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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Religion and the B.B.C.

I ALWAYS note with interest the religious outpourings of the B.B.C. They set me wondering where, in the year nineteen hundred and forty-six, they find men—they seldom get women—who can write or speak about religion as though we were living in the early part of the eighteenth century, and who appear to be quite ignorant that the origin of religion is now known and that we have the science of evolution and of anthropology well established. One would like to ask the B.B.C. whether it is acting with kindness to parade these hawkers of worn-out ideas to the ridicule of better informed men and women. Of course it must be remembered that the B.B.C. has publicly and brazenly declared that it will not permit anything to be said that runs contrary to the "Christian tradition," which is represented by the more ignorant of listeners and the more unscrupulous of preachers. The position becomes worse when the B.B.C. leaders are found admitting—privately, under pressure—that the "Christian tradition" is quite out of date. Thus the Rev. Dr. Welch, the head of the B.B.C. Religious Department, is found confessing by letter that the miracles of Jesus are things which took place in his mind only—which is a polite way of saying that Jesus suffered from delusions. Once upon a time such a statement would have been followed by Christian torture and would have ended at a Christian bonfire.

The latest character that the B.B.C. has introduced to the public is the Rev. D. R. Davies. He is completely unknown to me, but that makes him neither better nor worse. He may be a young man who has not yet developed, or he may be an old one who cannot grapple with modern ideas and discoveries. The first of the three articles appeared in the "Listener" for January 31, the others followed in due order. There is a different title to each issue, and in a way, a different subject, the first being "Infinite Man in a Finite World." The title to me does not run. It would make the "Man" a casual visitor who was alive before he was born and who remained alive after he was dead. It is quite clear that there is a definite period—long or short—for a man's appearance and a continuation that is ended in death. "The rest is silence," as a gentleman named Shakespeare remarked. Certainly there is no greater reason for believing man is "infinite" any more than an animal. Substantially, birth and death are the same. "Infinite" stands for something that cannot be destroyed or to which no boundaries can be placed. But how does that fit in with man? A human is born, he lives for a longer or shorter period and dies. That he will die is certain, and his deeds, good or bad, will remain for good or evil, not to himself, but to the human race. That is all we know, all we can build on, all that we actually

do build on. Moreover, any conceivable life after death must be a continuation of this or we shall all be out of place. Our feelings, our capacities, our ideas of right and wrong are not based on our living for ever, they are a development of the kind of life we have been living, and the only one we can picture. What men like Mr. Davies do not realise is that unless our alleged future life is a copy of the life we know it will not be of the slightest use to us. It is as plain as possible that our aspirations, our feelings, whatever we think or do or aspire to do, are all built on the fact of death. The love of man for woman and of woman for man, of parents for children and children for parents, the accumulation of discoveries and inventions point to the same conclusion. Death has its social value as well as has life. It is religion that made existence a terror and robs life of its dignity by transforming natural death into a divine punishment.

What Mr. Davies has done is easily seen. It is the common blunder—or deliberate falsity—made by the clergy as a body. We know that within a reasonable time man, as an individual, dies. We are all certain of that. Even the Churches have to admit it. Every insurance company will gamble on it. So will the Salvation Army which runs an Insurance Society of its own. Here, I think, I may be permitted to cite from one of my own books: "The Other Side of Death":—

"Birth and death offer the living paradox that while apparently the negation of each other, they are, strictly speaking, complementary facts. Birth is the other side of death, death is the other side of birth; the significance of the cradle is to be found in the grave, and the grave finds its justification in the cradle. On these two complementary facts all human affection rests. In a world where death did not occur, affection would wither and love be without meaning. For an absence of death would mean an absence of birth and what birth implies. What meaning have such terms as husband and wife, parent and child or family, in a world where immortality was a fact and death an unknown thing? There is a limit to the attractiveness of the mere duration of days. . . Those who care to analyse their feelings will soon discover that as parents their love for children does not rest upon a conviction of their immortality, but upon the certainty of their mortality. We are all mainly concerned with the things of which we are certain, but not about those of which we are doubtful."

Life is a curious picture but men of the craft of Mr. Davies make it ridiculous. An "infinite" man is waiting to meet an impossible God; an interview of the man with God is prepared by a modern "medicine man," expressing the ideas of primitive mankind in a civilised language. It is a picture to be remembered. It is also worthy of the semi-honest B.B.C. Christian Committee.

Mr. Davies opens his thesis with a reminder to his readers that Tokyo was devastated by a terrible earthquake. Towns were ruined and many thousands of lives lost. Of course every Christian would say it was due to God's displeasure at man's sinfulness. It was the judgment of God. This feeling is endorsed by our own prayer books, and we have special prayers to ward off God's anger. Mr. Davies does not seem the least disturbed by God wiping out hundreds of thousands of people. In fact, he takes it as quite a matter of course. Here is the way in which he takes "an act of God" when other people than our own is concerned, and when he is anxious to create a difference where no difference exists or should exist—to a Christian. He says:—

"Many years ago Tokyo was devastated by a terrible earthquake which caused terrible destruction. Many years later another Japanese city of the name of Hiroshima was visited by a man-made 'earthquake' weighing only a ton of which the explosive part weighed less than twenty pounds, which killed at least sixty thousand people. The destruction, death and mutilation were somewhat similar, but it is perfectly obvious that the events causing the devastation were vastly different. The Tokyo earthquake was an accident, but Hiroshima was no accident. It was the fatal consequence of a whole system of ideas."

Now in what sense was the first explosion an "accident?" It would, of course, be quite reasonable for an Atheist to talk of an earthquake as being an accident, but that would only mean that man was unable to trace the cause. But the Christian is on a different level. He believes, on the authority of Jesus Christ, that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without God knowing it. So far as humans are concerned the Christian may defend himself on the ground that we have a mysterious non-understood something called "freewill," but that has nothing to do with natural happenings. But earthquakes are on a different level. All a Christian can intelligibly say is that they are manifestations of the power of God. In our prayer books we have as a matter of fact prayers for the seas to be kept calm by God; we have prayers also for good harvests, and we thank God for them when they come. Moreover, we did return thanks to God for bringing the war nearer an end by the instrument that Mr. Davies says is entirely due to the growth of Materialism and our neglect of worshipping God. In the name of all that is sensible how can God escape at least the part responsibility for both these incidents? We should much like to know in what sense God can escape responsibility for the first disaster? Mr. Davies does not face the situation, he just evades it, and the evasion is the more evident because his comments on the atomic bomb are utterly stupid if the first heavenly bomb is set aside.

Mr. Davies argues with all the authority of one who evidently knows that God exists and is also well acquainted with the times when God acts and when he remains idle. He remained idle when the earthquake wiped out thousands, and when the atomic bomb came he let things run, merely explaining through his servant, the Rev. D. R. Davies, that the atomic bomb was a consequence of our being dominated by "Materialism." But even then millions of people have been killed or maimed, whole areas have been levelled with the ground, large numbers will suffer disease or death who have not had the slightest interest in "Materialism," but

are sturdy—if ignorant—worshippers of God? I am, of course, not aware of what fantastic conceptions of the meaning of "Materialism" Mr. Davies holds, but I am sure that God never had a more clumsy champion than the one the B.B.C. has selected.

I think it was George Jacob Holyoake who defined Secularism as a system that never gave God trouble. That might apply with equal justification for Atheism. The Atheist does not charge God with responsibility for earthquakes, for the weather, for contagious diseases, for ruined crops, for explosive machines or for any of the ills under which poor ignorant humanity suffers. He does not believe that the anger of gods causes war, or that God's fear of losing worshippers drives him to help win a war or cure a plague after he has let one loose. The Atheist does not say, with the Church of England, that whatever disease man may suffer from, we are sure that God sent it. He has pity on the poor puzzled brain of the one who wrote many, many years ago:—

Have pity on me, oh my God,
On poor Michael Ingobrod,
As I would on you if I were God
And you were Michael Ingobrod.

The Materialist may believe that godless humanity can still respect decency and love liberty. He can face the ills of life with a courage that the Christian assures us that he could not display if he were not sure that God was helping him. If the fantastic remnants of primitive ignorance that to-day do duty for religion were to turn out to be a reality, he can still say that a life of honesty and fearlessness is worth the living.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A DEFENCE OF THE RESURRECTION

II.

IN the last article I pointed out that Mr. Arnold Lunn in his book, "The Third Day," defends ancient miracles by showing that miracles happen at this day, and instances several which he contends, happened at Lourdes. He devotes most space to the case of Peter de Rudder whose left leg was badly injured in 1865 and who was cured "seven years later" at the shrine of Oostacker, near Ghent, by "our Lady of Lourdes." His doctor, Van Hoestenbergh, testified to having examined the leg "two or three months before the cure," and found it in a very bad state; and his testimony was confirmed by "witnesses" (whose names are not given by Mr. Lunn) who saw de Rudder "a few days before" the cure. We are not told by Mr. Lunn when this record was put down but—according to Mr. McCabe's "The Lourdes Miracles," based entirely on the original French narratives and not on the selection in English made by Fr. Woodlock which is followed by Mr. Lunn—the enquiry "which is generally quoted," actually took place 17 years after the cure, in 1892. The wonderful witnesses who saw de Rudder before the cure were Belgian peasants, and we are asked to believe such people where a "miracle" is concerned—though, at the same time, some of the patient's own neighbours actually looked upon him as "a rogue and malingerer and they gave him a good thrashing for his fraud."

There seems to have been two other doctors in the case, Affenaer and Deschamps. Affenaer gave no certificate, and "it is quite unknown" when he examined de Rudder; while Deschamps "a Jesuit who studied the matter years afterwards." And this

Mr. Lunn's classical case for a miracle! This is his wonderful proof that miracles occur these days!

Will the reader note in any case that he does not cite a "miracle" from Lourdes that is really modern, one vouched for by doctors who are living now. Yet dozens have been reported, vouched for, if not by doctors, at least by priests, and all believed in by Mr. Lunn.

Let us look at the case of Marie Lebranchu, the "La Grivotte" of Zola's "Lourdes" (in which novel, by the way, she dies). Mr. Lunn says that her restoration to health "was attested by the declaration of thirty doctors." Mr. McCabe, basing his statement on the French original, says that "the entire pathetic description of her condition is taken (without acknowledgement) from her own statements sixteen years afterwards." She was recognised as hysterical and not "a normal case of consumption." In any case there is "no medical certificate of phthisis when she went to Lourdes," and Dr. Marquozy "is not sure if her sputum was examined for bacilli at any time in the ten months before she left Paris." Mr. McCabe, moreover, charges the account given in Fr. Woodlock's pamphlet as "confused and misleading to the last degree."

Mr. Lunn repeats the Catholic statement that Zola said: "Were I to see all the sick at Lourdes cured, I would not believe in a miracle." Mr. McCabe retorts that "even in Lady Gibbs's translation (of this case) the Catholic reader will find his (Zola's) authentic words (p. 244) precisely the opposite."

The greatest case attested by Dr. Grandmaison (in the French account) was that of Marie Borel. She was healed at Lourdes within a few hours of six fistulae from which pus and faecal matter had been discharged for two years." For this "spontaneous" cure, as he calls it, Mr. Lunn disdains to give any evidence whatever. Fr. Woodlock says it happened, and that is good enough for him. It appears, however, that Mlle. Borel (Mr. McCabe spells the name as Borrel) took a certificate from a Dr. Bardol who is actually accused by the Catholic, Dr. Grandmaison, in reporting the case as "questionable or wrong in his diagnosis . . . it is possible that the girl was a malingerer." In fact, there is no independent medical testimony at all for this marvellous "miracle."

But Mr. Lunn gets more enthusiastic and even more extravagant as he goes on. "Small children and babies," he cries, "have been cured at Lourdes of organic diseases. . . Men have been cured when unconscious or asleep." The actual proof, with complete evidence, must be taken for granted, or if not, on the word of Mr. Lunn or that of Fr. Woodlock. Really, in the course of years of study of this kind of proof of miracles I have never come across so much childish credulity and naivete as that shown by Mr. Lunn. I can understand Catholics taken in by this balderdash, but Mr. Lunn is actually writing for "non-Christians." They, like any other body, may have fools among them but surely not quite so idiotic as to be taken in by this kind of "evidence" for "modern" miracles.

Mr. Lunn then proceeds to examine the Gospels, "the external evidence," as he calls it. Their authorship and dates "must be determined by the exacting standards of scientific history." After such a pretentious pronouncement I need hardly say that I looked forward to a reply to the Freethought case against their authenticity and credibility—a reply completely shirked by Canon Lightfoot when he felt compelled by public opinion to answer "Supernatural Religion."

Mr. Lunn begins his "apologia" with the "certain" fact that towards the end of the second century the four Gospels, as we have them, were quoted by Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian. This is—as far as we can rely on Church history—quite true, but Mr. Lunn, in quoting Irenaeus, has made a most unhappy choice. His book "The Third Day" is a detailed defence of the Resurrection and Irenaeus certainly has some curious observations on the reality of the Crucifixion and, by inference, on the Resurrection.

Most Christian writers claim that Jesus was crucified some time between the years A.D. 29-33. Of course, other dates have been given, but roughly speaking it is claimed that the Crucifixion took place then, the most likely year being A.D. 29. What does Irenaeus say? Here are his exact words:—

"Christ came to save all through means of himself . . . infants and children, and boys and youths and old men. He therefore passed through every age becoming an infant for infants . . . an old man for old men, that he might be perfect master of all . . . sanctifying at the same time the aged also. Then at last he came to death itself that he might be the first born from the dead . . . the Prince of Life, existing before all and going before all."

Irenaeus was commenting on the passage in John where the Jews said to Jesus that he was not yet fifty years old—a passage which surely implies that he was near fifty. "Such language," continues Irenaeus, "is fittingly applied to one who has already passed the age of forty. . . But to one who is only thirty years old it would unquestionably be said 'Thou art not yet forty years old'. . . He (Jesus) did not then want much of being fifty years old." ("Against Heresies," Book IV., chap. xxii., sec. 4-6).

And to confirm this, Irenaeus appeals to the testimony of his old friend, Polycarp, who was the companion of John, and other believers who, "moreover, saw not only John but the other apostles also, and heard the same account from them, and bear testimony to the statement."

Thus, if Irenaeus is telling the truth he completely demolishes the story of the Crucifixion which, according to the Gospels, must have taken place before A.D. 36 at the latest; and if Jesus was not crucified under Pontius Pilate then he was not "resurrected" as narrated in the four Gospels. The only alternative is that Jesus was born somewhere about the year 20 B.C., and not even Mr. Lunn would thus throw over the whole of the accepted Biblical chronology in this way. No, Irenaeus is a particularly shoddy witness for the truth of the Resurrection.

H. CUTNER.

ABSTRACTS FROM "LOCAL RECORDS"

By T. FORDYCE, 1876

JUNE 11, 1868.—The ceremony of laying the foundation stone of Gateshead Town Hall took place at 3 p.m. to-day, for the accommodation of spectators two platforms were erected. Near the end of the proceedings the platform in Swinburne Place gave way in the centre and those in the middle fell down heavily a depth of ten or twelve feet, several being very much injured and one, James Barnett, died on August 11 from the effects of the sad accident.

OCTOBER 24, 1868.—The gable end of a Wesleyan chapel in course of erection at Bill Quay (near Gateshead), was this day blown down by a gale which killed four people.

NOVEMBER 15, 1873.—Two American revivalists—Messrs. Moody and Sankey—who, after visiting the North of England, created quite a religious panic in various parts of the country, took a farewell of their friends at a meeting in Brunswick Place Chapel, Newcastle-on-Tyne. This place of worship was crowded to the doors by an earnest and devout congregation estimated to consist of not less than 3,000 persons—one of the largest religious meetings ever held in the town and singularly representative in character.

JANUARY 7, 1873.—Lord Ravensworth, of Ravensworth Castle, opened a very attractive bazaar in the Town Hall, Gateshead, with the object of raising a fund to provide an organ for St. Cuthbert's Church, Bensham.

Extracted by ED. H. SIMPSON (Low Fell).

ACID DROPS

We see from the newspapers that Professor Joad has written to Tommy Handley stating that he has not heard one of the two hundred performances of "Itma." We are also informed from a reliable source that there is no truth in the statement that Professor Joad is taking Tommy Handley's place in "Itma," leaving Mr. Handley to take his place in the "Brains Trust."

Mgr. Tiso, the Catholic priest, who ran Slovakia as President during the early part of the war, and was particularly partial to Hitler, is standing his trial as a war criminal. His motto was "For God and the Fatherland," and though he copied the Germans in this, it is possible that he meant Slovakia as his "Fatherland," and not Germany. He ruthlessly suppressed his Left opponents as could be expected from a Catholic, and in this he was backed by the Catholic Hitler. In fact, it was quite a "religious" family party. Catholic journals have not yet found how they can excuse Mgr. Tiso.

The inter-Allied Control Council has decided that children in Berlin will not be compelled to have religious teaching nor will they be refused if it is wanted. That is all to the good on the surface. It is our own rule in this country, and although it has worked it has not been wholly satisfactory. There are hundreds of thousands in the country who would sooner have their children freed from this or that phase of religious teaching. But either they fear their children will suffer, or there will be other difficulties with the result that the child in most cases develops without being able to appreciate the value and independence imbedded in the right to criticise and, in many cases, the right to withstand.

There are many committees whose duty it is to inquire into the reason why people will not come to Church. The peculiar thing is that so many of these "blacksliders" should lack the courage to say, "We do not believe in it," for that in at least seventy-five per cent. is the truth. But then intellectual courage is not the strongpoint of Christians. So we have nonsensical reasons such as "Don't like the parson" or "the Church is cold" or "the singing is bad," etc. The real reason is, of course, that their belief in Christianity is dying out. Fear of Hell is dying, and the possibility of Heaven is very doubtful. But naturally, a lie is not difficult to those who have been brought up under Christian influences.

It is well known that the Catholic Church does not encourage the reading of the Bible by the rank and file of its followers. The reason given is a sensible one. It is that the Bible can be read only by properly trained experts. "Trained experts" means those who will adapt the Bible to the Church.

We had just finished writing the above when quite by accident we caught a glimpse of a review of a new religious book in the "Sunday Times" written by the Dean of St. Paul's. The title of the book was "Love Incarnate," but the Dean titles his article "The quest of the real Jesus." There it is. After nearly two thousand years an official of the English Church talks glibly about attempts to discover the "Real Jesus." Meanwhile all kinds of Christian preachers are at work giving us the real Jesus when they haven't yet decided which Jesus we ought to follow. Of all the exhibitions of nonsense, lying, and misrepresentation, commend us to Christian officials on the prowl.

There is one thing, however, which all godites have in common—their God seems to let them down just when he or it ought to be most active in helping them. From India comes the news that during a religious ceremony which brought thousands of godites together, one hundred and sixty "Pilgrims" were killed and many injured by a bridge giving way and throwing the worshippers into a river. There seems little to choose with any of these gods. They are continually doing what they ought not to do and not doing what they should.

Portugal is one of the strongholds of the Roman Church, and in Portugal it can do many things that it would not dare do in this country, in the U.S.A., or in many other countries. But there are places where the Catholic Church may work with impunity. So it has arranged for a pilgrimage to Fatima by thousands of youthful worshippers. Fatima, by the way, is the place in which the Virgin—a few years back—appeared on several occasions to three children aged seven, nine and ten. She gave them all sorts of weird information, people gathered round the "sacred" spot, and in due course things began to happen. The most startling was the appearance of the Virgin nursing her Son who had again taken on the character of a child, and during the performance—we quote from an authorised document: "The Sun appeared like a silver globe. . . Then all at once the Sun began to spin round like a wheel of fire . . . casting enormous beams of light, green, red, blue, violet, of every colour. After some few minutes the Sun stood still only to begin again the same whirling dance. The three children saw the Holy Family . . . and St. Joseph carrying the infant Jesus, our Lord grown up," etc., etc. That clearly knocks the atomic bomb out of the picture. What a show that would make in London—if the police did not interfere. It is only fair to say that this fantastic piece of lying is backed up by the "Catholic Times" and the "Universe," two leading Catholic newspapers in this country. Curiously enough we cannot remember a word of protest being made by our newspapers—religious and otherwise. The power of the Church is still great, and we take it for granted that the Protestant leaders may think it safe to remain silent. An independent inquiry into the social value of the Churches would unearth and make public some very nasty facts. As it is we cannot help feeling that when an intelligent Catholic priest and an equally intelligent Protestant bishop meet they must often "wink the other eye."

The opening of the River Tweed salmon fishing was accompanied by prayer, the water and the nets being blessed by the Rev. Hudson Barker. But either the clergyman was out of touch with God or the prayers were not of the proper quality, for only one smallish salmon was caught. We should not be surprised to learn that poachers have had a much better haul without the help of God.

In Scotland there seems to be a division among church ministers with regard to Sunday entertainments. The Linlithgow Churches condemn other sections for providing Sunday evening entertainments while they try to get young people to church. But both sides are agreed that Sunday work may be tolerated for repair labour. Also that entertainments that are not connected with a Church should not be tolerated.

At the Old Bailey recently a girl of nine years of age was asked by the Judge, "Do you know what God is?" The Judge was astonished when the girl was unable to answer the question. But bless the innocence of that Judge; the question is one that people have been wrangling over generation after generation. If that Judge were to ask for an answer from a bunch of his friends he would find them just as puzzled as was the girl. The comment of the Sheffield "Telegraph" is: "We have allowed the common heritage of mankind to decay." We began to weep, but then we remembered that no one would recognise the heritage if he ran across it and certainly nowadays silence is a very common attitude.

We wonder how long it will take for prominent politicians to drop the outworn or lying cant of religion? Here is our Foreign Secretary, Mr. Bevin, informing the world with regard to the Poles in England. He said that before they are sent back to Poland we must be sure they will not be maltreated because "when men have fought with us it is against my religion to let them down." We do not know what Mr. Bevin's particular religion is and we do not care, but it would be just as well for him to remember that it is not part of his political position to use it to advertise his religion. A very large number of his followers are without religion of any sort, and if he wished to practise double dealing he would find plenty of instances side by side of the most fervent religion. It would be a good example to others if Mr. Bevin dropped these unnecessary advertisements of religion. It is apt to suggest insincerity even where it does not exist.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. A. WALTERS.—The paper difficulty prevents us taking advantage of your offer. And for the present there seems no signs of getting back to anything like pre-war supplies.

W. BROWN.—You are not compelled to give any reason whatever why you wish your child to be withdrawn from religious teaching. Your right is absolute. Please let us know if you have any further trouble.

For "The Freethinker."—G. Addison, £1.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We regret that Mr. Cohen was unable to lecture as arranged for the Conway Discussion Circle last Tuesday in opening a discussion on "Race." He was suffering from a severe cold that made lecturing impossible. He will, however, be able to fulfil his engagement in Glasgow on March 3. His subject is, "Will Christianity Survive?"

It would be interesting to know how many letters are received by the B.B.C. protesting against the narrow-minded and unfair policy followed with regard to religion. Of all discussions of religion, pro and con, little could be said, but that is not the case. Religion is brought up several times a day, but only praise of the Christian religion is permitted. There must be no questioning of the truth of Christianity. It must be praised and nothing but praise. One of the latest examples of the behaviour of the B.B.C. is dated—by the B.B.C.—on February 13. A subscriber wrote asking for some explanation for the boycotting of Freethought. The reply ran:—

"A note has been taken of your comments. It is still not the policy of the B.B.C. to allow the Christian faith to be challenged at the microphone.—Signed, G. J. Willoughby."

That is quite plain. Fair discussion is not permitted. Well, that is a very common method of preventing a lie from being exposed. Mr. Willoughby understands his position and like a good Christian its contemptibility makes no impression.

But the time has nearly come for a renewal of the B.B.C. charter. The matter will probably come before Parliament. We know that a large number in the House are disgusted with the policy of the B.B.C. and which was expressed by many members before the present Government existed. Now we shall have a chance of seeing how real is the love of the Members for fair play. And beyond them there is the number of speakers for the B.B.C.

who no more believe in Christianity than we do. But they remain silent. It is not very nice even to think of a body of men and women sinking their honour in the interests of getting their names advertised by the B.B.C. A stand by those might well bring the B.B.C. to heel. Meanwhile these others are selling their honour for the sake of getting advertisement. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that the fees have any weight.

From the "Yorkshire Evening Post" we learn that "a famous religious society" is appealing for £10,000 to put copies of the "Christian Gospel" in the hands of enemy prisoners of war. There seems no limit to Christian stupidity. Germany had many, many centuries of Christianity. Religion was so strongly placed that even Hitler had to be careful in the way he handled the Churches. In the late eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, Germany was regarded as the leading Christian country, and now money is being asked for us to supply Germans with the "Christian Gospel"! We have, of course, a great many forms of folly, but we have none greater than that which hides itself under a Christian cloak.

And, by the way, what is the "Christian Gospel"? From the first appearance of Christianity, Christians have been quarrelling about just that. They have fought with each other over that question, they have lied about each other, they have declined even to associate with each other, all to get the "true" Christian Gospel generally accepted. And now our leading preachers are busy assuring the world that the real Christian Gospel is to be found in better houses, better education, etc. If the situation had not its dangerous side we should be inclined to laugh. But the real danger displayed by these manoeuvres is the threat they offer to the creation of a better and higher form of social life.

There is evidently more than one way of getting to heaven—that is if people wish to get there. But there is still something in the old lady's choice when she said "give me heaven for climate, but I prefer hell for company." And the Christian heaven is about the dullest sort of place that one could choose for a long stay. We were reminded of this by an item in the "Standard." The Rev. P. Lee, Vicar of St. Ambrose, Bristol, asks for help. He says he has 800 parishioners he wants to get to heaven. At present he has only managed to get two per cent. Another local vicar says that he doesn't number two per cent. He tells his brother preacher in getting over two per cent. he is "over optimistic."

But there are many other priests in the same difficulty. The Bishop of Southwell says that he is losing his faith in man. The Bishop has got things upside down. We are gaining more faith in man, which the clergy naturally do not like. The revolt is against the gods, and their representatives do not like it. It is the parsonage that is feeling the pinch, and it is not likely that they will ever regain the power they once had.

The "Church Times" complains that our late Prime Minister—Winston Churchill—deceived us when he came back from the Yalta Conference. He gave his solemn word that "no secret agreement had been concluded." His Majesty's Stationery Office has now published a secret agreement between Britain, Russia and the U.S.A., wherein "it was agreed that Russia should annex the Kurile Islands from Japan. Further, the U.S.A., Russia, and Britain promised to bring China to agreement." We are not surprised. Next to the Churches come politicians for telling lies when necessary. The only consideration is that laid down by Lord Palmerston: "It doesn't matter what lie we tell provided we all tell the same one." We daresay that the politicians of ancient Egypt practised the same rule.

One way and another the Christian religion has had a very long and very strong control on life. The development of knowledge of the nature of religion and the fact it has no better foundation than the perpetuation of primitive ideas that are now discarded by modern knowledge, and the fact that the Churches have always played in the hands of a special ruling class, have all contributed to the idea that societies can be developed that will provide comfort and human developments without religion in every form. Man is born in this world; he lives and dies in this world. All he needs is an understanding of his own strength and capacity.

AN ARCHANGEL — DAMAGED

I.

STANDS Dickens where he did? If the query is in respect of the writer the answer might be in the affirmative. If it refers to the man, emphatically it must be in the negative. Has literary history revealed anything more ironical than his modern biographers have to face? The model of Victorian propriety, the god of its hearth, the writer who never caused a blush on the cheek of the young person (the fact that Dickens made this the concern of Podsnap may be a hint that the compliment, much offered, was not desired) so blotted his copy-book that now the same young person had better not see it in its entirety. It is no use devout Dickensians kicking against the pricks. The evidence is too convincing. Dickens, after the separation from his wife, had sexual relations with a young actress, in short, he played the base part of Steerforth. She, too, was much more his junior than Little Emily of Copperfield's false friend. The only writer of note, outside Dickensian circles, who has attempted to deny the story is Robert Lynd, and to my criticism of his article in "John O'London's Weekly" he made no reply. Ralph Strauss, the reviewer of the excellent biography of Dickens by Dame Una Pope-Hennessy in the "Dickensian," the organ of the Dickens Fellowship, to the manifest sorrow of the editor, says he finds no difficulty in believing that for some years Ellen Ternan was Dickens's mistress. This was the lady to whom Dickens left a thousand pounds in his will.

So we must say:—

"'Tis true 'tis pity;
And pity 'tis 'tis true,"

perhaps more sincerely than we have ever said it before. To Freethinkers who have loved Dickens's works it will be more endurable. We have given up so many illusions. We have become accustomed to squaring our beliefs to facts however unwelcome. Those of us who have shared the wish of Fitzgerald to shatter the universe to bits and mould it nearer to the heart's desire, can take the blow of one of our literary gods being found wanting.

How sad, however, for those many Dickensian devotees who have loved to emphasise the essential Christianity of Charles Dickens! There is little reference to this in the lengthy biography mentioned. The appetite for it has declined. Its importance was always over-emphasised, perhaps because too little attention was paid to the environment of Dickens's youth, always most important in any religious apologia.

It is generally accepted that Wilkins Micawber was modelled on Dickens's father. Who can imagine that that gentleman had anything but a worldly wise attitude towards religion? Perhaps when the coal and the corn trade failed, Micawber might have wished, with Wopsle, that the Church had been thrown open. Then we might have heard from a pulpit some of the eloquence that we assume, assisted by potent punch, overwhelmed the inhabitants of Port Middlebay who, then, well doped, made him Mayor. Micawber, a man of freethinking propensities? The idea is inconceivable. If you are waiting for something to turn up, wait on the threshold of the Church; assuredly it will turn away if you wait outside the halls of the infidel! In fine, young Dickens no doubt had absolute liberty to go to Church or stay away. Given this freedom, plus genius, and early success, and you have all the ingredients for the making of an optimistic, sentimental, rhetorical religionist. That was what Dickens was to the end. His god was born when his sky was blue. His literary genius waxed, but there was no corresponding increase in intellectual grip. In some matters he wrote like an adolescent even to the end.

I suppose the greatest delight has been found in his prayerfulness. How the orthodox love to quote his letters to his sons when, like some of the characters in the novels, they went to

the colonies to make good their rather indifferent qualities here. Chesterton delightfully referred in this connection to the ironic interpretation of a line in a well known hymn: "Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away." "Never abandon," Dickens wrote in 1868, "the wholesome practice of saying your own private prayers night and morning." I do not here detect the authentic note of religious passion. Not so would my Methodist father have written me in like circumstances. When I read that advice I feel one might continue: "Do some daily jerks and take weekly some purgative medicine." Dickens added: "I have never abandoned it myself." I am sorry for my friends who are Christian Dickensians. They must now reconcile themselves to the fact that the man "living in sin," as their grand parents would have said, remained pious. It may sadly remind them of the prayers of Hamlet's uncle—

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

Then there are those who delight to quote Dickens's allusions to the founder of Christianity. To use our current expression they are hardly ever even Modernist in tone. An "enlightened Unitarian" Browning called him in 1845. He was not: he was a disgruntled Anglican who for a few months went off to another religious shop. Dame Pope-Hennessy says that he regarded Unitarianism as "the religion that has sympathy for men of every creed and ventures to pass judgment on none." That may well have been, but almost always when he alluded to the Jesus of the New Testament his pen dripped with miracles. He was so little versed in theological matters that he may not have known that they were rejected by Unitarian divines. He oddly wrote once of Jesus that "he never raised his benignant hand save to bless and heal except in the case of one unconscionable tree." He seems to have forgotten the whip of small cords, but then that version of the New Testament he prepared for children (and mentioned to several correspondents) when eventually published ten years ago, revealed that Dickens was deficient in knowledge of the life he professed to write on the basis of the four Gospels.

Some of his religious allocutions are amazing. Writing of the death of Thackeray in the "Cornhill Magazine," which he had edited, he said he had gone "to his Redeemer's rest." Can one imagine any writer to-day using such an expression of another writer? I do not think the Catholic Belloc would so have written of the Catholic Chesterton. Of Thackeray too, above all people. Yet, it is useless to say that Thackeray would have minded. He had his own sentimental religious embroidery. Fields, the American publisher, recorded that once when walking with some friends in Edinburgh they saw "a wooden crane used in the granary below and was so placed as to assume the figure of a cross. . . All three gazed at it silently. As they gazed Thackeray gave utterance in tremulous, gentle and rapid voice to what they were feeling in the word 'Calvary.'"

Writing of Paul Dombey's death, Dickens has a grotesque phrase about that "old, old fashioned Death, that older fashion yet of Immortality." Dangerous indeed! It might boomerang back to its author. Some of us Freethinkers would say the belief was but a fashion, and Dickens's Christianity as much period piece as the crinolines of the ladies! This is clearly evinced by the books for boys. What publisher to-day would want the pious moralising introduced by Kingston, Ballantyne and Talbot Baines Reed? Their heroes, sooner or later, are always found to be concerned about the state of their souls. The very idea of it now in boys' fiction is ludicrous.

Those who stress the emotionalism of the Victorian age mentioning the tearful fits of Florence Dombey—one reader counted over eighty—and the howling and weeping of the writhing Macready when Dickens read "The Chimes" to him are not so ready similarly to explain the religiosity of the writers. Some publisher might make an anthology of all these pieces

parentheses in the fiction of last century. Perhaps, however, the volume would, by contrast, expose the secularistic stream of to-day.

There are still those who would have us believe that Dickens was a regular attendant at Church. There is a complete and final answer to this suggestion. Lived there a parson with zeal so dead that when Dickens died or, later (when it was known Forster was writing his biography) would have failed to write to the "Times" and say that week by week the great novelist bowed his head in humble reverence . . . ? Has the editor of a newspaper ever lived who would not have rushed to print his Christian correspondent's welcome missive? Of course occasionally Dickens would go. He had no sceptical scruples to keep him back. Once he went to accompany Hans Andersen who recorded that each meal at Gad's Hill Place began with silent prayer. Obviously he had not heard of Grace before meat! A desire to be hospitable would take him there with a friend. Once, Fields says, he went with him to Canterbury Cathedral. "He remarked how sleepy and inane were the faces of many of the singers to whom this beautiful service was but a sickening monotony of repetition." One wishes Dickens had protested in his writings against the outrageous absurdity of paying people for praising the Lord! Of course, nobody says anything about the evidence of George Jacob Holyoake as regards Dickens's Sabbath diversions. He once lived in a house overlooking Dickens's—in Tavistock Square. He saw no signs of piety but plenty of potation.

To the end, as I have said, Dickens was unaltered. In his will, made less than two years before his death, he said: "I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The Unitarians, who still obstinately claim Dickens as a "one-godite," to use Lamb's phrase, should explain why Dickens wanted the second person of the Trinity to save him? Unless he accepted some evangelical "plan of salvation" the expression was meaningless. If it was, however, that applies to much he wrote about religion. To some of this I will allude in a further article.

WILLIAM KENT.

SANGUINE EPITAPH, 1st/1/1 N.E.T.*

THE gods are dead, and the call to a saner life springs from their unmarked tombs. For hundreds of years they reigned supreme in pomp and regal majesty, with millions of loyal subjects paying the allegiance of fear; zealous, fanatical. Now the gods have perished, miserably, their passing unmourned and unnoticed. Their place is taken by a new happiness, an exalted cheerfulness, a world emancipated from Fear. Life has assumed a new urgency; humankind is drawn closer together by a common bond of unity, their watchword Love, their clarion call Truth, their creed Justice, their mandate Tolerance. The gods perished because their period of utility had long since expired. Their mental shackles and psychological goals had lost their potency. Unrestrained, the mind soared to a beatific transcendental plane of utter peace. Their proselytes, striving to avert the debacle with false panegyrics in "fraudful tones of fanaticism and hypocrisy" were swept aside by the growing tide of knowledge. Pitifully they clung, yet tenaciously, to a set of ideas they knew to be rotten, whose excrescences stank to the skies with putrefaction. They too are gone, unlamented. The gods were not easily killed for they chose their weapons well, and with meticulous care. Fear came first, manifesting a hundred cunningly contrived barbs and edges, employed early in the campaign, and rarely utilised without some degree of success.

* New Era of Truth.

Used in conjunction with superstition, a multi-headed device, it almost completely overcame resistance, but never quite succeeded. Propaganda, false reasoning and subtle illogics were resorted to, with their consequent effect, Convention. Truth and Knowledge were suppressed with the greatest impartiality, and pure light summarily extinguished by the cartelleers of an ersatz product which wilted and warped for many centuries the flower of Happiness.

One weapon encompassed their ruin. It was not violent. It drew no blood. It was not vindictive. Relentlessly, Reason undermined those forces so bitterly arraigned in opposition to it. Slowly, silently, rarely gaining recognition, always persistently harassing its foes it worked its predetermined goal.

One by one they fell, some tottering uncertainly, protesting, falling ever faster, louder, larger, deeper!

The gods are dead, their influence eradicated forever from our children's minds. And who shall write their sanguine epitaph?

RAYMOND BOWER.

CORRESPONDENCE

LATIN AMERICA.

SIR,—Re book review of "Inside Latin America" by John Gunther (now out of print). Birmingham readers will note that the book is in the city libraries.

Like an army of locusts the Roman Catholic Church has certainly through the centuries left their stultifying tendrils upon the people of Latin America.

Like Portugal, Spain and Ireland, extreme poverty abounds in Latin America. The Roman Catholic Church owns nearly half the land of some of these countries. Land reform is needed. And the grip that strangles economic expansion removed.—Yours, etc.,

A. GEORGE.

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., Dr. J. C. FLUGEL: "The Nature of Love." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., Ivor BROWN, F.R.S.L.: "Nature and Human Nature."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Councillor J. BACKHOUSE will lecture.

Bristol Branch N.S.S. (Crown & Dove Hotel, Bridewell Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., Mr. G. THOMPSON: "Value of Free-thought."

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., CHAPMAN COHEN: "Will Christianity Survive?"

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., 65th Anniversary. Music and song. Speaker: Mr. C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

FREETHINKER member of the N.S.S. seeks employment as collector-salesman, bookseller, light clerical, etc.—Norman Charlton, 64, Sandygate, Burnley, Lancs.

THOMAS PAINE, by Chapman Cohen. A Pioneer of Two Worlds. An Essay on Paine's Literary, Political and Religious Activities. Price 1s. 4d., post free.

THE MOTHER OF GOD, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by post 4d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC CULTURE ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE WEST

(Continued from page 75)

THE Cistercian monks spread Gothic traditions the root of which came from the East not only in the decoration and ornament of the niches of the four minor doors at St. Marks but also in its construction. The arches of the upper part of the elevation (Gothic tabernacles added later) show in the inflected crowning arch the results of Islamic inspiration. To a similar influence must be attributed the stilted arches at the corners of the façade, and also the bulb-shaped cupolas, which were still more accentuated in their bulb form as may be seen in a picture painted in 1496 by Gentile Bellini. At Sienna the brick and stone treatment, at Como in the Church of St. Abondio, and at Cremona may be seen examples of Islamic character. Many palaces of Venice like the Loredan or the Dell'Oro recall Moorish prototypes. Even in Padua in the Church of St. Sophia the external arch gallery recalls the architecture of Toledo. In Sicily, as we have seen, we have pure Islamic art in buildings, fortifications and palaces surrounded with gardens, according to Islamic tradition. Gardens scattered with pavilions, kiosks, fountains and running water. Yet the majority of these buildings were erected after the Arab domination, like the monastery of St. Giovanni-degli-eremite, erected by King Roger. The Church of St. Cataldo, the Ziza, the Piccola Cuba and the great Cuba in the Palermo, with its stalactite ornaments, are purely Arab in style. Then we have those buildings which denote mixed influences, such as Byzantine and Arab or Arab and Norman. To mention a few, the Church of Santa Maria-del-Ammariglio, the Palatine Chapel, the Cathedral of Cefalu, and the Cathedral of Montreale. In Spain Islamic influence seems natural, but original ideas like the blind or blank arcading, the prototype of which is to be found in the Cristo-de-la-Luz at Toledo (10th century) spread far beyond its original country and may be seen in the Cathedrals of Durham or Norwich. It is the decorative use of architectural elements of this type which may be traced directly to Islam. The same applies to the treatment of paired windows, the Al-Shamas or Ajimez of the Spaniards. The mosque of Cordova with its low columns and circular shaft above necessitated by the use of existing columns, gave rise to the Gothic theme of circular pier and superimposed shaft supporting the ribbed vaulting. Cordova with its 70 libraries became such a famous centre of learning and art that the rulers of Navarre and Leon, whenever in need of a surgeon or an artist, applied always to Cordova. Queen Tol of Navarre brought, for instance, her son Sancho the Fat to Cordova to be cured of his obesity. The Islamic Mozarabis also spread during their persecution under the Berber Almoravides and the Almohades. The Cluniac monks were also accessories in the diffusion and adoption of these Islamic methods of construction. It was during these periods of persecution that the geographers Al Bakri, Idrisi and Ibn-Zuhr (the Avenzoir) lived and taught under the Almoravides. In France the Cistercian and Cluniac monks rivalled in new building and the immediate result may be seen at Vezelay, St. Denis and other buildings of the period such as Poitiers, Vaison, or some churches of Poitou. Islamic fabrics inspired the decoration of the windows at the Church of Aulnay and the doorways at Avallon. The history of King Odo and Sully, and the monastic orders in France are rich in examples of Islamic infiltration through Spain such as the importation of the Lancet Gothic. The ornamental battlements of the mosque of Ibn Tulun (876) are to be seen in many a Gothic or Tudor building. The Kufic ornamental inscriptions served as example for Gothic friezes. The decoration of the Retable at Westminster Abbey according to Professor Lettaby may be attributed to Islamic origins.

Machicolations derived from the Bab-an-Nasr in Cairo (1087) will inspire the castle-builders of Europe and they will be seen first at Norwich and then at Chatillon or Villeneuveles-Avignons. It would be interesting to note that machicolations were originally latrines formed with a pierced slab supported by brackets and overhanging the top of buildings. It is not known who originated the idea of dropping through the hole molten lead or equally disagreeable matter and missiles.

PROFESSOR HECTOR O. CORFIATO, S.A.D.G.
(Professor of Architectural Design in the University of London)

From "The Islamic Review"

(To be concluded)

A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION ?

ONE of the most striking literary phenomena of our time is the emergence of Mr. Herbert Read from the position of a leading art critic to that of a real leader of thought. In such books as "Poetry and Anarchism" and "Education Through Art" he has shown himself one of the most important figures of the day. His influence on his younger contemporaries has been almost incalculable, since those who acknowledge his leadership are themselves among the finest of the writers who have come to maturity during the last ten years or so. His latest essay "Power Politics and Human Values," which is included in the volume "New Road: 1945" (Grey Walls Press; 10s. 6d.) is therefore worthy of consideration. It should be considered by Freethinkers, since Mr. Read, though he has on occasion shown sympathy towards a generally mystical point of view, has never shared the ideas of our pious friends, but has seen clearly enough that the old assumptions of religious orthodoxy are completely irrelevant to the problems of the twentieth century.

The dilemma which Mr. Read sets out to consider is the one that we have apparently to endure the domination of a determined minority for our own good. A benevolent dictatorship, whether of Church or State, is one of the apparently necessary evils of our time. To face that fact is what Mr. Read sets out to do. He concludes that only by what he calls a "spiritual revolution" can this be overcome.

The trouble, I feel, is over the word "spiritual." It is clearly necessary for there to be an individual revolt against many of the tendencies of the day. Only if we are prepared to struggle to protest, to revolt, can we hope to escape from this iron ring of dictatorship.

We have many problems to face. They have to be faced frankly if we are to get anywhere at all. I feel that we should thank Herbert Read for having pointed the way to a possible solution of our greatest problem.

S. H.

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