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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Magic and Medicine

SOME years ago a very well known medical man, one who stood high in the opinions of his brother men, asked to have his name removed from the medical register. This was not because he had in any way infringed the rules which all medical men respect, it was because he wished to deal with things in a way which might not fall into line with official practice. It was a noble sacrifice by a fine character; and after all, he was only in line with a tradition that runs right back to ancient Greece and the father of medical science. Two hundred years before the alleged birth of Jesus—who sanctioned and practised the most primitive forms of exorcism and magic, raising men from the dead by a wave of his hand, and curing blindness by rubbing spittle in a blind man's eye—the Greek founder of scientific medicine, Hippocrates, had declared that all disease arose from natural causes, and should be treated by natural methods. It was also Hippocrates who laid down the rules that should dominate a doctor's mind and practice, rules that all licensed practitioners must subscribe to to-day. Meanwhile, it may be noted that our Church of England prayer book still insists on the magical cause of disease whatever be its nature.

The cure of disease is a great and noble work. It calls forth all that is worthy in the human character. In this respect it leaves behind the Church and the Army. The Church does not advance by the normal force of life; it threatens punishments in the next world for those who do not obey its commands; and the soldier's period of greatness is usually of small endurance. It may also be borne in mind that the Church has in its service an army of interested persons, and a still larger army of foolish ones. The appeals of religion are obviously matters of misdirection, but even to-day there are myriads of people who believe that the decency of human association would not persist in the absence of belief in another life. The priest who visits people in need insists that his doing so is solely due to God, and without religion human conduct would fall to the level of mere animal life. That is as the priest would have it. Those who really know the poor, know that in their kindness to distressed neighbours they are second to none. But they neither boast of their deeds, nor attribute their kindness to God. Theirs is a greater charity than that of priest or millionaire. The preacher says: "I help the poor man because God told me to do so." The back street human says, "Yer can't let the poor blighter starve." Case for case, there is often more manhood in an oath than in a prayer. Poor human beings; religion has robbed them of much, and there will be no real alteration until mankind puts the gods on one side.

But what I had in mind when I commenced writing was not what I have written, but one's pen will now and again take charge. What I had in mind was the outlook that belongs—at least on paper—to both priest and medico. I do not wish to bother with the fanciful foolishness that the doctor is concerned with the body and the priest with the soul. In truth, the doctor is concerned with man as a whole, and can leave nothing unnoticed. A patient's hopes and fears, interests and dislikes, with many other human phases, the doctor will not discard. It is the priest who is one-sided and finds his dealings most satisfactory when his patients are most helpless.

But there is, in one respect, a very clear difference between the parson and the doctor. After a time the doctor will say, if successful, "Well, I shall not have to call again. Look after yourself, and you will not need me." And the patient will reply, very heartily, "I hope not," and with a shake of the hand the two part. But once get into the hands of a priest and the song is, "You must come to me regularly for my ministrations. The longer you are with me the more you will need me. Remember always that you cannot stand alone." The doctor's aim is to make his patient independent. The whole aim of the priest is to convince one that a man cannot stand alone. The doctor aims at creating a feeling of independence, he finds a man weak and leaves him strong. The priest finds a man strong and leaves him with a growing conviction that he is spiritually sick, and the "sicker" the patient the greater the triumph. Independence of character is an insult to God.

If by some method there were found an immediate cure for all mental diseases, all churches will suffer, but the Roman Church would be put out of business. In countries where the Roman Church can and does rule, local papers are full of miraculous cures of diseases, to say nothing of good business deals. Cases of sickness, etc., have their price. In other situations, where discretion has to be shown, other plans are adopted. Thus, right in the heart of the City of London, there is one of the oldest churches in the country. One of its special features is the power of certain saints to cure or prevent sore throats, and once every year the church is thronged with sturdy business men and others who come to pray to a special saint to cure or prevent sore throats. All over the Catholic world the same process, in kind, is to be found. No charge is made, but payment is expected. If the same method was adopted in a private house the police would interfere. But the Churches are privileged and careful. Who can say that when a doctor successfully removed a deadly cancer that it is the work of an angel, and that the doctor is just a tool? There are forms of logic that will knock a philosopher sideways. The Church may defy anyone to prove that those who escaped a sore throat did not owe their freedom from pain to a guardian angel.

The whole of the Roman Church may defy disproof. One need not wonder that the European world went sick before the advances of the Christian Church.

In the best days of Pagan Rome we hear of few outbreaks of serious diseases. But the Romans had their baths, and they were in use by all—rich and poor. It is in the Christian-dominated world that we get rampant disease after disease. It was the Christian Church that fought against the development of scientific treatment. Did not Jesus cure the sick by driving out devils? The Church even made it a rule that when doctors were called they were under the supervision of a priest. What that meant we may see in that deeply interesting book by Johannes Nohel, "The Black Plague." We give one case out of many. A plague had broken out and advice was asked from the Pope. The people were dying by hundreds. The Pope gave advice, and it ran as follows:—

"Jesus, Mary, Anna, Michael Bernardius, Miclajus, Sebastinus, Christofolus, Martinus, Silvester, Rochus and Gutrus.

"There should be read fifteen paternosters, and five Ave Marias and seventeen rosaries. He who does this shall not die of the plague, for it has been tried in many towns, and by the will of God it has been stayed in the self same hour.

"This is the will of God and our Beloved Lady, and of his blessed five wounds which neither swelled nor festered."

Then followed some inscribed papers, duly and properly blessed:

"And this ye must inscribe on a paper folded seven times to the number of five times, and every day on an empty stomach eat, saying the while five paternosters and five Ave Marias."

And the disease, after some time, did die away.

This is not, of course, the only effort made by the Papacy. As late as 1657 there was a plague in Naples. A letter was carried to Rome by a very pious philosopher and physician. A letter came in reply direct from the Virgin Mary, "The Mother of God." It ran:—

"The Virgin Mary, the humble handmaid of God, the Mother of Jesus Christ, sends greetings to all inhabitants of Naples. Ye confess that my son was born of God. Therefore do I bless you and the citizens, and will forever be your guard and protector. Given in the year of my son, 1642. . . Dated at Jerusalem by Virgin Mary, who vouches for the above handwriting."

There is one consideration that has its application both to disease and the historic Church. Diseases that are too deadly kill the material on which deadly germs live. It cuts off its own supporters—at least the more deadly forms die out. This principle applies to the world at large as well as the Roman Church. If the Church had retained its full strength, the civilisation of Europe would have completely died out. But the revival of the old Pagan culture forced the Church to loosen its authority, but without completely giving up its poisonous influence. Europe was saved, not by Christian aid, but by the revival of the

culture of Greece and Rome, strengthened by the later culture of the Mohammedan world.

The history of Christianity gives us what we may call a useful picture of a reversed preventive practice. It has done nothing to make human society better, but under pressure of the development of knowledge it has been compelled to come to terms with its opponents. In its earlier stages Christians appeared to have seen little more than a probably ending world with salvation being purchased by a small body of believers. Greeks and Romans saw in society at least the possibility of a progressive growth, a life that offered opportunities. Whatever the better type of men and women saw in the old Pagan world, they did not live without hope. But to the Christians nothing of that kind existed. It was pessimistic from the start. A few favoured persons might be saved, but not by the way of social effort or skill. Even to-day our Christian leaders cannot think of man as higher than convicted criminal who may receive an unearned pardon.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

POLITICAL CATHOLICISM AND THE FUTURE.

THE Church of Rome emerges from the Second World War as by far the most powerful of the Christian Churches and immeasurably the most formidable antagonist of the intellectual emancipation of mankind. To that pre-eminent position the recent world conflict has itself assisted the Papacy to rise. For Nazism, by effectually destroying Lutherism in Germany, indirectly strengthened Rome, against which Lutherism had represented a barrier ever since the Reformation. Just as, similarly, the Russian Revolution had effectively broken the power of the Greek Orthodox Church, another former religious competitor. Even in England the at present desperate plight of decadent Toryism necessitates an ever-more obvious recourse to religious opium. One has only to look at the current programmes of the B.B.C. to observe this. And the brew of opium dispensed from the Vatican is so much more potent than the wishy-washy Anglican brew that one must expect an increasingly close tie-up between Rome and the British Reaction. All of which augurs well for the political, no less than the ecclesiastical status of Roman Catholicism.

To be sure, the Church of Rome has always been at least semi-political, as its most acute critics have not failed to emphasise; had we the space we could illustrate this point with innumerable quotations. And it has been so from the earliest times. For in the highly political atmosphere of Imperial Rome, the then metropolis of the western world, the original Galilean "zionist" Christian movement of the founders of Christianity quickly assumed a predominantly political and administrative character. One must suppose, indeed, that, long before Constantine, some far-sighted Roman ecclesiastics, perhaps as early as the second century, when the canon of the New Testament was completed, saw the immense possibilities of world power inherent in the new "Universal" (Catholic) Church at a time when (as St. Cyprian clearly stated in his letter to the Roman Pro-Consul of Africa, Demetrianus, A.D. 250) both the civilisation of secular antiquity and the power of the Roman Empire were visibly headed for decay and ultimate collapse. Under such circumstances, men, perhaps drawn, like St. Benedict later on, from the innermost circles of the Roman ruling class, the most capable political class in antiquity, could hardly have failed to have set about the transformation of a Church into an empire which was finally

achieved by the mediæval Papacy, in accordance with the blueprint provided by St. Augustine in his "City of God" (A.D. 427).

In this last connection, it may well be that pre-Christian pagan institutions may well have provided some useful hints. In particular the Delphic Oracle which upon the more restricted terrain of Greek civilisation discharged many of the functions of a pagan Papacy. To be sure, Plato, by far the most influential of the Greek philosophers, has drawn up in his "Laws" (c. 360 B.C.) a meticulously accurate blueprint in his imaginary constitution for his sinister "Nocturnal Council," of what the Inquisition was to become sixteen centuries later. No wonder that Plato has been termed "the first Christian."

At any rate, whatever its precise antecedents, the Roman Catholic Church has always been and is to-day, still distinguished by a "totalitarian" character which sunders it sharply and definitely from all other Christian Churches whatsoever. For which reason, "anti-Catholicism" is, and by its very nature, always must be, quite distant from a merely negative attitude towards Christianity as such.

The attitude of this world-wide ecclesiastical corporation towards the recent world conflict was somewhat equivocal. From one point of view, that represented by its attitude towards Russia, the pro-Fascist sympathies of the Vatican were unmistakable. Though the present writer finds himself unable to share, without at least considerable reservations, the view propounded by certain left-wing writers on the subject, who appear to treat the Papacy as just one hundred per cent. Fascist, as, in fact, merely the spiritual gendarmerie of Hitler and Mussolini. Such a single-track viewpoint constitutes, in our submission, a somewhat crude over-simplification of a much more complex question. It would, or so at least it appears to us, be more accurate to state that Fascism, from the stand-point of the Vatican, represented, so to speak, a "mixed" grill, which it accordingly viewed with mingled feelings.

For example, on the one hand, Fascism, *vis-à-vis* the Papacy, represented a useful big stick to beat down Communism and Freethought. Incidentally, eliminating Russia en route. This aspect of Papal policy was, and, for that matter, is still very evident in relation to Spain and practically all left-wing writers on both politics and religion have emphasised it. In fact, in our submission, they have over-emphasised it; or, more precisely, have under-estimated, or even totally ignored another equally fundamental aspect of political Catholicism; which last is that the Roman Catholic Church is itself a totalitarian state; in fact the oldest of all (all the Fascist dictators learned much from it) and, also, the most totalitarian, in fact, the only *really* totalitarian one, since it not only claims the allegiance of its subjects from the cradle to the grave, but, also beyond the grave as well, for even the grave, according to its teaching, only divides one of its "concentration camps" from another.

Such a super "total" state could never conceivably have existed for long with Fascism, with its substitution for an infallible Pope of a still more infallible Führer. Had Hitler won his war, the Roman Church would have had to fight a (probably) losing battle for its life. And it is fantastic to assume that such experienced politicians as the oldest European dynasty did not realise this.

In fact, to realise it, they had only to consult their own history. For the "Holy Roman Empire" of the mediæval era furnishes what is, *mutatis mutandis*, an exact prototype of what the relations between Rome and a victorious Fascism would have been. They were stormy relations. For whilst the Papacy had itself created the Holy Roman Empire (A.D. 800) as a protector against its Mohammedan and Pagan enemies, yet, subsequently, as every student of mediæval history knows, the Church had to fight for its life against its own creation and, in fact, it became a mediæval proverb that "no Pope could be a Ghibelline" (i.e., supporter of the Empire), and yet the mediæval empire at its height never put forward claims to universal jurisdiction that

were even remotely comparable to the every day practice of Fascism. In truth, the Vatican is so constituted that it is axiomatic that it can never share power with anyone for long.

In the light of what has been stated above one can now view the prospects of political Catholicism in the current world as it appears, on the morrow of the defeat of the Fascist powers.

At the present time the Papacy is ostensibly backing two horses simultaneously. On the one hand, in Spain, Portugal, and Argentina, it backs the Fascist, or clerical-Fascist dictatorships which have come to power as the vehicles of political and cultural reaction. Whilst, on the other, it cautiously encourages Catholic Democracy in France, Italy, and the Anglo-Saxon countries. Of these two contemporary trends in Papal policy which is the more likely to prevail?

It has been a permanent characteristic of Vatican policy in all ages to take its enemies, as far as possible, one at a time. For example, in the sixteenth century, all its energies were devoted to the fight against the Reformation. In fact, so much was this the case that the Jesuit Order, though originally founded to fight Islam, soon became absorbed in the contemporary struggle against the Reformation. And to-day, similarly, the Church also has one fundamental enemy: the Social Revolution, Communism; using this last term as a convenient synonym for all those social forces which, in contradistinction from the gradual reforms advocated by, say, the British Labour Government and by Social Democracy in general, aim at a fundamental transformation of social relationships. And, if Communism is the enemy of the Church in the abstract, Russia, the country of the first revolution which sought to establish it, represents the concrete focal point against which any proximate "crusades" must be directed.

In an earlier article, published in the "Freethinker," we have indicated that, in our submission, Rome is fully justified in her tenacious belief that the coming of World Communism would mean the end of religion, and that accordingly, Rome fights for her very life.

[N.B. In a summary article of this kind we cannot go into the question of motive; the Roman Church, by and large, depends for its very existence on the prevalence of the belief in God, though, no doubt, in the higher ranks of the clergy there must be many who re-echo the historic aphorism of the Renaissance Pope: "What a profitable superstition for Popes is that fable of Christ?"]

From what we have just said above, we draw this practical conclusion: Rome will adopt, at least for the time being, the politics of those countries which can be of the greatest use to her in her primary tasks of smashing Russia by military action and of policing Europe effectually against Communism (using the word in the broad non-party and sociological sense in which we have defined it above). And who are the allies who might be able to undertake so extremely formidable a task? Yesterday, it was Hitler, but who could seriously suggest that any of the remaining Fascist dictators could succeed where the mighty German war machine failed? Franco? Ask his "Blue Division" who have already figured in one retreat in the Russian winter!

The only hope for a successful war against Russia and "the spectre of Communism," a war for which every Catholic Church in the world is now a potential recruiting platform, lies in the armed support of America and Britain. The Church does not lack influence in either country, and, as we have recently seen with startling clarity, there are powerful reactionary interests in both countries outside the Catholic Church, which for their own secular ends would gladly underwrite the Vatican in so holy a task.

In our view, Rome will reciprocate; the next Pope will probably be an American, thus ending the Italian monopoly which has subsisted since the Reformation. There is now, for the first

(Continued on page 195.)

ACID DROPS

Speaking at a meeting of the "World's Congress of Faith," Lord Samuel said that "even if the Churches seem to be dogmatic, still they exercise a terrific influence upon a vast proportion of people." We really thought that Lord Samuel was above that rather cheap pulpit talk. First of all it is never safe to discuss the reasons given by people how they act, since the vast majority are quite incapable of the required self-analysis. We should say that about one person out of 20 who gives a reason for his action—or absence of action—is a very generous estimate. The vast majority of people simply cannot find adequate reasons for their actions. We fancy that any scientific critic will agree with us.

As to the terrific influence of the Church on people—this is so far from the truth that we are inclined to feel that Lord Samuel was either pulling some one's leg or his analysis of character is very poor indeed. The vast majority of people act first, and find convenient reasons for how they acted afterwards. As to the influence of the Church on character, only a small percentage of people ever go to church, and character is formed more from natural qualities than from the preaching or teaching of either a church or any other organisation. Perhaps, after all, Lord Samuel was feeling unusually generous or he has been corrupted by the Brains Trust.

The Bishop of the Methodist Church in New York, and President of the Federal Council of Churches in America, says that "(Protestants) are gravely concerned over what they believe to be an attempt on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to exercise political domination in the U.S.A. similar to the control exercised in other nations." We are not surprised at the news, it is the policy adopted wherever the Catholic Church is established. It is as active as it dare be even in this country, and if anyone could compile a list of Roman Catholics in "key positions" it would open their eyes.

Having said that, it remains true to say that, allowing for opportunities and also for the fact that the very way in which the Protestants are broken into numerous sections makes for greater freedom all round, there is little difference between Protestants and Catholics. Of the two the Protestants are the least bigoted—taken in bulk. But that allowed, the anti-social character of religious bodies remains.

Consider, for example, the trouble about Sunday entertainments and remember the opposition that was offered to Sunday travelling, Sunday opening of museums and art galleries, etc., etc. Those who fought against Sunday freedom, and who still fight against it, were just in the position that the Roman Catholics appear to be in the U.S.A. The sum of the whole situation is that Christianity is always a threat to civil freedom so far as their strength permits the churches to act. "There is blood upon the hand," etc., etc.

The Rev. F. Sparrow rebukes the lack of interest people have in Christianity, and reminds those who are Christians that "It was the sterling reality of the early Christians that brought them victory." Maybe, but nowadays they do not find Jesus feeding multitudes with a handful of bread and a few fishes, and similar things. Now if Jesus, or the Roman Catholic gang of Saints, would work one of their miracles—which appears to occur very frequently—and drop a few thousand tons of food, there would be no lack of followers. Mr. Sparrow is not fair in his judgment.

Fr. C. Whitworth, a Cowley Father working in India, is very pessimistic about the future of Christianity there as his religion is, in the eyes of the Hindu, bound up with foreign domination; and he sees very few converts in the future. All the missions could do was "to strengthen their stakes." Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been poured into the mission field of India, and this is the result. There was only one thing now to do, according to Fr. Whitworth, and that was for the white

Christians in India "to work in subordination to Indians"—a rather bitter pill for a "superior" race to swallow. Still, it has always been the boast of Christianity that all are brethren in Christ, and it ought therefore to be more than a pleasure for white Bishops and black Untouchables to kneel and worship together—perhaps!

The Church is in the doldrums. Not only are laymen treating the churches with almost open contempt, but the call for soldiers to fight for Jesus falls very flat. We are told that three thousand soldiers are required to fight for Jesus and only a few volunteers respond and many of these are declined. The Archbishop of Canterbury is alarmed while plaintively confessing that "the Church cannot carry on without a ministry," and the Church in addition to the demand for more needs in solid cash £600,000 for home use, and an additional £100,000 to re-establish the Church in China. Whether the Church will get the money or not remains to be seen, probably it will, for there are many interests locked up with the Church. The Church is maintained by bolsters from without not by pillars from within.

One of God's representatives writes to the "Church Times" and that he recently performed a Christian marriage ceremony and duly invoked the blessing of God, only to find that the marriage turned out disastrously. We sympathise with the priest, but the situation is not as black as he thinks. For if the marriage was a legal one he was only acting as a civil registrar of marriages; it was not a religious ceremony. Moreover, the priest himself became for the time being a servant of the civil government, and nothing else. Finally, for the purpose of a civil marriage, the Church ceases to be a Church and becomes a registered building. And by way of a footnote it may cheer the priest to learn that there are probably more religious mishaps where the Church is concerned than where it is not.

The Town Clerk of Blackburn, where there is a tug at present whether the only comic performances shall be performed in a church or in a cinema, has declared that if the town had Sunday shows it will mean a seven-day work for all concerned. But that is downright foolishness. There is no greater necessity for seven-day labour with regard to cinemas than there is for any other occupation. Moreover, if the people generally are to enjoy their day of rest—without any regard to Sunday—it is essential that there shall be division of working time which can easily be managed without interfering with anybody. The real thing is that the church dare not face a people with freedom of action and opinion.

The Rev. E. W. Mowill, Bishop of Middleton, says that "the idea that increased education would produce more and better Christians has been exploded by two world wars." We do not agree to that. All that the wars have done is to prove that as a means of preventing wars religion is useless. It is well to remember that the last world war has completely demonstrated the fact religion does more to create wars than to prevent them, and each party believes that God is on their side. The last war—or ought we to say the present war—is the first that has one of the armies which put God on one side. And no one has yet been able to say that it made any marked difference. The only clear issue is that God is always on the side of the biggest guns and the best fighting men. What religion does is to bless bloodshed and to plant the seeds of still more wars.

The Catholic Press is doing its best to persuade foolish and self-interested people to look forward to a new Russia that will reinstitute the Russia of pre-Revolution days. That is a sheer impossibility. There may, of course, be changes up or down, backward or forward—history presents many cases of the kind. But to imagine that the Russian people will return to the Churches, and to something like the Russia of Tsarist days, is just nonsense. And, of course, the same people of influence who hated Russia before the war still hate, and it is those that we have to note. We fancy this is why Russia, wisely or unwisely, appears to be striving to create a circle of defences that will prevent another onslaught. Russia can be a world by itself, and if it becomes that the rest of the world will suffer.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.—Will appear next week.
 "EX-SERVICEMAN."—We never accept articles without the name and address of the sender.
 G. PECK.—We are pleased to hear from a comparatively new reader. Thanks also for newspaper cuttings. They are useful.
 W. THERGOOD.—Next week, if possible.
 H. THOMPSON.—Some of these century old—or more—magazines are often very instructive, and are always interesting. Time seems to have the power of converting what was once a dull record of uninteresting matter to one which bristles with interest. The secret of it is probably that it comes as near as possible to resurrecting the dead.
 C. CHAMPION.—You are probably right that a large number of the Socialist leaders are in their hearts Freethinkers. Many of them, of course, heartily confess it, but those who keep their Freethinking to themselves, and even profess high opinions of Christianity, are not of much use so far as our movement is concerned. Our need is for Freethinkers who are Freethinkers to the world and not merely to friends.

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

Some local alterations had had to be made in the arrangements for the N.S.S. Annual Conference at Bradford. The business meetings and evening demonstration will all be held in the Mechanics Institute, Town Hall Square. The Conference lunch will be at Benson's Cafe, Ivetgate. The proposed outing on Whit. Monday is cancelled owing to difficulties of travel and catering for a large party, but something else will be arranged for those staying over Monday.

A few weeks ago we called attention to the opening of the "New Lindsey Theatre," controlled by men and women who consider art first and the strength of the box office takings second. The first play went well and the public was introduced to the art of producing good plays under cramped conditions. The second play, still in being, brings before the public material that belongs to no nation in particular. The title of the play is "The Pick-Up Girl." The theme is that of a young child of about sixteen who is brought before a juvenile court and in the end is sent to a hospital to be treated for syphilis, none knowing of the fact except the Judge. The man who is responsible is in the 40's. There is only one scene, although the curtain drops at intervals. The whole story—the examination of the girl, her parents and others by the Judge—is conducted in a way that scatters to the winds and leaves, or should leave, one feeling that more than the single man is responsible; we all in some way are locked in it. The whole story—the examination of the parents, of the child and others—never drags; nor is anything offensive in action or speech, and, what is more important, interest never lags. Joan Miller (the Mother), Jessica Spencer (the Girl before the Court), Hugh Price (the Father), Ernest Jay (the Judge) play their parts with that restrained strength of which every actor should be proud. Special recognition must be given to Peter Cotes, who brought together so fine a team and, what is more, kept its members together.

The Chaplain of the Fleet appears to have got things mixed. Speaking at the Albert Hall, Nottingham, he said that "the presence of God can be had for the asking." Now that would be news if it were true. But the important thing is, in what language do we call on God and what are we expected to do? The Chaplain of the Fleet answers no questions, and the evidence he gives, or can give, is of the quality of the visions of a man who sees snakes crawling round his bedroom.

The Sheffield Branch N.S.S. hold a Garden Party in the grounds of 18, Junction Road, Woodhouse, at 2-30 p.m. to-day, and Mr. J. T. Brighton will give an address. Mr. Brighton will also speak at Barkers Pool at 7-30 in the evening for the local N.S.S. Branch.

The West Ham and Bethnal Green Branches N.S.S. will join in holding meetings in Victoria Park during the open-air season, and to-day Mr. Ivor Greenhouse will open the series with a lecture at 6 p.m. There is a large number of Freethinkers in the area who will no doubt appreciate the revival of activity and give their support.

The following which appeared in the "Sunday Mercury" (Birmingham) will be of interest to our readers:—

"Darlston people were intrigued to read a few days ago an announcement by Mr. G. White, of Simmonds-place, that he absolved his family from any blame for the course of action which he decreed should be taken with his body after death.

"Mr. White, who died a few weeks ago, was one of Darlston's first members of the freethinking National Secular Society.

"He had read that atheists usually retracted their beliefs as they lay dying, so he drew up a statement which he had witnessed, that he would die as he lived, and that he wanted no church rites or prayers at his funeral.

"He was cremated and his ashes scattered on a garden.

"There was no religious service, but an oration from the Society said: 'We say farewell—pass out,' and the coffin slid into the fire."

We were pleased to see a successful objection made in the Matlock Urban Council was the rejection of a proposal to open its business proceedings with prayer. The suggestion was made by the Chairman, who should have known better, but was opposed by Mr. G. W. Burton, who said that he "could not see how prayer would bring a pint of water to Bonsall or bring nearer the sewage scheme or any social progress." We think it is time that this stupid practice was ended. Men in possession should bear in mind the fact that England is not a Christian nation, it is only a nation where Christianity gives some special favours to some people and insults to others. Our compliments to Mr. Burton, and may the Chairman develop a better sense of fair play.

In a recent number of the "Church Times" the Rev. G. L. Wheeler discusses the Church and the Cinema, and we are glad to see he has no vain illusions on the question. He recognises the utter impossibility of the Religious Film Society to compete with Hollywood in producing films, especially as the Society has no film writers or actors or directors or producers, or even the money to be able to do so with the slightest hope of success. All they can do is to produce "Bible stories faithfully told or religious documentaries."

The "Church Times" has a leader on the subject which completely supports what we have said. It admits that "many specifically religious films are faulty both in technique and theology," and so it advises the Church to provide the expert advice to make the film a success. The idea that the average or even the expert parson, with his particular training, would be able to produce a film worth seeing is uproariously fantastic, especially as we are solemnly informed that "as Christians show themselves increasingly appreciative of the film as an art-form" a body will grow up among them which will "purify" the commercial form. We wonder whether the gentleman who wrote this drivel has ever laughed!

PEN PICTURES OF FRENCH REFORMERS

IN his "Leaders of the French Revolution" (Basil Blackwell, Oxford), Mr. J. M. Thompson surveys the careers of eleven prominent actors in that thrilling drama. All these studies are dispassionate, and the redeeming features of even the most constantly vilified Revolutionaries such as Danton, Marat and Robespierre, are fairly acknowledged.

In the nineties of last century, Lord Acton asserted that in a few years' time, with the publication of a mass of new material that had been discovered, "all will be known that ever can be known" concerning the Revolution. But, even now, forty years later, as Thompson notes: "New material is still being published and imperfect judgments are still being expressed."

Political partisanship pervades many accounts of the upheaval composed by French historians, while English chroniclers have frequently displayed sectarian bias. But in Thompson's essays, elemental influences are fully recognised and his protagonists appear the creatures of heredity and environment. "'Leaders,' we call them, but indeed they were led—or rather, swept of their feet, and carried along by a movement which they were powerless to control."

In presenting an outline of the leading events that preceded and signalised the Revolution, its biographer recalls that from 1744 to 1789, every effort to evade the consequences of a king's incompetence, clerical and aristocratic tyranny, and an insolvent State having failed, the States General was at last assembled in Paris (May, 1789). This body was converted into a National Assembly which declined dissolution until the Crown consented to redress public grievances. This was followed by the fall of the Bastille in July, and the king's forced departure from Versailles to Paris in October, 1789.

Far-reaching reforms were carried out by the National Assembly from 1789 to 1791. But Louis XVI. rashly decided to escape his enemies and fled to Varennes where he was detained and sent back to Paris. Previous to this escapade, many of the reformers were loyal to the throne, but the king's frustrated flight aroused such widespread suspicion that the republicans gained countless converts.

The sack of the Tuileries and the king's suspension, trial, and execution followed. The moderate Girondist leaders were overthrown by their pitiless Jacobin assailants and the dictatorship of Robespierre was established, only in its turn to be superseded and the path prepared for the advent of Napoleon as consul, with the later emergence of the First French Empire.

Of the outstanding personalities studied in Thompson's volume, Louvet and Mirabeau died prematurely; Marat was murdered, and all the others perished on the scaffold save Sieyès, Lafayette and Dumouriez who long outlived the Revolution.

Perhaps the astutest intellect among them was that of the Abbé Sieyès. Driven as a boy into the Church against his will, he determined in his novitiate to search for truth. This he did by studying Locke and other Deists, and then acclaimed the powers of reason and the reign of law. Thus, when he was ordained he had shed every vestige of the faith. He became an earnest social reformer, "Mirabeau's acknowledged master." He prudently avoided danger both before and during the Reign of Terror, so he lived until 1836 dying in Paris at the age of 88. "There were no religious rites at his funeral," attests his biographer, and no Catholic symbols marked his grave. More recently, emblems of the creed he despised were placed there by pious hands. Yet, royalists never pardoned Sieyès' republicanism and the priesthood never condoned his Freethought. Many have maligned his memory. Still, as Thompson urges: "Talleyrand and Carnot, two of the ablest of his contemporaries, maintained that France owed to him three inestimable boons—the National Assembly, the National Guard, and the Departmental System and called him the 'the most representative man of his age.' It is a true epitaph and does him honour."

Mirabeau's career in the Revolution was speckled, but he proved the Prometheus of that troubled time. Had he lived and possessed power his dauntless policy might have spared the Revolution its worst excesses. When death was near he told his physician, Cabanis, that his end had come and now he would "fall pleasantly into the sleep from which there is no awaking." An immense concourse attended his funeral and he was the first statesman interred in the national Pantheon.

As a youth, Lafayette fought for American independence and he and other Frenchmen brought back to France the democratic aspirations of the New World. These views were regarded with suspicion by the French Court, when Lafayette was lionised as an apostle of liberty. Jefferson even proposed the grant of an American estate to the Frenchman if he became an exile. But Lafayette's opinions were now so prevalent that there was no danger of their repression.

When the Revolution came, Lafayette's moderation made him unpopular. He then left France in disgust and trusted to be welcomed by the rulers of Austria and Prussia. But those potentates considered him the revolutionary of 1789, and therefore a dangerous character. So he was immersed for five years in dark and loathsome dungeons. Fortunately, he was still young and possessed a sound constitution. Otherwise "he might never have survived treatment compared with which the lot of many of the prisoners of the Terror was luxury." At the age of 40 he was released, and in 1824 revisited America where he enjoyed an enthusiastic welcome. But as a statesman he was a distinct failure.

Brissot was an energetic journalist whose studies of Voltaire, Bentham and other humanists made him a reformer. His revolutionary proclivities were intensified by his imprisonment in the Bastille for a misdemeanour of which he was innocent. He became prominent in public affairs, but having incurred the hatred of Robespierre, he suffered death as a dangerous Girondin. Still, as Thompson states: "It is difficult not to sympathise with the Girondins in their attempt to curb the Paris mob, to defeat the 'disorganisers' (as Brissot calls the Paris leaders), and to make the Convention the real government of the country."

Danton was another protagonist who became the victim of Robespierre's virtuous dictatorship. As for Marat, the most contradictory verdicts have been pronounced concerning his character which was certainly not unblemished. St. Just's personality is better understood but at his execution he had only reached the age of twenty-seven. One who was party to his murder, Barère, said of him that he "hated the nobility as much as he loved the people."

The most sphinx-like character, however, is that of the witty lawyer, Robespierre. It is true that he inspired great admiration, but seldom, if ever, affection. His legal training was not likely to cultivate his emotions except those of an egotistical character, while he appeared incapable of appreciating another man's point of view. He plumed himself on his austere virtues although he was ever ready to sacrifice those who had faithfully served him as soon as their convictions obstructed the accomplishment of his schemes. His public life proved him a born persecutor and his attempt to establish his cult of the supreme being hastened his fall from power. Robespierre's critics saw him not only as the high priest of the new faith, but also as its Grand Inquisitor. As our essayist well observes: "They were haunted not merely with the prospect of a Puritan régime and compulsory churchgoing—in itself a sufficiently dreary outlook—but also with the dread of fresh proscriptions, aimed at those members of the congregation who failed to provide themselves with the necessary wedding garment."

T. F. PALMER.

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LOOKING BACKWARDS

"GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE," JANUARY 13, 1809.—It is a remarkable circumstance, that the ceremony of tracing the boundaries of the parish of Basingstoke commences from the very place where the great Elm-tree stood, with an act of *religious worship*; a Psalm being sung by the parish-clerk and others assembled on the occasion. This is a relic of the antient Popish processions in the perambulation of parishes; and which originally might be derived from the Heathen custom.

Parkhurst says, the Elm "may have its Hebrew name from a word signifying to *interpose*, to *intervene*, for *protection*; from its remarkably *interposing* and *protecting* men and animals from storms and tempests. The LXX have once rendered it descriptively in the Greek as the *overshadowing* tree. Hos. iv. 13." Virgil takes notice of the Elm, as possessing this property.

Your insertion of the above remarks, Mr. Urban, may, perhaps, induce some correspondent to give your readers a more satisfactory reason for Elms being so frequently met with at the junction of publick roads, and will oblige — J. J.

OBITUARY

CHARLES A. WATTS

We have to record the death of Charles Albert Watts, at the advanced age of 88. He came from a family, members of which in each generation provided a worker in the cause of Freethought. The first worked steadily with Bradlaugh, so did the second for a time. Charles A. Watts has been saturated in Freethought throughout his life, and without sacrificing his own opinions he saw that there was a large body of men and women dissatisfied with established religions and yet who lacked the courage to free themselves from them. His judgment was so far justified, and his publications proved to be a notable success. He also formed the Rationalist Press Association at home and abroad, which opened the way for heretical publications. His son, Frederick, has been in charge for some time and bids fair to continue the tradition of the family. The remains were cremated at Oxford, the service conducted by Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner. C. C.

WILLIAM WESS

With the death of William Wess in his 84th year another link with the early leaders of progressive movements is broken. As a Freethinker, Socialist and Co-operator, he took an active interest in those movements, and which brought him in contact with

POLITICAL CATHOLICISM AND THE FUTURE

(Concluded from page 191.)

time for centuries, a non-Italian majority of cardinals. The new regime will blandly disown a fascist past which is now as needless as it was always discreditable. The ancient chameleon on the seven hills will assume the democratic slogans of its new champions and the new phraseology of the holy war, for democracy, now become equivalent to "Christian civilisation," against "dictatorial Bolshevism," already foreshadowed in a notorious recent speech, with the same facility as it echoed until recently the now discarded Fascist slogans.

The danger we premiss is not an illusory one; a little more pressure on the Washington State Department, already stuffed with Catholics; a little subtle pressure, of the kind in which Rome excels, on a desperate Toryism and an already anti-Russian Labour regime served by a Tory Foreign Office, and, hey presto, the trick is turned!

Democrats and Freethinkers everywhere who rightly regard the Roman Church as to-day their principal foe, would do well to recognise, and by recognising to counteract, the growing menace which political Catholicism represents.

For, now as ever, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance."

F. A. RIDLEY.

many of the well-known leaders of his time. His remains were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on Friday, May 17, where before a large assembly of relatives and friends a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S.

R. H. R.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHARLES DICKENS.

SIR,—Again I can only say that I agree with most of my friend Kent's most interesting article—but not on the point at issue between us.

After living 12 years with Dickens it could only be an actress with "nerve" who could impress a Victorian parson that she was "repentant." Her confession, with the inevitable tears and the statement that she took a lot of "persuasion" were all in line. After all, we could not have expected her to "brazen" it out.

As for Dickens' "debunking himself"—I have possibly missed his own evidence on this affair. I can only say that it is usual in this country to treat a man as innocent until *proved* guilty. Until we have Dickens' own statement I prefer to hold him "not guilty."—Yours, etc., H. CUTNER.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. J. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 4 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.
- West Ham and Bethnal Green Branches N.S.S. (Victoria Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Mr. I. GREENHOUSE will lecture.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, J. HART and E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: "Loyalties."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. A lecture.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. C. McCALL will lecture.
- Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY will lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m., Mr. ALFRED KOLLMANN: "Czecho-Slovakia." Tea at 5 o'clock.
- Halifax Branch N.S.S. (L.L.P. Rooms, 7, St. James Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. R. W. MITCHELL: "Old Fashioned Humbugs—The Rocky Road to Secularism."
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (18, Junction Road, Woodhouse).—Garden Party, 2-30 p.m., Sunday, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will speak. At Barker's Pool, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

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ON MARTIN LUTHER AGAIN

II.

THERE is one point with regard to Martin Luther on which both Mr. Peter Wiener and the Rev. Gordon Rupp dilate in their respective books on the great Reformer. It is his notorious anti-Semitism.

Mr. Rupp does not hide the fact. "We are ready to grant," he admits, "that Luther gave vent to anti-semitic utterances." Having said that, he proceeds to demolish Mr. Wiener's charges with every argument he can lay hold of—so long as it is a good debating point.

First then, Luther's "antagonism to the Jews was poles apart from the Nazi doctrine of 'Race.'" Now, if this is so, it seems to me a small matter in the ultimate result. After all, no one would expect any doctrine held by Luther to be exactly the same as held by Hitler. There was then, as Mr. Rupp rather pathetically acknowledges, a Jewish problem—a problem caused entirely by the greed, intolerance and inhumanity of the Christians. The principal cause of this was the fact that, among the nations in Europe, the Jews would not accept Christianity, and it is this—in my opinion—which still accounts for most of the anti-Semitism today. There are other causes, but they are nothing like as strong as this one. Let me call in Mr. Rupp as a witness.

He says that for Luther's anti-Semitism he had "historic provocation." It appears that under Jewish influence some "sectaries" had "reintroduced circumcision and the laws of the Sabbath," and this movement had spread. "Such a movement," continues Mr. Rupp, "as this must, on theological grounds, have been more abhorrent to Luther than all the fanaticism of the other sects." Of course. It was bad enough for Jews to reject Luther's Christianity in general, but for them to influence some *Christian* sects in the direction of Judaism was too much for even such a thoroughly Christian hero as Luther was—*pace* Mr. Rupp. It was really awful "provocation." In fact, when the sectaries "produced a pamphlet against Luther" his "anger boiled over."

Mr. Rupp is ashamed of Luther's "vulgarity and crudity" in two pamphlets written against the Jews; but he does not at all like Mr. Wiener's way of dealing with all this. "Luther's language is vulgar," he hastens to assure us, "but it is not bawdy." Nor is it "obscene" in the sense of "titillating base passions." One can almost hear the renowned Julius Streicher in the dock at Nuremberg answering his accusers in the same oily fashion.

So Mr. Rupp goes on to "expose" Mr. Wiener's "humbug." It is not fair to deal with Luther's anti-Semitism in the way Mr. Wiener deals with it. It is most unfair to take the Lutheran passages from such "not unbiased" writers as the Jesuit Fr. Grisar or Rabbi Lewin. Mr. Rupp cannot tell how Luther's contemporaries felt when they read Luther on the Jews, so we ought not to press the great Reformer too hard. It isn't cricket.

Even if it is true that Luther said that, "the Jews deserve to be hanged on gallows seven times higher than ordinary thieves," Mr. Rupp asks, quite indignantly, "What evidence is there that any Jew was executed at Luther's behest, or murdered with his approval." Once again I am reminded of the saintly Streicher protesting that he never knew of any Jews being murdered as the result of his highly necessary propaganda against them. I expect Luther himself, in the same circumstances, would have acted like Streicher, and looked for the Gordon Rupp all over the world to support him.

In Professor Karl Pearson's essay on Martin Luther, which appeared first in the "Westminster Review" for January, 1884, and was later reprinted in "The Ethic of Freethought," we find a criticism of Luther's violent anti-Semitism well worth contrasting with Mr. Rupp's very reluctant admissions.

From Luther's pamphlet, "Von den Juden und ihren Lügen" ("About the Jews and their Lies"), Professor Pearson quotes—

"First, that the Jewish synagogues and schools be set on fire, and what will not burn be covered with earth, that no man ever after may see stick or stone thereof. . . . Secondly, that their houses in like fashion be broken down and destroyed, since they only carry on in them what they carry on in their schools. Let them content themselves with a shed or a stall like the gypsies, that they may know they are not lords in our land. . . . Thirdly, all their prayer books and Talmuds must be taken from them, since in them idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught. . . . Fourthly, that their Rabbis, on penalty of death, be forbidden to teach. . . . Fifthly, that safe conduct on the highways be denied to Jews entirely, since they have no business in the country, being neither lords, officials, traders or the like; they ought to remain at home. . . . Sixthly, usury shall be forbidden them. All that they have is stolen, and therefore is to be taken from them, and used for pensioning converts."

Mr. Rupp complains in the face of this that, after all, Luther did not preach the Nazi doctrine of "Race"—so he is not to be compared with Hitler. So that when Luther's precious teaching against the Jews were put into practice—as they were—they had one consolation; they were not attacked because of a "race" theory. They must have allowed themselves to be tortured and slaughtered with great happiness because of this. I find another reason given by Mr. Rupp with great unctuousness why Luther attacked the Jews. He could never feel, even in his last years, that "his cause was secure." I have a faint suspicion that so argued Adolf Hitler.

Professor Pearson was not, of course, trying to invent reasons why Luther was not quite as black as his record shows. There might have been some excuse in denouncing Roman Catholicism as he did, but these attacks on the Jews made the Professor "solemnly protest against that ignorance which terms Luther tolerant, or which attributes to him the origin of our culture today." He shows how, as the direct result of Luther, the law against the Jews were increased in severity, and contrasts the Reformer with the way in which the Humanist Reuchlin pleaded for a better understanding of Jewish literature and which "brought upon him the wrath of the whole Dominican Order and was the cause of that notable battle between the party of intellectual progress and the party of ignorance and bigotry." Mr. Rupp does not think that Luther helped in executing Jews or ill-treating them. This may be so, but Professor Pearson says that Luther insisted that he would carry out his threats to Jews in earnest "if he only had the power of princes." The penalty of any act of worship on the part of a Jew should be loss of life and "let him who can throw pitch and sulphur upon them, if any could throw hell fire, it were good," so that God might see our earnestness, and the whole world such an example.

Professor Pearson's quotations are taken at first hand, and he gives full authority for them.

Mr. Rupp "supposes Hitler never read a page by Luther." The fact that he and other Nazis claimed Luther on their side proves no more than the fact that they also numbered Almighty God among their supporters." I expect that when a man claims Luther and Almighty God are on his side, Mr. Rupp would be prepared to argue that this proves he must have been an Atheist.

Thus does religion darken a man's intellect—and honesty.

H. CUTNER.

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