest, and with having failed to provide a Christian burial according to public decency."

There is more than one probable flaw in the drawing of the charge but there is one thing that is not only without legal backing, it is a first-class example of Christian impudence. There is no law in England that orders a "Christian burial." Even in a Church of England churchyard the next of kin has the right to prevent any religious service, and in other cemeteries or crematoriums any service may be held, or abolished, but no attacks on religion may be made, and we might add Atheists are not of the type that seize on the occasion of a funeral to advertise particular opinions. That degree of indecency we have always left to the churches and chapels.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

- J. McCORRISON.—Thanks for sending us copy of the Holy Insurance advertised in the U.S.A. But we have already a copy of it in print, and hope soon to publish it.
- I. YETAM.—Thanks for copy of the "Irish Times." It will be of use. The Catholic Church always plays the game of a State within a State.
- C. MORTON.—There is nothing illegal in a Roman Catholic priest performing a marriage ceremony. But English law recognises a marriage that conforms with the civic law. In English law, a "Church marriage" has no validity.
- W. J. M.—For "The Freethinker," £1; D. Finlayson, 3s.; J. Johnson, 5s.
- E. W. J.—Pleased to hear from you. Will print as soon as possible.
- E. V.—The name is genuine.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

We were pleased to see the following from the pen of Mr. F. Lawes, who writes regularly on the B.B.C. and its habits.

"I find the Friday Discussions pleasant gladiatorial combats enough, but still hold that the B.B.C. will have done nothing to answer the charge that it feebly dodges controversial broadcasting until it (a) allows at least half an hour a week, uncensored, to single speakers with unorthodox opinions, and (b) until it breaks the rule which prevents any free discussion of religion"

We should like to see other newspaper writers deal with the B.B.C. with similar candour. It would be still better if the many men of standing who broadcast would insist on selecting their own subjects and decline to either permit the B.B.C. to trim what they have to say, or do their own trimming lest the B.B.C. heads do it for them. If the B.B.C. decides to confine its work to entertainments, well and good. But it is double-dyed dishonesty when knowledge and ideas are suppressed in the name of truth and decency. We know that some men and women have declined to play double with the public, but they are very few.

We do note, however, that the feeling against the dishonesty of the B.B.C. is steadily gaining ground. We see that Mr. Tom Driberg writes a very strong article in "Reynold's News," exposing the extent to which his writings were mauld about by the B.B.C. The pity is that he has ever put up with this censorship. We can see no reason for men and women of ability submitting to their copy being cut here and there whenever the "gods" of Broadcasting House find anything approaching candid criticism. We take it that it is a matter of advertising, but it is certain that until men who have some standing in the world of letters and science have sufficient courage to decline to sell themselves to the B.B.C. the scandal will continue. It is pitiful to note the way in which men of first-rate ability sell themselves for mere publicity.

Our readers may remember that in the years during the rise of Hitler to power with his declared determination to purify the "German Race"—which involved the murdering and torturing of both Jews and Germans—we insisted that what was before

the world was a definitely and deeply-rooted religious movement. It will also be remembered that this religious crusade was welcomed by many people—many of them prominent persons—who looked to him to purify Europe. Hitler himself proclaimed to the world that he was an instrument of God, and the chief objection the Roman Church had to him was that he would not give the Catholic Church in Germany a free hand. As it was the Vatican quite comfortably worked a "deal" with Mussolini which materialised in the shape of a good round sum of money. Business is business.

It is well to keep this religion to the front, for we are quite sure that most of our English writers will skim lightly over it or ignore it altogether. So we record the striking feature that among the prisoners now being tried in Nuremberg the majority are fervent Christians. Von Papen, Seyss-Inquart with Hans Frank went off to praise God in a Catholic Church, while Rosenberg and Streicher stuck to their old German Gods. To his credit we record Frank declared that he needed the solace of religion. There is nothing strange in this devotion to God, and finding ethical and religious encouragement forthcoming, it is the keymark in the wholesale burning of heretics at the stake, to the brutal torture of heretics and Atheists, and the conviction so many brutal rulers who felt they were doing God's work. Of course cruelty could and does exist apart from religion, but there is nothing to equal religion for turning brutality and intolerance into a sacred duty.

The Blackburn Branch N.S.S. has a visit from Mr. Joseph McCabe to-day when he will lecture in the Public (Lecture) Hall, Northgate, on "The Vatican Peril." The lecture commences at 7 p.m. and admission is free. The local branch has been running lectures at regular intervals and there are enough Freethinkers in and around Blackburn to develop a strong movement if they will get together.

It is high time that the sitting of archbishops and bishops in the House of Lords was discontinued. In itself the practice is a very ancient one. It begins among the most primitive of peoples, but then it fitted the occasion; the primitive priest looked after the rain, warded off disease, etc., etc. But our House of Lords medicine-men serve no such purpose. They are in the House to keep in being outworn ideas and unjustifiable privileges. We have no objection to a second chamber, and even election might be for life, but to talk about democracy with our present second chamber is an insult to decency.

There are two words in constant use that offer a first-class exhibition of either carelessness or ignorance. They are "race" and "instinct." We have, for example, the English "race"—which is made up of Saxon, Welsh, Scots, French, German and many others. The other catch-word is "instinct." Here we have a rush of "instincts" exhibited in numerous ways of which we may note that skill in legal matters, cleverness in sporting games, agility in acrobatics, generations of military life, quickness on the Stock Exchange, love of adventure and a score of other features are all due to family or national instincts. The fact is that of all living groups the human one has the fewest instincts. So far as man is concerned a group of instincts would be more of a liability than an asset.

The latest example of the assumed power of "instincts" saw daylight in the House of Commons the other day. Earl Winterton, commenting in the "Sunday Chronicle" on a discussion in the House of Commons, remarked that "Mr. Lloyd George . . . realised with his acute Parliamentary instinct that nothing delays progress more than bursts of ill temper," etc. Now, in the name of all that is idiotic what has "instinct" to do with the recognition that one may often get more by good humour than by bullying? It is really an exhibition of common sense, of realisation that good temper will do more to get an opponent to give way than will bullying. Many scientific thinkers have suggested more than once that it would be a good thing if that word "instinct" was abolished altogether in the interests of clarity and common sense. Clear thinking is made difficult when it is saturated with meaningless or misleading words.

## THE BOOK OF CHURCHES

### I.

ANYONE who tries to get definite information about English churches and their priests finds it difficult. The matter is scattered among all manner of reference books, periodicals, and annual reports, elusive and often undiscoverable except after lengthy and tedious search. A great deal which one would like to know, that the public ought to know, is not at present in print at all, or only touched on lightly, or deducible from public activities of clergy.

The problem is aggravated by the wide diversity of religious organisations in England, ranging from the Roman and Anglican Churches through larger Nonconformist sects and the Salvation Army down to tiny dissenting bodies, all preaching some form of Christianity as interpreted by themselves, but otherwise exclusive.

So we need a Domesday Book of religion, setting forth the numbers, wealth, possessions, and power of the churches and their paid professors. The danger of such a volume is size. The author, editor, or compiler would have to exercise severe economy, be a master of compression, to keep the book within reasonable limits. For a large tome would defeat its own purpose. We do not want a long work which few will read, to lie on library shelves accumulating dust except when an occasional specialist or controversialist hunts through it for material relevant to some essay or argument he has in hand.

The need is for a simply written small volume understandable by the common man, and made accessible to him at low price. As they engage in public activities we are entitled to know what the churches are doing internally, and what funds and organisation they have for their purposes. It would be revelatory, perhaps startling to the majority of people.

To avoid excessive size and complexity it would be advisable to study the English churches only. Welsh, Scottish and Irish need separate handbooks as they have many differences from their English equivalents.

Dispute about religion and connected topics increases. Debate is valueless without accurate information available for use of the protagonists, and for their hearers or readers to check the correctness of what is served out to them.

### II.

Thus a great part of the projected book will be statistical. Set forth in tabular and graphical form should be all the data of church business, each church separately. Not only will the number of priests, clergy, and ministers be interesting, but also other paid workers, as organists, choristers, missionaries, monks, nuns, and a host of lesser dependants.

To these should be added all offices of profit derived from religious bodies. Ecclesiastical commissioners, architects, builders, printers, publishers and sellers of religious books and periodicals, manufacturers of and dealers in vestments, furniture and endless other materials, and the staffs of each, will make surprising reading.

For the old-established and larger churches have some extraordinarily wide and various ramifications. They are more than churches or religious communities; they are huge businesses or corporations engaged in most diverse activities, and such should be noted, as the Salvation Army running factories, salvage dumps, hostels and insurance.

### III.

Difficult, controversial and indeed perilous will be the chapter on church memberships. This can be approached from so many angles, none of them satisfactory, some dangerous to the unwary

Baptisms may be counted. This is the method of computation most favourable to the churches. It ignores the enormous falling

off in later years. Confirmations or similar initiation ceremonies, marriages, burials with religious rites, attendance at Communion would all give varying figures. Records of active church membership, where such exist, would be greatly less. For communicants it would be necessary to get figures over a whole year, not on special dates like Easter.

Christenings, weddings and funerals indicate little, except that the churches get fees for the two latter ceremonies. It has been said by an honest bishop that countless numbers of people enter church three times only—as infants, to be wed, and to be buried. In the first and last they have no choice, being brought by their kindred for the same reason as the second, that it looks well, has some satisfaction or consolation as a sentimental and magical ceremonial, and is a social or established custom.

Figures for church attendance will give the compiler trouble too. There is no disinterested and authoritative census of attendance as a whole to be had.

### IV.

More reliable and vastly more fascinating will be the chapter on finance. Endowments and investments of religious bodies will be investigated, the possession of property and rentals. Tithes must be explained for what it is—a tax on land for the benefit of the Anglican Church, however commuted by Act of Parliament or otherwise varied.

Whoever is responsible for this chapter of the volume will have some detailed and tough accountancy if he tries to calculate what the churches get in collections, donations, offerings and fees. Also he will have to estimate the value of rates and property tax which churches do not pay on their buildings and sites. This is a handsome subsidy of religion by the local authorities and Treasury.

All that being settled stipends and salaries can be listed, classified and set out clearly. Before embarking on this it would be well to give the relative distribution of all the churches' total disbursements. That is, what share goes to buildings and upkeep, to charity, to printing, to missions and to salaries. The last is almost for sure the largest item.

We shall see the Archbishop of Canterbury with fifteen thousand a year, his Grace of York and he of London with ten thousand each, then the thirty-odd bishops ranging down to four thousand per annum. Close below them come Suffragans and Deans and Archdeacons down to one thousand a year. Parish clergy vary from over one thousand a year down to curates who are supposed to be poorly paid, but get more than farm labourers.

The incomes of Roman Catholic priests and bishops will be revelatory because they are so secretive about their money affairs, whereas the Anglican Church is not. The chapter on Roman Church finances will be very interesting indeed, possibly astonishing if we can get the facts. Nonconformist economy will be more humdrum. The Salvation Army has always been notorious for refusing to issue a balance sheet of its operations. A few small sects and the Society of Friends have no paid pastors. All honour to them because it is incongruous for men to make a living out of religion, especially such fat livings as many make.

### V.

This compendium of the churches will not be all figures. Even the chapters containing such will need explanation and elucidation, as well as the statistics being put in the most comprehensible form, with tables and graphs and percentages, comparisons among the religious bodies and against past years, also some fruitful deductions from analysis of the statistical information.

The general position of the churches in relation to society must be examined. Priests, parsons and ministers as Members of

Parliament, mayors, councillors, members of education and other committees; as magistrates; teachers in State and municipal and other types of schools, in colleges and universities and on the governing bodies of such; as probation officers: there is a long list of public and semi-public posts which clerics occupy. These must be recorded, with the emoluments thereof.

Connected with this are chaplaincies in Army, Navy, Air Force, prisons, hospitals and all manner of institutions. As well as Sunday schools, figures and data will have to be supplied of day and boarding schools directly under church control, and of the prevalence of religious services and teaching in other types of schools.

It may fairly be stated there is still compulsory religion in England. An Act of Parliament enforces it; there are many official regulations of similar effect, and established practices which so far we are unable to get rid of. Despite the Conscience Clause in schools and theoretical liberty of choice of religion, or of keeping out of it altogether, the author of this book will be able safely to assert that we yet have compulsory Christianity in England. After reading all the data his readers will surely say so.

## VI.

A chapter will have to be devoted to the gigantic propaganda carried on by the churches apart from the above heads. There is a steady and constant stream of periodicals issued by religious bodies and vigorously advertised and circulated, together with books of all sizes from pamphlets up to big expensive volumes. Classification of these with their financial position, sales and numbers, will be engrossing reading.

Akin to this will be needed a skilfully written and thoughtful section dealing with the more subtle general influence of the professional religionists on all aspects of life, not only in education and public affairs, but in art, music, literature, the Press, politics and civics, ethics, the radio, and historical, philosophical and scientific research: everywhere we shall find them trying to make some difference, perhaps slight, often considerable, upon the general trend of thought and opinion.

Summarily; by the time he finishes compiling this digest of clericalism the editor will have come to the conclusion that England is a priest-ridden country, having a trinity of priestly castes difficult to escape. Readers will almost certainly agree with him.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

### CHRISTIANS PLEASE NOTE

It becomes more apparent every day that these Christian gentlemen cannot raise their voices above a whisper for fear of attracting public notice to many cracks in their armour. We are being led to believe that the Christians and the renegades of the 18B company are hand-in-glove. According to the "Daily Mirror" the League of Christian Reformers finishes prayers with this: "In the name of Adolf Hitler, Amen." I suggest that this is blasphemous. When is the "Universe" going to raise its rather mezzo-soprano voice in indignant protest against this atrocious poaching on Christian preserves? Or do birds of a feather still flock together?

We Freethinkers do not object to the L.C.R. saying: "In the name of Old Scratch, Amen," but surely this is a strange thing . . . the Christians saying nothing about a well-publicised piece of arrant blasphemy. I hoped that the "religious lunatic" of 7.55 fame would have had something to say. I suggest that the paper that dared to publish such stuff as this prayer-ending farce is asking for a nasty spot of criticism from the "Church Times." But perhaps the Christians will make no comment after all, they've lost enough face already.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.

### "THEY DIED THAT WE MAY LIVE"!

"They died that we may live" . . . this travesty . . .  
This comfortable sham . . . has ever been  
The means to salve the guilty consciences  
Of those who stay at home and *live* to see  
The deaths of all the finest of our Race,  
In wars, begotten through the greed of men,  
Which never should be fought. The Awful Truth  
That stalks us, in our shadows, as we walk,  
Is not that young men die that we may live,  
But that we live for Greed and they must die!

And then when they have died, we thank our God,  
That He in all His wisdom has seen fit  
To save us, so that once again we may  
Return to Greed and Sham and Foul Pretence,  
And Economic-Freedom-to-Exploit  
These growing sons who, later, and once more,  
Must sacrifice their Aims, their Lives, their Loves,  
To die that we again may thank our God  
That some there are to die that we may live!

Whatever ancient mystic we avow . . .  
Mohammed, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ . . .  
Whate'er the protestation of our faith  
In these or any other wandering Saint . . .  
We, one and all, are Liars, because we live  
For Greed and so to shamelessly exploit,  
While serving with our lips, those humble creeds!

We live in mortal dread, for fear the Light  
Of honest and Eternal Truth may shine  
Upon our Shams and painted Masquerade  
And thus betray our meanness and reveal  
Our falseness to ourselves! So give we Thanks  
To God for "Victory," to God Omnipotent,  
To God of Love who never stops our Wars  
Till Men have Cursed and Killed and fought them out,  
And spilled the precious blood of those we love . . .  
Our Fairest Sons!

By giving thanks to God  
For stopping wars, we slyly shift the guilt  
For causing them . . . and thus we save our face . . .  
That atavistic masque which hides the lies  
Of human Greed and Cruelty and Lust  
Which still rise up from Miasmatic Swamps  
That spawned us in the Aeons of the Past.  
"They died that we may live" ? . . . Forget that lie!  
We live our Selfish Lives that they must die!

ANON.

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

#### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

#### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.:  
"The New World Order; Its Friends and Enemies."

#### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13,  
I.L.P.).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m., Mr. H. LENNARD: "Life History  
of R. G. Ingersoll."

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Halls, Northgate).—  
Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. JOSEPH McCABE: "The Vatican Peril."

## NEW YEAR FESTIVALS

"THE occurrence of a New Year Festival both in the spring and in the autumn, we find in the Hebrew custom which still retains this dual character of the New Year celebrations, holding its religious New Year in the spring, and its civil New Year in the autumn."—Prof. HOOKE, Schweich Lectures, 1935.

The first New Year Festival took place in Egypt on July 19, 4241 B.C., to celebrate the beginning of the Nile flood.

The priests of Heliopolis, at the apex of the Nile Delta, who worshipped the sun under the title of Ra, observed that the sun and Sirius both rose at the same time only once a year. Helios is the Greek for sun, hence this rising of a star and the sun at the same time is called the heliacal rising of the star. These Heliopolitan priests observed that 365 days occurred between two successive heliacal risings of Sirius; and thus established the solar year, and "fixed the earliest date in the history of the world as known to us," so says the greatest historian of Ancient Egypt. On July 19, 4241 B.C., Sirius, the Dog Star, was the brightest star in the winter sky, and it can be easily spotted on a starry night a little to the left of the Constellation Orion but nearer to the southern horizon. The priests came forth from their temple and proclaimed "The Nile has risen, the Nile has risen!" On that eventful morn a human sacrifice was offered up to Ra. It was a royal sacrifice, and the one who killed the king, himself became the new king for the following year. "The king is dead; Long live the king!"

Almost three thousand years of peace followed in which the Egyptians developed their art, science and religion. Their ships sailed down the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean, round Arabia and up the Persian Gulf and landed emigrants at the mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris. Here they founded colonies in the lands of Elam and Sumer. Ur of the Chaldees, from whence the mythical Abraham began his journey to the Promised Land, is in this district.

"The identity of their burial customs," writes Prof. Elliot Smith in his "Human History," "their methods of agriculture and irrigation, the use of bricks, cylinder-seals and mace-heads, as well as of gold, copper, and painted pottery, the weaving of linen and the choice and methods of preparing cosmetics, and above all, their beliefs and religious practices, reveal the fact that the cultures of the earliest peoples of Egypt, Sumer, and Elam, were derived from a common source." Hence, we can confidently claim that the early civilisation of Sumer was approximately of the same age as the later part of the Second Dynasty in Egypt (circa 3000 B.C.). We know that in the days of the priest-king Gudea, about 2600 B.C., the Sumerians were holding a New Year Festival. Sumer and Elam later on were incorporated into the Babylonish Empire. A great library was founded in Nineveh by King Asshurbanipal, from which we get most of our knowledge of New Year Festivals in Babylon.

We learn that the Babylonish New Year Festivals, starting with the actual slaying of a king, evolved into a sort of pantomime or mystery play, in which priests, wearing masks and crowns, acted the parts in a drama of the slaying and resurrection of a king. This took place in March in the largest temple in Babylon, and lasted for eleven days.

Starting at the city of Babylon, let us join a caravan going to a seaport in Syria. Passing close by Bagdad and Nineveh we go northwards, possibly joining other caravans from Persia and India, and make a great semi-circular sweep round the north of the Syrian Desert, arriving, after many weary days, on the shores of the blue Mediterranean, at the great city and seaport of Ugarit. From the citadel of this ancient town on a clear day

can be seen, far across the sea, the wonderful island of Cyprus. Ugarit was the Cairo of long ago. It began its life in the Stone Age and lived on into the twelfth century B.C.

Its best days were spent under the government of the Egyptian Empire. It was captured by Thothmes III. about 1479 B.C., and remained under Egyptian rule until the times of Tutankhamen, about 1350 B.C. It lasted, in a state of anarchy, for two hundred and fifty years more, then, "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold" and erased it from the face of the earth. It was buried under the dust of ages for three thousand years until it was unearthed by a French explorer in 1929 near a small Arab village called Ras Shamra. Temples and forts were laid bare, as well as a well-stocked library from which thousands of tablets have been sent to Paris and translated.

The Ugaritarian language bears the same relation to ancient Hebrew as Anglo-Saxon to modern English. In fact, it is often called proto-Hebrew. "It is apparent that our Ras Shamra text affords the prototype of New Year rituals still surviving in Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C." The parallelism strongly supports the contention that the Ras Shamra documents are the libretti of sacred pantomimes, behind which lies the picture of proto-Hebrew ritual," so says Mr. T. H. Gaster in the September issue of "Antiquity" in 1939.

When we come to the Hebrews, we find that the Passover is a New Year Feast held in the spring. In Exodus, chapter xxii., verse 29, it says: "The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me." This seems to imply that among the early Israelites the Passover was a human sacrifice.

Just as Abraham in the land of Moriah substituted a ram for Isaac, so we find an amended commandment in Exodus, chapter xxxiv., verse 20, which reads: "All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem."

After the Egyptians withdrew from Syria, both in this land and in Palestine, a state of anarchy prevailed with occasional punitive expeditions from Egypt. An account of one of these by the Pharaoh Menephtah mentions Israel, "their first appearance in history as a people," says Breasted. This was at the beginning of the thirteenth century B.C., yet the Ugaritians never mention them nor does the Bible ever refer to Ugarit, and yet we have to believe they were neighbours. The truth seems to be that Israel was born from some tribes of indigenous Arabs and made its first appearance on the world's stage about 1200 B.C.

Professor Hooke, in his third Schweich lecture dealing with early Hebrew ritual, says "the ritual sacrifice of the firstborn was connected with the New Year Festival. The Passover is first of all a New Year Feast. It is a spring festival and lasted eleven days in all," and further on in the same lecture he declares, "It is possible that the grimmer rite of human sacrifice implied, as we have seen by Exodus xxii., verse 29, and confirmed by the evidence of excavation, for so the frequent occurrence of infant jar-burials has been interpreted, was also a part of the ritual of this dreadful night. It may, indeed, have been the original form of substitution sacrifice, and have given place later to the animal victim. The tradition of the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt points to some such element in the ritual."

HENRY SPENCE.

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