

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Man or God

THAT brilliant writer, Edgar Saltus, quite correctly placed the character of Jesus Christ as belonging to the Pessimists. If Jesus ever lived, and if the portrait of him in the New Testament is correct, the judgment is sound. The dictionary explanation of "Pessimist" is given as "taking a gloomy view of things," and there is another definition "to expect the worst." That fits the New Testament Jesus like a glove. It is sound Christian doctrine that the fall of man following the disobedience of Adam and Eve, brought to the whole human race the penalty of damnation. Without the fall of man, the story of the crucifixion is without meaning. The Testament puts it quite plainly that as in Adam all men die, so in Christ all men are made alive. Nothing could be clearer and nothing could be more completely idiotic. We may add that no part of the Christian theology is more troublesome to the educated clergy of to-day than the story of the Fall of Man. It is true that the New Testament talks of Jesus bringing "glad tidings and great joy," but the joy was to come in the next world, not in the present one. And a world in which, on the authority of Jesus, that in heaven there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage does not indicate an existence that is worth living. Gibbon's famous summing up that it was not in this world that Christians hoped to be either happy or useful was more than a witticism, it was a plain statement of fact. We should never forget that the story of salvation through Jesus is based on the essential wickedness of the human race that had lived and would live. Take away that belief and—logically—the whole Christian scheme falls to pieces. The belief in the potential greatness of Man to be realised by the co-operation of *Men* is something that is foreign to historic Christianity. Clearly if Man can be "saved" by a process of natural growth, then the need for the sacrifice of Jesus falls to the ground; and, above all, there is no need for the glorification of a God who, according to his worshippers, is as fond of praise as a Prime Minister or an actor who has just made a resounding "hit." It is true that this fanatical fondness for praise is common to all gods, but it is particularly evident when one is dealing with the Christian deity. And if the philosophy of Christianity could have been carried out by all Christians, Christianity would long since have ceased to exist. As a matter of historic fact the world was expected to come to an end within the first thousand years of the Christian period. That particular exhibition of Christian foolishness is now almost dead. The sin of Adam is less loudly trumpeted, and there has grown up—expressed in various ways by godites—a feeling that may be expressed as at least making God share the responsibility for whatever "sins" man may be charged with. It was expressed by

one heretic thus: "O God, I am what you made me, and if you wished me to be better you should have made me of better material. The responsibility lies, not with me, but with you." Any workman might reasonably plead that having been given poor material he cannot be made responsible for the quality of his handiwork: and if man falls short of being what he might have been the responsibility lies with God. There is no excuse for a man failing to bring his children up decently if he has the means and the power to do otherwise. Against the Christian God lies an indisputable case.

What I have said has resulted from reading an article in the "Daily Sketch" for March 2. The article was written by the Bishop of Southwell, who, I believe, stands high in a situation that is getting lower in the opinion of the people. The Bishop does not appeal to believers in the Christian religion, he does not threaten anyone with an eternal hell that is waiting for the sinner—the sin being non-belief in God—he is content to try and frighten those who are careless about God, by offering an argument that is as foolish as his professional beliefs are fantastic. Take as an example this passage:—

"If man is merely a product of natural forces, born in a night to perish in a night, then the State or even a big industry seems to matter more than individuals. But if Christianity is true, if man is indeed a child of God and an heir of eternal life, then it is the State that is transitory. It is John Citizen and his wife that are immortal. But if so, politics and economics are meant to be the servants of men and women, to help them to fulfil their destiny as spiritual personalities in fellowship with God and one another."

I understand that the Bishop of Southwell stands very high in the religious world, and really a man who can make a statement like the one just noted and in 1946, must be getting rare, at least he would be rare outside the ranks of the clergy. Of course, inside the clerical ranks sheer desperation appears to be driving the leaders to try what can be done to prevent the collapse that seems almost inevitable. The old song was that Atheism is no more than an excuse for vicious living, and the Atheist obligingly helping on his death-bed by shrieking for God to forgive him for his vicious life. There are too many Atheists about nowadays for the foolish Christian lying that was once so greatly in evidence. So the selected move is for our clergy to remind Atheists that as they have given up belief in Christianity there is not sufficient reason for them being decent citizens, good parents, true friends or honest men.

But of all the cockeyed reasoning I have come across that set forth by the Bishop of Southwell is that "Man to-day is losing faith in himself." But it is losing religious faith which is *lifting* man out of the mire. It is the Christian who insists on the weakness of man, it is the Atheist who

insists on his potential strength. If there is any frame of mind that is entitled to be called pessimistic it certainly is Christianity which declines to believe that mankind can, without supernatural aid, lead a consistent social life. All that we need say, at the moment, in answer to that is that the historic Christian Churches have done their best to make human life justify the statement of the Christian Churches that it requires supernatural aid to make Christians lead decent and useful lives. If all men and women were as helpless and as bad as historic Christianity would make them, civilisation would have died out.

A policeman is a very bad teacher of morals, and the policeman as a teacher of morals is not improved because he happens to be called God. Mere law is equally as ineffective. Laws to be effective must rest upon a basis of public feeling. The moral groundwork of social life depends upon feelings and ideas that are generated by social contact. To the Christian a Freethinker is an opinion *plus* a man. To the Freethinker a Christian is a man *plus* an opinion. The Christian hates the Freethinker because of his opinion, the Freethinker hates the opinion because it misleads and weakens the man. I know, of course, that some of my neighbours—Christian or other—need watching, but I deny that all my neighbours are of that kind even though they have been brought up in a church or chapel. And I decline to believe that *all* my neighbours are of that shady character. I do not believe that husbands and wives, parents and children are rascals held in leash by the Christian creed. I do not believe, as the Bishop apparently does, that all are rascals held in leash by the fear of punishment. A preacher is bound to imply, at least, that this is the case, and if he does not believe that, I should be obliged if he would tell us what he does mean. I am ready to believe that a certain number of his followers do need watching. But all of them? That is more than I can believe.

We Freethinkers, we godless ones, are defending Christians against the slander of their preachers. I claim that many of the followers of the Bishop are as good as the best Atheists, and that both of them may often need watching. My claim is that Christians may be as good citizens as Atheists, and I am saying this in a Freethought journal because ordinary journals would not permit me to say it in their columns. Our newspapers will willingly publish slanders against Freethinkers, but they decline to permit any real defence in their columns. They publish the libel and refuse to permit a correction. There are really few things which the Christian Churches have, as Churches, touched without lowering their quality.

I believe in the substantial equality of human beings, not equals in moral, intellectual quality, or in any other direction, but in the substantial qualities which mark them as human; and in support of what I have said, and for the enlightenment of the Bishop—and others of his kind—that Freethinkers as husbands or wives, parents and citizens, are at least as well behaved as are Christians. No police officer has ever reported that, owing to the growth of Freethought, the number of crimes have increased and the police force has had to be strengthened. Freethinking husbands and wives are not conspicuous figures in the divorce courts. They are not notorious as child beaters. If some Christians have played a conspicuous part in social reforms so have Freethinkers. In revolutions, Freethinkers

have given their lives as cheerfully as Christians. All over the country, and in every shade of social service, Freethinkers have played their part. There is not a single virtue manifested by Christians that cannot be found in application by Atheists.

I would ask the Bishop of Southwell—I am quite certain that he will not reply—whether he believes that Atheists are so far superior to Christians that they can do without God what Christians cannot do without such supernatural assistance? I do not believe it. My modesty will not permit me to even whisper it to myself, and my dislike to being called a liar forbids my saying in set terms that I am in any sense superior to others. The utmost I will claim is that the Atheist is wide awake to certain characteristics and qualities of the human being to which professional Christians appear to be quite blind.

The Bishop of Southwell says he believes in man because he believes in God. That is a very bad reason. He believes in something he does not know in order to believe in something that is staring him in the face. It sounds very much like a confidence trick. And at law that often brings a man into trouble. As an Atheist I have no desire to see the Bishop in gaol. I would even uphold his right to preach whatever foolishness he inclines to. But I do enter a protest against the teaching which deliberately claims that honesty of speech and action, of kindness to others and decency of life is dependent upon the belief in an impossible God. Edgar Saltus was right. Christianity was built upon Pessimism.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## OTHER PEOPLE'S GODS

### The God of Marie Bashkirtseff

#### I.

FEW ideas of other people are more interesting than their ideas of God. Rarely, however, are they original, which detracts from their value. However, generally speaking, one may say: "Show me your God and I will show you what you are."

Voltaire, indeed, said that man made God in his own image, neatly reversing the Biblical text on the creation. But Voltaire's acute saying, like most epigrams, does not contain the whole truth; for many people are copycats and make their god out of bits and pieces, the remnants and rubbish of other people's gods. It is only the originator who can make a god in his own image—and most people are anything but originators.

And of course to-day it is mind-stuff from which a god is made. No longer can it be said in the psalmist's words: "Their idols are silver and gold, even the work of men's hands. Destitute of taste, and accustomed to nothing better than base metals and shoddy plastics, we do not admire either silver or gold, even if we are fortunate enough to possess either unalloyed in these poverty-stricken days of soiled paper money and debased currency.

Our gods are phantoms of the mind, bits of manufactured stuff flung off by the whirring wheels in the factories of our heads. We need to be bidden, not as the Second Commandment bids us, to refrain from making "any graven image" but any mental concept for worship. In days when the Ten Commandments were promulgated, the progress of mankind from materialistic idols to mental idols was evidently not foreseen by the Almighty legislator! Strange!

When I first met that adorable little girl, Marie Bashkirtseff (who most unfortunately died in the flesh before I was born) I searched with eagerness in her celebrated "Journal" for her God. Marie was, indeed, eloquent about him as about most things. But from the age of twelve to the age of 24 when she died, her god shows little, if indeed, any, development—unlike herself and her creative ideas upon most worldly phenomena.

Nor is her God original. He is the God of the patriarch Joseph with whom one bargains and gets the better of, if one can. Of course one may say in general that God is the answer to man's cry: "Give me."

I have always thought the prayer of that girl of twelve, "O God, give me the Duke of Hamilton," not unworthy in its stark simplicity and sincerity to be placed beside the prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and that prayer of the Cavalier leader, "O God, if in the hour of battle I forget thee, do not thou forget me." There are, indeed, few prayers that remain in the mind as noteworthy; the finest sustained prayer as literature is not the overrated "Lord's Prayer" but the "Prayer of Humble Access" in the English Book of Common Prayer.

Marie's prayer for the Duke of Hamilton—part of the first entry in her celebrated "Journal" deserves transcription in full:—

"O God give me the Duke of Hamilton. I'll love him and make him happy; I'll be happy too and kind to the poor. It is sinful to believe one can purchase the grace of God by good works but I can't express myself properly.

"I'm in love with the Duke of Hamilton and can't tell him so, even if I did he would pay no heed. . . O God, ease my pain, I can't pray any more, but listen to my prayer. Thy grace is so infinite, thy mercy so great, thou hast done so much for me. It grieves me so not to see him on the promenade. He looked so distinguished among the vulgar crowd of Nice."

Whenever this incomparable young girl was in love whether with the Duke, with Antonelli, with Ladarel, with Cassagnac or Bastien-Lepage, she calls for the aid of God as regularly as the British politicians invoke him in time of war. God is the Ally—but only in times of dire necessity! Such spectacles as the Duke's mistress or the Duke's marriage cause her to call upon God in her agony, like a dervish.

Indeed, whenever she wants anything terribly badly throughout all her too-short life—and whatever Marie wanted she wanted badly—whether it was that her brother Paul should study, or that she should have a good singing voice or a talent for painting, she uttered frenzied prayers to a God of Rewards and Punishments. Had she not observed that three times God had granted her prayers: the first time in sending her a croquet set, the second time in helping her to learn English, the third time she does not specify what omnipotent deed was done for her?

But so far as Hamilton was concerned, all her tears and pleadings prevailed nothing with her God. It is difficult to understand why God was so unpleasant as not to give this school-girl her Duke of Hamilton; for my part, I would have given her a dozen Dukes of Hamilton in gratitude for even the first entry in her diary. A signal instance of the badness of God! Inplacably, however, Marie went on "trusting in God and in his divine goodness," in accordance with the usual human practice; however badly her god behaved to her she stuck most womanfully to him.

Certainly her god betrayed atrociously throughout and I find it hard to forgive him. He would not even cause a second lover, Ladarel, to fall from his horse at the races:—

weeks. O my God, I give you five years of my life for him to have a fall from his horse.'

Yet God was recalcitrant. I would have let the fellow break his neck if I had been Marie's god, without the slightest hesitation. But all Ladarel did was to get drunk.

Marie, like most geniuses, was no fool even in minor matters. She realised that her god was not behaving himself; later she says:—

"I dare not pray to God for I have only to ask for anything to make sure that it won't happen. I dare not omit to pray for afterwards I might say: 'Ah! If I had only prayed to God.'"

She resolves her dilemma by deciding to pray on for as 'she sensibly argues: "I shall have nothing to reproach myself with at least" (if I do). Her "Papal blessing" proved equally unlucky: the Pope was no better than God.

Certainly Marie did her best with that perverse god of hers. Could anyone make his, or her, god a fairer offer than this:—

"O God, if thou wilt suffer me to live as I like, I promise if thou takest pity on me to walk on foot from Kharkoff to Kieff as pilgrims do."

But her god would not suffer her to live as she liked; he would not even (callous brute) allow her to live after 24 at all! This, too, although Marie offered his Virgin Mother in addition a tenth part of her income and although Marie besought him on her knees with outstretched arms, sobbing and crying. Why Marie at 15 thought her god would prefer foot-slogging to train riding is not clear unless the implication was that he liked making a worshipper uncomfortable.

The story of Marie Bashkirtseff is heart-rending. It is the story of the gay certainties of youth becoming slowly and relentlessly broken before the bewildering onslaughts of life. That is the common lot. But the ultra-sensitive and the more finely-tuned, of course, suffer more than the common herd.

Her singing voice that was to bring her to fame—in spite of the most passionate appeals to God for its improvement—failed her. Every one of her loves, for all her prayers and tears, except for the last one who was dying, failed her. Throughout her life her god played the cat-and-mouse game with her. Her painting talent brought her only mediocre success. She became deaf. Finally consumption struck her down, and as she put it: "God, not being able without partiality to give me what is necessary for my life is going to kill me."

Her god, like most other people's gods, took a special interest in the affairs, even the most trifling affairs, of his worshippers. It is a great pity he did not do something more efficient and more effective about them, for that Marie should die at 24 was a most monstrous and tragic crime: What might she not have achieved if she had lived, asks the reader of the journal?

But—"to have enough genius to live for ever" as she puts it—after her death her god granted that to her. If she knew that in her journals she had given a world performance never surpassed, that her records would be translated into most European languages, and that even the English Gladstone would be touched, would she have been contented? Hardly. She wanted to be "everything" and she might have been so much more than a posthumous literary sensation.

Is it not strange that the trader-and-schoolmaster-god that satisfied so primitive and barbarous a person as the cheating old patriarch Joseph of the Old Testament should satisfy this bright and brilliant young Russian-born Parisienne of the 1880's? The plain fact is that while Marie herself is of transcendent worth her god is not worth a damn. And she never realised that fact. She picked him up ready-made from the human beings around her and adopted him without realising what a shoddy piece of rubbish he was. She should have lived longer. Then she might easily have created a god more worthy of her genius. As it was, her god was inferior in morality to her negro boy servant, Chocolat.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

## SOCIALISM AND RELIGION

IN the following paragraphs we seek to raise the precise question from the standpoint of Marxist Socialism and in the light of the concrete circumstances of the twentieth century: circumstances which correspond with the contemporary era of the decline of capitalism and which differ considerably from those with which the founders of scientific socialism were confronted in the nineteenth century; the zenith of the historic evolution of the capitalist system.

In dealing with the complex question of the mutual relations of socialism and religion we have to consider successively the nature of Religion, its historic social role, and the present relations between it and the Churches which embody it, and Socialism. As we are writing in a European country our major concern is with the traditional religion of Europe, that is, Christianity.

With regard to the fundamental nature of religion the relevant facts are now known with sufficient clarity to all students of the subject; or, at least, to all those students who are motivated by a sincere desire to know the essential facts, and who are not inhibited by self interest or prejudice. In its origins, religion was neither the direct result of supernatural revelation, as the Churches have traditionally taught, at any rate until quite recently, nor was it the artful and deliberate creation of scheming priests, as writers of the school of Voltaire and the type of Volney once supposed.

Rather was it the creation of primitive social circumstances and of the also primitive psychology which corresponded with such degrees of social immaturity. Far from God having "made man in his own image," as the ancient oriental mythology preserved in the Biblical book of Genesis records, the exact converse has been historically true: man has always made his god—or gods—in his own image. And, indeed, with such a degree of exactness did created and creator conform that one can also reverse another well known literary axiom, and say that "an honest god is the noblest work of man," and, one might add, well nigh the rarest!

Historically, magic, perhaps the earliest recognisable form of religion, can be traced back with some degree of probability to the pre-literary Stone Age (pre-literary rather than pre-historic, since there are other ways of recording history than by writing) in the pre-civilised era of "primitive—patriarchal communism." In the Pyrenean caves, excavated by modern archaeology, that date back to palaeolithic times, "sympathetic magic" has been plausibly inferred in pictures of reindeer carved by the ancient tribal artists. In general, however, religion in any form recognisably similar to its modern descendants, does not appear to have antedated the era of "civilisation," equating this often vague and misused form in a precise Marxist manner with the homogeneous era of private property, class exploitation, and the class state.

Whether or not Aristotle was correct in his statement that the Egyptian priests, the first "leisured class" in history, created civilisation, it at least seems certain that religion, as a recognisable historic phenomenon, is coeval with the social and cultural epoch of class-society and of the class state, "that particular power of suppression" (Engels) which has traditionally held together the self contradictory structure of a society unequally based on exploitation and privilege.

And since the cardinal feature of this entire epoch, however much disguised by history—and historians!—has been the effective exploitation of the many by the few, one must conclude that the primary function of religion in such an age was, and indeed, could only be, the justification of exploitation: the provision of artificial compensation in a supposedly real other world for the actual misery of the masses in this world of sin—

and class!—below. And such, indeed, has been and still is to-day the real role of religion.

In this ultimate sense the classic Marxist definition of religion as "the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, the opium of the people," is definitive and final, and makes all pre-Marxist "rationalist" definitions of religion themselves pre-rationalist in character.

At the same time this definition itself requires some further qualification and explanation. Religion has, indeed, been moulded by class society, but its primitive roots in all probability go back beyond civilisation into the dark unconscious of the tribal pre-civilised past. And such roots were, accordingly, created not only by economic, but also by psychological ignorance and fear. Human psychology, as we know from Freud and others of his kind, possesses a complexity which was unknown to the nineteenth century rationalist, including Marx and Engels. It must, consequently be conceded that religion is the product not only of the society, but also of the psychology, of the age of economic scarcity and exploitation which has been the historic basis not only of capitalist, but of every other "civilised" society.

Moreover, religion only gradually acquired its modern character as "opium," i.e.: as a deliberate soporific for the exploited. The earliest religions such as those of the Homeric Poems and the African Ju-Ju rites, were frankly aristocratic beyond the grave as well as here. There was Olympus or Valhalla for the fallen noble; and the Kings of Dahomey, Ashanti and Benin needed slaves to attend them beyond the grave also. For the obscure masses there was, at most, only an indefinite continuation of their obscurity in the Realm of Shades: "Better to be even a landless man than go down into Hades," sang the Homeric minstrel, who no doubt echoed the current thought of the early Greek feudal society which he so faithfully depicted.

It was, indeed, only at a relatively advanced phase of civilisation that religion took on its primary character as "the opium of the people," since the earliest religions were thus frankly class religions. It was only when exploitation became more complex and more unbearable that the need for spiritual "compensation" for the unendurable misery which a servile civilisation such as that of Rome henceforth made the permanent lot of the masses became absolutely imperative if that civilisation was to continue. Then, and only then, did religion promise the masses in heaven as fast as the class state whose efficient servant it was, depressed them on earth.

"The Century of the Common Man" began in Heaven long before on earth. It was also beyond the grave that democracy was first established. A democracy of compensation for the total absence of democracy on earth. And such has religion remained in essence: the supreme prophylactic against social change, and in particular, against social revolution, the sharpest form of change.

In that ultimate sense, Napoleon, before Marx was accurately summed up the essence of religion: "I regard religion not as the mystery of the Incarnation, but as the mystery of the Social Order." Adding that it was only the hope of a different distribution of goods in the Beyond which prevented the poor from cutting the throats of the rich down here.

So much for the historic nature and role of religion. And to-day? Here we confront a situation similar in kind but somewhat different in degree from that at which we have just glanced. For to-day, in a scientific civilisation in which gods are eliminated by the atoms they are supposed to have created, and where even primitive head-hunters like the Nazis are forced to cultivate science if only for military purposes, the natural roots of religion in ignorance and fear of the unknown are dying fast with the growing diffusion of knowledge.

And from this indisputable fact some middle-class "rationalists" (whose "reason" does not extend to the class struggle) have

deduced that religion is at long last about to disappear automatically. They never made a bigger mistake in their lives! For they ignore what has been indicated above, viz.: that religion is a social creation: a necessity for a society based on inequality and exploitation. And to-day, when capitalist civilisation is plunging from war to war on its road to the finally inevitable destruction of human civilisation by the suicidal misuse of its own scientific knowledge, the need for a religious "compensation" for the unbearable woes of the world—woes heightened in and to the human consciousness by a previously unequalled frustration—not less but is far greater than before.

The ruling classes of to-day cannot do without the gods! When the traditional gods fail them, they even create new ones: the Divine Mikado in the East; the infallible Fuhrer in the West—who only needed a few more panzer divisions before Stalingrad and Moscow, and a few more squadrons of aeroplanes over London, to have superseded Christ as the effective Deity of the Western World!

We live, after all, at the end of an age; the age of "civilisation," of class society, of human slavery.

Before the onrush of the slaves, before "the revolt of the masses," which last is the cardinal feature of our epoch, all the beneficiaries of the old order of privilege present a united front in a last back-to-the-wall rally in defence of the privilege which is common to them all. The future of religion cannot to-day be separated from the social future of the species. To-day gods and capitalists stand together; to-morrow gods and capitalists will fall together!

The long inarticulate aspirations of the masses for a free and equal society which for so long necessarily took a Utopian form that was even sometimes itself religious, have now crystallised in an age of science into the growing and ultimately irresistible demand for an international Socialist order. Such an order with atomic energy at its disposal for practical use and with the theoretical legacy of all that was good in the age of "civilisation" would speedily create a society in which Fear, Frustration and Want were alike unknown.

In such a brilliant secular future how could religion hope to survive when its historic basis had gone, and its function as "opium," as "compensation," had become entirely superfluous? The fear of death no doubt would still remain, but the free and full life of a libertarian communist society would both adequately explain this necessary phenomenon and simultaneously provide adequate compensation in the abundant overflowing life that it dispensed to all its members. In such a free classless society the consoling functions of the clergy would be as meaningless as those of the army and the police: those other vestigial creations of the era of the class state. As for God, in such a harmonious society, he would become as meaningless as the Stock Exchange!

One has, accordingly, only to consider at all fully the nature of Socialism and Religion to realise their complete and utter incompatibility. Why, even the Papacy has declared that Communism means the end of all religion. For once a truly "infallible" statement! The coming of Socialism means inevitably the end of religion.

Voltaire once made use of the famous words: "Ecrasez l'infame" ("Destroy the infamous one"), of the Roman Church. To-day it is not only Rome but every "infamous one" which is in imminent danger of the same doom, and neither terror nor demagoguery, Franco, that modern successor of the Inquisition, nor "Catholic democracy," will save them. The Socialist workers, armed with the science of the rationalist age, will complete the work that was begun by Voltaire, but which the inhibiting circumstances of a more primitive age than ours prevented the bourgeois anti-clericals, of whom Voltaire was the greatest, from bringing to a finally successful conclusion.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## EVOLUTION !

The Apes looked in  
And saw their human cousins  
Seated in the Council Hall.  
Fat men with shining domes;  
Some lean, cadaverous and sour—  
All garbed in black like carrion crows  
Gathered round a garbage heap,  
To claw and scratch for filthy pickings—  
A horrid sight.  
Then each would totter on his legs in turn  
And utter in most solemn, unctuous tone  
Blather most meaningless:  
And some would sleep; the over-fed  
Would belch or blow their purple noses,  
Each bored and only anxious for the time  
To strut the stage and say his little piece  
Quite unconcerned with what the other clowns may say.  
Who are these ghouls who take upon themselves  
The right to plan Man's destiny;  
To bargain human life and property away  
And pocket rich rewards?  
Workers? They cannot be.  
Too old, decayed and senile far  
For that. Men call them Statesmen:  
Politicians, who rise to fame  
Through arrogance; by shouting down  
The man who dares to think—  
The quiet, humble man of peace.  
These pompous wind-bags  
Who prate and preach are different meat.  
Thick-skinned and skulled are they  
And greedy to divide the spoils:  
Thriving on offal and full-gorged  
With Victory they loudly cry—  
"There shall be no more war!"—  
Because it suits them at this moment.  
(Have we not heard that cry before?)  
But when a few more years have passed  
Those self-same hypocrites will be  
The first to call "To War!"—And send  
The Flower of Manhood to its ghastly end!

The Apes looked in  
And then they turned away—  
Sick and disgusted at the scene.  
Then, too, they held a Special Meeting,  
Passing unanimously this Resolution—  
"We disassociate ourselves with Man,  
The Humbug, and all his senseless bleating.  
We thank the gods we still are Apes—  
If that's the farce called Evolution!"

W. H. WOOD.

The Church of England Assembly has decided that a clergyman shall not be deprived of his living for divorce and desertion. We should say not. After all, every clergyman believes that he was "called" by God to his job, and it is downright impudence to imagine that God would call unworthy people to his service.

## ACID DROPS

Probably, it is because of God's numerous failures that Sir Angus Watson writes in the "Christian World" that "the creator may be frustrated in his great task of winning the world for himself." Well, attempts of world conquest have been many, and they have all, sooner or later, ended in failure. Ancient Rome tried it and failed, and others have had the same ambition and have finished in a deadly collapse. Hitler has given the latest illustration. These people all said "There shall be no other ruler than me." Hitler said: "There shall be no other ruler than me," and collapsed. God said: "Thou shalt have no other God than me," and gods appeared in every direction. In a mainly democratic world gods do not flourish.

Perhaps this unhappy fate of the gods is due to the desire of making life worth living on earth. If it is so, Cardinal Bernard Griffin would damp their efforts by the assurance that "social improvements will not solve the problem." The Cardinal also says "man was made for happiness in another world." So it seems one must be miserable in this life in order to be happy in the world to come. But that is sheer madness. At least we know that this world is real, and for all we know the other world is no more than a "pipe-dream." For if we are born and live unhappily, we shall be quite unfit for happiness in another sphere. There seems to be something cranky about the philosophy of the Cardinal.

An article in an Aldershot journal inquires: "What is wrong with the Church?" We would say there is nothing wrong with the Church—when it is honest. But when and if it is honest it would have to tell the truth about the Church and its teachings, and that would certainly cause a hell of a row. So one had better put it that, "What is wrong with the Church" is just the Church. If those who keep the Church tell the truth they will empty the Churches, if they don't tell the truth the wide-awake leave the Church. So far as the clergy goes it appears to be, "Heads, I lose, tails, the other fellow wins."

On the authority of the "Christian World," God has called upon us to be "co-workers with God." Of course, we cannot contradict it, but neither can we endorse it. As things go it looks as though "God," wherever he is, whatever he is, or was—for gods appear to alter considerably as time flies—should have managed himself more consistently and made a better selection of the quality of those whom he called.

What we should like to see done is this "God versus common man" farce subjected to a real test. Let two fields in different parts of the country be selected. Let one piece be given to man, the other to God. The first will be treated in the usual way, the second will rely upon a selected body of highly placed religious dignitaries, who will put the matter before God. We could then reach something like a decision. If we can trust the Bible, God did once feed one of his followers by sending birds to carry food. What is to prevent him repeating the trick? If successful it would kill Atheism in a day.

The Reverend W. H. Elliott has been inviting—"begging" is the right word—people to send him letters to help in a "spiritual campaign." He claims that he has received 70,000 letters. We see no reason to disbelieve that a very large number of letters have been received. But one should bear in mind that these responses are in the nature of a stage army—the same persons appear in every "show," and it should not be difficult to get this same army to appear whenever they are called. Mr. Elliott must be of a very sanguine nature if he imagines that these letters will do anything in the direction of filling the empty churches, or securing new recruits.

Mr. Elliott mournfully asks: "Why are the Churches empty?" And turns on his fellow preachers and says: "The clergy in too many cases have been allowed to rot in aching penury, in bitter

intolerance, and in deep discouragement." We do not believe that the clergy are to blame for empty Churches; it is the empty stuff that is offered to the world that is responsible. After all, when one looks at the matter broadly, one cannot—in the face of what is now known of the beginnings and endings of religions—expect the game to go on for ever. The Churches are empty because science has cleared the gods from the sky, and no amount of private or public appeals can reinstate them.

"The late Fuehrer," blandly says the "Universe," "of the German Reich, was nominally a Catholic but not a practising one. He was never formally excommunicated." And what think you is the reason given why this striking example of a Catholic environment and of Catholic belief was never excommunicated? "He had really excommunicated himself by his anti-Catholic attitude and his opposition to the Church authorities." But Hitler knew perfectly well that, just like Mussolini, he could get the Church on his side in the twinkling of an eye by exactly the same method as employed by the Duce. And the Church knew this too—which is at least one reason why he was never excommunicated. The Church is always ready to welcome its lost sheep. But it is not true that Hitler was not a true Catholic. He actually showed the people what the Christian Church did to its enemies. Of course, the mediæval Church did not use the instruments that Hitler used, but the knowledge for doing it was not then available. But he did his best.

A Californian seaman, who believed in reading the Bible for hours on end to his English wife, violently assaulted his father-in-law who thought a four-hour stretch long enough. The seaman was fined £5 or a month's imprisonment—which makes us wonder what is happening in this old country of ours? A Bible reader condemned for reading the Bible and losing his temper! He comes any lover of the Bible to lose his temper and to strike another man? Have we not always been told that the loss of morality, of sweet reasonableness, of dignity and charity and love, which is so characteristic of our modern world is almost altogether due to not reading the Bible? What a hard-hearted magistrate it must have been to condemn a Bible reader, who loved the Holy Book so much that he could read it for hours, to a fine or imprisonment. This materialistic age!

The "Church Times" pronounces that "the permanent survival of Christianity in any country appears from a study of history to require that it become interwoven with the country's social structure: otherwise it perishes. . ." Of course. That journal and others like it are at last beginning to see that there is precious little chance of Christianity's survival unless, embodied in the State as part of the State, it is forced on the people. It must be taught by law in our schools, and Church parades must be made compulsory as by law. There must be no freedom of choice whatever—the State is Christianity and Christianity is the State; that is how Hitler forced the German people to accept his Fascism, as he preferred to call it, National Socialism. It was a religion, and Christianity is a religion, and we are glad the "Church Times"—however much it may protest—is beginning to see what we have always contended.

What is happening in Germany in religious matters gives proof to what we have just said. Landesbischof Dibelius has been allowed, for example, by the Soviet authorities in Berlin, to retain his post as head of the Lutherans, though he not only gave the Church's blessing to the pact between Hitler and Hindenburg in 1933, but preached then the Divine Right of the Secular authority. Another member of the Christian Democratic Party who is now in favour of National Communism, an old member of the German Reichswehr, Lemmer by name, who always supported Hitler and worked under Goebbels in anti-British propaganda, was also allowed by the Russians to keep his post. Both men are intensely religious, and no doubt feel that if Nazism, as such, failed, by calling it Christianity this time it may not fail. After all, in this opinion, there can be little difference between National Socialism and National Communism especially if it is called Christianity.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C.1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

The date of the House of Lords case, *Bowman and Others v. the Secular Society Limited*, was heard on May 14, 1917. The Lords present were the Lord Chancellor, Lord Shaw, Lord Parker, Lord Buckmaster and Lord Sumner, whose judgment was read by Lord Dunedin. The full reports are in record in the Law Reports. This will answer many inquiries.

G. H. LEAT.—It was not exactly illegal for the question about religion being asked of an applicant for relief, but it is quite unnecessary and, as things stand, may easily prejudice the matter before the committee. But when religion is on the board, indecency of conduct is a long way from being unknown.

H. M. MELLOUGH.—Sorry but we could not at present enter into a discussion on "Spirit Messages." We have never been favoured with one, and really we have as much right as anyone else to get one.

M. G. H. REATE.—We stand rebuked. Will try to do better for the future.

E. H. COX.—Thanks. Items of news are often useful even when not immediately used.

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

*THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.*

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

We are pleased to hear that there is a move on foot to form a branch of the National Secular Society in Sheffield. A meeting was recently held at the Grand Hotel, and an address on "The Need for Secularism" was delivered by Mr. Corina of Bradford. Mr. A. Samms was responsible for the organising of the meeting, and his reward was a very enthusiastic gathering, and a number of forms of membership were filled in. So soon as these forms reach headquarters permission to form the branch will be registered. Many years ago there was a very flourishing branch in Sheffield and the new branch should be larger than the old one. All possible help will be given from headquarters, and for further information letters should be addressed to Mr. Samms, 18, Junction Road, Woodhouse, Sheffield. We are also pleased to be able to say that a very good report of the meeting appeared in the "Sheffield Telegraph."

How Roman Catholicism works in a country which is almost all Catholic can be seen in Eire on the question of the freedom of the artist. According to Mr. Sean O'Faolain: "Almost every Irish writer of note is now banned in his own country by a censorship, a state of affairs that must be unique among democracies." Leaving aside that, according to his own description, Eire is certainly not a democracy but a Roman Catholic dictatorship, we find that among the banned writers are Bernard Shaw, Liam O'Flaherty, Sean O'Casey, George Moore, Kate O'Brien, and Oliver Gogarty—and yet Catholics in this country are constantly swanking about the way in which their Church always upheld the dignity of art and literature. Mr. O'Faolain adds that "no Irish writer can or does live on his country either financially or spiritually." What an advertisement for Roman Catholicism!

These doughty fighters for Christian "unity," the Anglican Bishop of Carlisle with some other Anglicans and Nonconformists,

heard Mgr. R. Knox ridicule the idea that Catholics could join with any other Christian body in defence of their "common" faith. "The immediate answer," he declared, "is 'No,' and about this there must be no mistake. There is no common basis of apologetics shared by Catholic and non-Catholic Christians." That is straight to the point, and non-Catholics have heard the same thing for centuries from the same sect. It is about time that they learnt their lesson. The only unity Rome insists on is that all other Christian bodies should submit—however humbly, but submit they must. And they won't.

Mr. F. A. Hornibrook will be in Birmingham to-day and lectures for the local N.S.S. Branch in 38, John Bright Street, at 3.30 p.m., on "Religion, War and Politics." Mr. Hornibrook is sure of a cordial welcome from his many friends, and they in turn can expect a direct and pointed address. Admission is free and tea can be obtained on the premises. On Saturday, April 6, the Branch will hold a Beetle Drive. Tickets 2s. including refreshments.

In the Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, to-day, Mr. F. J. Corina will lecture on "Freethought or Christianity?" at 7 p.m. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each. Mr. Corina will be welcomed by members and friends of the Newcastle Branch in the Odeon Cafe, Northumberland Street, Newcastle, at 4.30 p.m., where tea has been arranged. Mr. J. T. Brighton, as usual, has been very busy and deserves all the support he may get.

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. has arranged a course of lectures covering three Sundays in The Alexander Cafe, Victoria Street, Blackpool. Mr. R. H. Rosetti opens the course to-day at 2.30 p.m. with a lecture on "Nature, Man and God," and at 6.30 p.m. on "God and the Atomic Bomb." Admission is free, with reserved seats at sixpence each. Mr. F. J. Corina will follow on April 7 and Mr. J. T. Brighton on April 14.

Some members of Cambridge University have formed a "Religion through Drama Society." The idea is that as the Christian story as stated in the New Testament is losing its grip, a stage performance which will leave out a real account of what the New Testament does say and also what it means is taking its place. Really, to be honest, the first scene should present Joseph as just becoming aware that Mary was about to become a mother. A suitable scheme would be very interesting. Then a series of the miracles performed by Jesus and the dialogue with Satan would also rouse attention, and the turning of a few handfuls of bread and fishes which not only fed a "multitude" but left more food at the end than at the beginning. We may wager that what will be given will be a few more falsehoods, in fact, even when the dialogues are "dressed."

At Norham, Berwick-on-Tweed, was the usual performance of a clergyman praying to God that as "chosen fishers for his apostles" he would give the people "a miraculous draught" of salmon. Now if the people really desire something that would make people "sit up" the vicar who officiated should have added to his prayer the simple request, "And in thy goodness and to confound enemies send us half the number of fish already tinned."

The "Sunday School Chronicle" informs its readers that Professor Einstein said that during the war he saw that "only the Church stood square across the path of Hitler's campaign." We had some idea "Atheist Russia," Jews, Mohammedans, Hindus and millions of non-Christians took a hand in frustrating Hitler. Perhaps we were mistaken. Or perhaps the writer in the "Sunday School Chronicle" is just an ordinary kind of a liar.

At a recent Warwick assizes a woman was ordered by the Justice to be detained during the "King's pleasure" for failing to find a "Christian burial" for her father. The question of the mental state of the woman does not concern us, and the provision of a reasonable burial would be endorsed by all. But why a "Christian burial"? There is no legal compulsion to provide a Christian burial; and large numbers have been buried without a religious ceremony of any kind. We think the judge overstepped himself in his phrasing.

## A DEFENCE OF THE RESURRECTION

## IV.

THE pains taken by theologians desperately anxious to vindicate the text of the New Testament is astonishing. I don't know how much trouble and hard work, for instance, Sir William Ramsay put in to show the world the trustworthiness of the text of St. Luke, but it was certainly enormous. He seemed to have the idea that if he showed the *topography* used by this Gospel writer as a background was unassailable, the miracles of Jesus reported by Luke must undoubtedly have taken place. Sir W. Ramsay, however, utterly failed to show the connection—except, of course, to those already convinced like Mr. Arnold Lunn. In his book "The Third Day," Mr. Lunn devotes a long chapter to Ramsay most of which is simply irrelevant.

He gives us—we are called the "anti-miraculists"—five statements from Luke which have been proved true though they were once rejected as "demonstrably false" by the unbeliever. Cyrenus was Governor when Joseph went to Bethlehem, Augustus had issued a decree ordering a census, there was a regular census under the Empire, the head of the household had to return to his original home to be registered, and he had to go with his wife. In all these Luke "has been proved to be right and his critics wrong"—therefore miracles must have been performed by Jesus. This is Mr. Lunn's great argument about Luke. It is difficult to imagine more nonsense.

If Sir W. Ramsay was out to prove that the miracles of Jesus really took place he should have done his utmost to do so—and not imagine that the unbeliever is going to accept them merely because Luke was right on the question of Augustus issuing a decree that there was to be a census in Judea. To use my favourite analogy, the fact that Mr. Pickwick went to a debtor's prison because he would not pay the damages of Mrs. Bardell's breach of promise action, and the fact that this prison was actually in existence at the time and correctly described by Dickens, no more proves the veritable existence of Mr. Pickwick—even apart from miracles—than the fact that the story of Aladdin took place in a real country, China, proves that he had a magic lamp which actually worked as described in the famous yarn.

Mr. Lunn then comes along with a defence of the Fourth Gospel as being veritably written by John the "beloved disciple." This is a big question, and I have not the time or space to deal adequately with it. But any reader can test the matter for himself in a very simple way. Let him read the speeches of Jesus, say, in Mark, and then turn to those reported by John. The contrast is immense. It is utterly impossible to imagine anybody talking like the Jesus of Mark at the same time and to the same people as talked the Jesus of John. Indeed, John actually complains that his hearers did not understand him.

In addition, there are the contradictions between the first three Gospels and the Fourth—discrepancies which Mr. Lunn admits "are difficult to resolve." There used to be a time when it was indignantly denied that there were any discrepancies at all, that God simply could not have contradicted himself, and that if by some unlucky chance contradictions can be shown in "Holy Writ," that is the fault of the copiest and not at all present in the "original." This was a position so difficult to defend that the faithful now resort to "frank" admissions. "Oh yes," they airily say, "there are contradictions we know, but this proves that the Gospels are absolutely authentic, otherwise the forgers would have put everything in complete harmony."

Of course to the non-Christian, the unbeliever, it does not matter two hoots whether John's Gospel was written by one John or another of the same name. Almost all authorities are now agreed, in spite of Mr. Lunn, that the speeches put into the mouth of Jesus by John were never uttered by him but were written for him by the Gospel writer—another way of saying

that they were *forged*. In any case, even if the original John was proved to be the author, how does that prove the miracles of Jesus? I don't know, and I am sure that Mr. Lunn could not tell us.

He claims that John was an "eye witness" of the events of Jesus. Good; but he does not explain the fact that according to John the Last Supper took place on the day preceding the Passover, while, according to the Synoptics it was on the Passover. John says it "was before the Feast of the Passover" (xiii. 1). Luke says, "And they made ready the Passover" (xxii. 13). The reader can rest assured that though dozens of volumes have been written to explain such a gross contradiction no one has succeeded in doing so. Strauss calls it an "irreconcilable contradiction," and it is all the worse if John was indeed an eye witness.

Mr. Lunn gives as "a minor argument for the deity of our Lord" the "reluctance of non-Christians to draw rational conclusions from their denial of our Lord's claims. Instead of condemning Christ as an imposter they seem spellbound by the ring of truth in every word that he uttered." When one reads this kind of rubbish one wonders who are these wonderful "non-Christians" who stand "spellbound" at Jesus's *every* word. Are they spellbound when he said: "All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers?" I should dearly like their names.

That many Rationalists have praised Jesus, I admit, but they were never spellbound at this kind of saying, and they would have roared with laughter at any claim made for them that their admiration of the *man* Jesus was a "minor" argument that he was a *God*. Personally, without in any way admiring Jesus, I have always claimed that he *was* a God. It is this which constitutes my quarrel with so many Rationalists who insist that he was a Man. I look upon Jesus as a God in the same way that I look upon Osiris or Krishna as a God. They are paper Gods, and of course never had any real existence.

When we come to what Mr. Lunn calls the "proof" that the Resurrection actually took place, I find that he relies very much on the fact that the stories surrounding the event could never have been invented, or that there was an almost infinite standard of veracity in the early Church.

The Gospels simply could not have been fictions—they are much better written than even such a book as "War and Peace." Why, Mr. Lunn remembers every incident of the "Trial of Jesus"—and he can't recall any incidents whatever from "War and Peace." That is absolute proof of the veracity of the Gospels—a literally devastating proof of the truth of the Resurrection. I can only rub my eyes in amazement. This—the great book specially written to convince non-Christians! These the puerile arguments for an unique miracle! Really, who can be the people Mr. Lunn has been mixing with lately? What sort of people are these non-Christians he hopes to convince?

To get over the fact that the story of the Resurrection teems with absurd contradictions, Mr. Lunn tells us that historians are not sure whether the Marquis of Argyll was condemned and hanged on a Tuesday or condemned on a Saturday and beheaded (not hanged) on a Tuesday. Is not this delightfully disingenuous? There was no miracle whatever in the execution of Argyll so that it is not of great importance which historian is right. Supposing Mr. Lunn's biographer were to tell us that he climbed Mt. Blanc not in the usual way, but in one hop. Would the question of the day he performed this miracle matter the proverbial brass farthing? Would not the real question be, could Mr. Lunn get to the top of Mt. Blanc in one hop? What would be the evidence to begin with?

Mr. Lunn tells us that "the anti-miraculist does not deny that the disciples believed that they had seen the risen Lord" but he asserts that they were the victims of "collective hallucinations!" Well, well. I expect that some unbelievers could be found arguing in this idiotic way, but I have never met them

For an anti-miraculist like myself the whole story of the crucifixion and the burial is just fiction. So is the story of the "empty tomb." The four accounts are so hopelessly contradictory, that even a Fundamentalist like Dean Alford, ready to swallow even more than Mr. Lamm, had to write: "We must be content to walk by faith and not by sight." (Greek Testament, p. 905.)

H. CUTNER.

## A SAD ENDING

AT no other period in human history does the peace of the world seem more secure than to-day. Representatives of the United Nations have declared solidly for peace; peace in practice and peace in intention. There seems nothing left in the world that would dare challenge such a united organisation determined on peace. Unfortunately a perturbing snag seems to be hovering around. The United Nations seemed equally solid that the retention of armies, navies, air forces, atomic bombs and military research was quite permissible. Somehow it does not seem to fit in with the determination for peace pledge, but may be it is the politician's way of providing mutual trust and goodwill. Weapons in the hands of private citizens were recently ordered to be surrendered on the grounds that they were a menace to peaceful, social life; but weapons held by governments are supposed to make for peace and friendly relations, perhaps the Brains Trust can add a little more confusion and so help to clarify the point.

Two things at least are certain if another world war breaks out. The peace-pledged members of the United Nations must play a leading part, and the bulk of the munitions must come from Christian countries. Pulpit talk that Christianity is the key to world peace is just a clerical joke taken seriously by a section of the people. Christianity and militarism have always been good companions. The sword has won for the Christian religion what Jesus could never have done. No Christian need be ashamed of that for it is quite Biblical. The Bible says clearly: "The Lord is a man of war" (Exds. xv. 3), and Jehovah in his best godly style declared: "I will make my arrows drunk with blood and my sword shall devour flesh" (Deut. xxxii. 42). Only a god who loved a scrap would make such an admission, and remember the famous occasion when Jehovah put Dagon, a rival god, down for the full count (1 Sam. v. 3); a scrap between two gods must be a real tough do. The Israelites, God's chosen people, under divine command, were in continual fights with their neighbours, and Christians have been worthy successors to the chosen people in fighting as long as the going was good. Christian swords have slit human throats beyond count, and there is nothing un-Christian about it so long as Christians honestly believe: "Curseth be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and curseth be he that keepeth back his sword from blood" (Jer. xlviii. 10). When Christians arrive in Heaven they will no doubt find the walls covered with chapters from Christian history, framed in gold and rounded off with Jehovistic commendation.

It is when Christian sect meets rival Christian sect, or the heat of war gives licence to public expressions of blood lust that Bible Christianity comes into its own for the time prevailing. But in normal social life Christianity loses its sting, the sword has to be put out of sight and Jesus, a very poor substitute, has to take its place. And then not the real gospel Jesus, but a carefully overhauled Jesus, a Jesus pruned of his primitive mentality and beliefs, a Jesus with his outbursts of bad temper and intolerance stifled, and a meek, lowly, hopeless specimen of a human weakling presented that could never arouse any admiration from any manly man or womanly woman. Real Christianity, the Christianity of the Bible cannot retain its health and vitality in

a peaceful civilised society, and the real Christianity purged of its vitals and presented in the castrated version of to-day, merits the contempt it excites in the well-informed.

Its strength does not come from the best elements in our social life. It is kept going by relays of humbugs and those of timid character, both creations of Christianity, both expressing a pretended belief as a measure of safety, and both acceptable to the churches as show pieces of numerical strength. If Christians did show toleration and a sense of fair play in religion there would be no need for any fear over differences of belief. Then the humbug would not need the protection of a pretended belief, timidity would disappear, and so also would Christianity; thus the Christ like hatred, cruelty and spite towards non-Christians has a strong survival value to the churches to-day. The Bible and what it stands for belongs to the past. The clergy may twist and turn it but B.C. cannot be a pattern for A.D. 1946. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" had life, vigour and thrust in it; it was a challenge to all other gods and people at a time when holy crusades and religious warfare were representative of the world state, but to-day when every man who wants a god makes one for himself out of the common god clay, and church gods vary according to the preachers, and an increasing number of people have no god at all, well, the commandment is in the last stage of dry rot. Until another war breaks out the clergy must expect a lean time. The cure for a dying religion is not more religion.

Balaam's Ass at 7-50 a.m. on the Home Service is really a five minutes exposure of the mental weeds in Christian intellect. Jehovah, the almighty creator of the universe, is hopeless and helpless before scores of millions of starving human beings. "Monty's" victory god can do nothing for the hungry German people, and "Monty" does not expect his god to do anything. Trouble makes some men sensible and others look to god. Perhaps the most humiliating betrayal by the clergy and politicians is to put Jehovah in the schoolroom as the best hope for his future. It's a sad ending, and bad for the children. It is true God will be well treated and looked after in the schools. The children, especially the infants, will enjoy some of his "Jack the Giantkiller" stories. The teachers will be carefully selected and only those who will treat him kindly will be engaged. We cannot blame the clergy for acting like clergymen, who all over the world are never very particular where their religious interests are concerned. But what of the politicians? What a corrupting influence politics seems to have on its victims when men will help the Churches to dump a worn out god upon unsuspecting school-children and pass legal enactments that it must be taught as the real thing by the teachers. That those teachers not prepared to teach it as the real thing can be excused, therefore ensuring that it will be taught as the real thing.

R. H. ROSETTI.

## OH LORD!

Go where thy Duty lies, play the good part, heed not the whisperings of faintness of heart. Count not the cost nor how it must be paid. Go where thy Duty lies and seek ye God's Aid.

Go where thy Duty lies, though pitfalls outspread; the Love of thy Father is over thy head. Look not for other ways easier to take; the hard way is Blessed by God, make no mistake.

Go where thy Duty lies, through dreams and through tears; the steeper the climb the more the sky clears. And though doubts assail you don't be afraid for when Fear is forsaken the Soul's undismayed.

Go where thy Duty lies, for Duty well done is Life lived and conquered and half Heaven won. So go where thy Duty lies, face ill winds and fair, and take up thy Cross and trust. CHRIST WILL BE THERE.—J. M.

(The "People," February 10, 1946)

## "DISCARDED AND OBSOLETE PIETIES"

IN "As We Are," published in 1932, E. F. Benson deals with the vast change in "all the revaluations and revisions of thought and conduct" brought about by the 1914-18 war. Of particular interest are his references to the futility of prayer and religion generally in view of the fact that he is himself a son of a former Archbishop of Canterbury. Take, first, this extract:—

"Many of these young men had a bone to pick with God. Such a statement of their intention may sound gratuitously profane, but no other expression seems to convey quite what I mean. To say in milder phrase that 'a wave of irreligion' swept over the young generation in the years 1914 to 1918 does not meet the case.

"For some years already a growing indifference to religious matters had been sweeping over them. It might be called a wave or it might be called a tide. But there was no hostility about it any more than there was when Darwin published his 'Origin of Species.' Science then simply formulated certain incontrovertible conclusions which seemed to invalidate the first chapters of Genesis. But these conclusions were not designedly polemical. They were groupings of ascertained facts in natural history or geology, only incidentally controversial. Their object was to search for the truth and to get as near to it as possible.

"Similarly, but in no polemical spirit, the exponents of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament looked into the history of the founding of Christianity as revealed in the Gospels. They examined these books as they would have examined any other documents that claimed to be authoritative, and pointed out historical discrepancies. But now there was something different."

With this Mr. Benson goes on to say that unlike their parents, "who had accepted Christianity as they accepted most other traditions," the young "conducted, in camera within their own minds, a pretty stiff cross-examination, and they found the answers of the defendant highly unsatisfactory," adding:—

"There was a crudity, of course, in stating things directly, or asking direct questions, but what (to be crude for a moment) about the efficacy of prayer as they had been taught to believe in it? They were convinced that the cause for which they fought was just. But petitions were not getting through. Perhaps the line was blocked, for millions of Germans—young men and their parents—were in the same case, and the only conclusion was that God was not interesting Himself. Not long ago a bishop had asserted that religion was daily becoming a more vital force in the life of the nation. But it looked as if he was mistaken: It was the chemists and the gunners who had the last word.

"I do not want to draw an unfair picture of this quarrel.

"There were thousands of young men as padres at the front would testify in whom belief in God was an unshakable conviction, and who in danger, in bodily anger and in death, found peace and consolation in their undimmed faith.

"There were thousands and thousands again for whom religion had always been a matter of indifference and to whom it remained so.

"But there were also those—not negligible in point of numbers, and far from negligible in point of intelligence—who quietly thought about it all and found that the faith in which they had been brought up was not reconcilable with the horrors that were their daily bread. About the reality of them there was no doubt: to see your friend turned to tripe or a dish of brains before your eyes was actual, and they threw over the other, not with indifference but with the savage contempt of those who have been fooled. It was childish to talk of loving your enemies when you were going through hell yourself for the sake of maiming or killing them as profusely as possible.

"And what price Divine Protection for non-combatants?

"There was that padre—bloody fool!—who ran out across a shell-swept area to administer the sacrament to a man who lay

mortally wounded in front of a trench, and who was like to die before they could bring him in. A shell hit him directly as he ran. He vanished like a property in a conjuring trick, and one couldn't help laughing—and was sick afterwards."

Mr. Benson reveals himself too, in a reference to a Mrs. Anstey who sought to console her daughter, Joyce, over the death of the man the girl was to marry.

"Joyce's mother," he proceeds, "returned from the church service and did all that might have been expected of her, even quoting the hymn, 'For Ever With the Lord.' Soon Mrs. Anstey wore the girl's nerves to fiddlestrings. She spoke in a low voice. She said: 'Darling, how brave you are being about it.' She laid occasional hands of sympathy on her head. She talked of the dead as having 'crossed over,' and what hosts of friends there would be to welcome him on the other bank.' It was all such rubbish—the same old fairy tale. It was not even worth while to ask her how she knew there would be anybody there, or if there was any other bank."

Following his participation in a spiritualistic seance, Mr. Benson makes this very frank comment (a comment that would appear to clearly indicate his disbelief in any after-life): "It is impossible to conceive any discovery that could be made in the realms of human knowledge comparable with a proof—or, indeed, with very strong evidence—that the individual is not extinguished by death."

Derisively he goes on to write, in the way of a summing-up of the industrial troubles and the growing indifference to religion in the post-war years:—

"The Fatherhood of God fared no better than the brotherhood of man, for the war which, according to the message preached from a thousand pulpits, was to have brought near and made living to the indifferent and the faithless, His protective paternity had proved that these privileges must be heavily paid for and in advance. Or, perhaps, he was a god like the God of Abraham, who demanded the blood-sacrifice of his son for the due testing of his faith and, this time, had insisted on its summation.

"Already, before the war, the national indifference to matters of religion had been on the increase and the Church had been losing hold, and these four years had vastly accelerated the process. Some, those chiefly who had seen service, rejected it with scorn and bitterness, but apart from them the attitude of the mass of the nation was to turn from it as from some topic that lacked interest and reality. There was no slogan or crusade against it. It was merely a bundle of discarded and obsolete pieties, rubbish that lay littered in the house of life and had perhaps, better be cleared away, lest the microbes that bred in those medieval rags should again infect the spirit of man with fevers of childish superstition.

"The house must be cleaned and set in order, made habitable for a race that now looked on the world with a more enlightened eye.

"Perhaps if religion had been actively attacked the justified indifference to it would not have been so widespread, for those who still held to their faith and their churchmanship might have put up a fight. No cause is lost while there are enemies to be fought and while there is the will to fight them. But there were no enemies for the mass of the nation was not hostile to religion at all, and it did no harm in their opinion.

"By all means let anyone who felt like that go to church and say his prayers, and believe that a Power, immanent and eternal and transcendental and accessible to human petitions, took an omnipotent interest in the flux and flow of temporal affairs in one of the smallest of the stars that he had idly peppered over the sky, and that he regarded with fatherly concern the needs of the queer little insects that crawled about there for a day and were gone."

Strong, decisive words these, but they are even more justified by events since the date they were written.

There is a reminiscence of interest in "As We Are" regarding the eminent financier, Sir Ernest Cassel.

"He married an Englishwoman of the Roman Catholic faith," relates Mr. Benson, "and when his wife lay a-dying her irreparable misery was that, according to the tenets of her faith, she would never see her adored husband again in the eternal life on the threshold of which she now stood, for he had no religious beliefs of any sort and was therefore a lost soul."

Ernest Cassel appealed to the priest who was attending her and begged him to baptise him then and there, and thus he would become a redeemed member of Holy Church. He promised if this was done to make a serious study of the faith, and a conscientious endeavour to accept it. The priest to his everlasting credit thereupon baptised him, and his wife died happy in the belief that she would be united to him again when he too was done with the times of probation. For a period of six months following her death, Cassel studied theological matters under the instruction of a priest. But the attempt at spiritual enlightenment was fruitless and after this honest and thorough trial he gave it up as unprofitable, for he found himself unable to believe a word of orthodox dogma.

However, having been received into Holy Church and baptised into the communion of true believers, he was technically, though he believed nothing, a Catholic, and, after his death, a Requiem Mass was said for him at Farm Street to the astonishment of all but the few who were aware of this strange story."

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

## THOUGHTS ON RELIGION IN THE NAVY

HIS Majesty's Royal Navy is of course composed of two distinct classes: the wardroom and the lower deck. The gulf between these is deeper by far than any of the uncharted, bottomless depths of the Pacific. The officer, assumed to have a sensitive skin, has the undeniable privilege of placing his recumbent (but not always unclothed) form between laundered sheets, laundered by a degraded member of the lower deck, naturally. That the ratings' skin is not sensitive, making sheets unnecessary is well enough known.

Wardroom food is prepared in the wardroom galley, it is whispered by the officers that all sorts of low contrivances and Machiavelian schemes are included in its preparation. In the ships' galley, however, subterfuge is unnecessary. Many a "bosuns" party has stepped on and over the meat carcasses the day previous to their being cooked, and was it not remarked by a rating when given Grade 3 salmon, "That after all one couldn't grumble, there were only two grades better than that." If the consistent epidemics of mild dysentery caused by sediments of the previous day's meal in the cooking tins did not occur, why, the M.O. would have no queues outside the sickbay every forenoon.

Religion which is privately condemned by the wardroom "strong men" is supported because "the ratings expect it." The padre, a good fellow who can find no wrong in swearing, smoking or drinking except of course after his demobilisation, can also find no wrong in the widening chasm of the two Naval classes. Eighteen inches is quite sufficient space for a rating to sling his hammock in, if not the padre would surely complain to the Captain and have the King's Rules and Admiralty Instructions altered.

Religious service is usually voluntary not because the space allocated to the padre is insufficient to hold half the ship's company not on watch but because voluntary attendances are large enough. Unfortunately on a battleship where the padre's "Church" is larger, attendances might and often do become compulsory.

The padre too will lecture on the religious aspect of many of the Biblical towns that the ship might pass. Why, I remember

the padre taking infinite trouble to explain the relations of Tyre and Sidon with bibliography and to make it topical he chose the very day that we bombarded those two places. And his operoseness when taking parties from Haifa to the birthplace of Jesus in Nazareth to stop the car on the top of the hill that overlooks this ancient and historic village, to explain how much better it looked from afar and entreat us to remember it from that distance rather than inside it's gates, where as he so rightly said, commercialism, flies and guides abound in the dingy, filthy, squalid streets. Unfortunately I was never able to elucidate clearly from him as to the fact of more than one "carpenters shop." While on board, with a frank openmindedness, he encouraged debates on religious subjects, being always at hand of course to use his subtle, restraining influence if the course of the debate became too "heretic."

So many difficulties beset the poor padre, so gallantly did he meet them, so persistently did he keep the ensign of faith, a little tattered perhaps, flying high. That chasm, that gulf between the classes so wide, so constant in my thoughts, on which side was the padre.

I know now. He laid on one side quite flat and with arm extended waved his flag sufficiently far to reach the other.

S. NATHAN.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### PENSIONS FOR MOTHERS.

SIR.—Bachelors and spinsters are taxed and during my last full working year 1944-45 I worked over 100 days for the Government without receiving a penny for myself. Children are wanted to provide factory and cannon fodder for the future.

Freethinkers should think for themselves and be capable of deciding how they shall live. Until we can supply the present population with adequate food, clothing and shelter we need fewer children.

Pensions for mothers was adopted by the Nazis and Fascists whom we were supposed to be opposing during the recent war but apparently we are only adopting their methods ourselves and establishing National Socialism both in this country and America.

Nearly every issue of "The Freethinker" gives some instance of Nazi methods in operation here (Elizabeth Millard's article, for example) and every issue of the "Industrial Worker" (U.S.A.) and "Freedom" (London) gives similar instances, including the existence of very complete "Gestapo" agencies.—Yours, etc.,

L. SANDERSON.

## 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., Rev. F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.: "The Perils of Superstition."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Bakers Hall, 122, Upper North Street, Belfast).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., Mr. F. C. BLORE: "The Social Origin of Moral Law." Admission 6d.

Blackpool Branch N.S.S. (Alexander Cafe, Victoria Street, Blackpool).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "Nature, Man, and God"; 6-30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "God and the Atomic Bomb."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. H. L. SEARLE: "The Materialistic Basis of Life."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. C. BRADLAUGH BONNER: "Religious Instruction."

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA: "Freethought or Christianity."

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