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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Do we need Jesus?

FOR some weeks I have had lying on my table a copy of the old established "Church of England Newspaper." It contains an article by Mr. Robert Lynd, who is described by the Church newspaper as being a "famous essayist and man of letters." I do not know enough of Mr. Lynd's writings to pass any opinion as to his quality as a writer, but I should hesitate to call him a brilliant writer, and in the article before me he certainly cannot claim to be a deep thinker. What he says on behalf of Christianity is not of the highest order. It has all been said before and, I would say, much better said. If I may be excused for offering help to Mr. Lynd, I would say that he puts his meanings before his readers too plainly for all of them to be pleased, and too confused to escape some sharp criticism. For example: Jesus, so runs the historic tale, came to earth to save men from the curse placed upon mankind. The way of escape came not through good deeds but, as the story of the thieves on the cross shows, salvation came from an act of belief. The Roman Church rests on that theory, while Luther, says one Christian authority, "not only taught that Christ had not come to impart a purer ethical code but to liberate true believers from the curse placed on Adam." One of the greatest preachers of my time, Spurgeon, insisted that salvation was a matter of instantaneous action. He said: "If thou wilt trust Christ thou shalt be saved in a moment. . . . You great sinners shall have no back seats in heaven. There shall be no outer court for you." The founder of Methodism also took the same view. In fact, if we follow historic Christianity, the best way for a man to make sure of getting "saved" is to be as "sinful" as possible, then at the last moment return to Jesus and take a place in the Christian paradise. There was something in the old lady's opinion that Heaven might be a fine place for climate, but Hell was decidedly better for company.

Mr. Lynd does not champion this view of historic Christianity, but he hopes to help the Churches by stressing an alleged difficulty of understanding the world without God, whereas the real difficulty that is diminishing believers in Christianity at a very rapid rate is what can we do *with* him. The historic Christian deity is rapidly becoming a burden. The B.B.C. morning whiner may say how much man needs God, in his inmost mind he knows that the real fact is that God needs men. In our mind's eye we can easily picture a world without a God. But can we think of a God without a world?

Mr. Lynd has given his essay the title, "The Difficulties of Unbelief." I can assure Mr. Lynd that unbelief in Christianity and, deeper still, unbelief in God, does not present a difficulty to the Atheist. But it does present a real one to Mr. Lynd and his kind. The difficulty

is both immediate and historic. It is immediate because the retreat of church attenders has so alarmed our leading preachers that they have been driven to tell the truth. After pretending that Atheism was almost a delusion, but there were few Atheists anyway, they have turned right round and are shrieking that the real danger is not this or that opposing creed that is a danger, that lies in the rapid growth of Atheism. The Archbishop of Canterbury has openly proclaimed it. The smaller fry have repeated it. To be able to speak the truth without any qualifications must be to our Christian leaders like a stream of water in the desert.

Yet there is a certain psychological interest in Mr. Lynd's thinking that it must be a sad, or bad, thing for not believing in God. Thanks to the malignant lying of Christian leaders, it never strikes the Christian that it is he who needs the sympathy of Atheists. It is the Atheist who follows his understanding of things so far as modern science enables him to do so, and where science and philosophy stop the Atheist stops; not in fear and trembling of Gods, but in the conviction that time will bring answers in the future as science has brought answers in the past. The difficulties of unbelief are the difficulties that have always faced man in his search for truth, but when the answers have come it is the Christian who laments.

If we must take Mr Lynd seriously, then he is woefully out of touch with the time. I would with all kindness remind him that the period on which he appears to stand is at least a century out of date. The theory of evolution is fully established; so is anthropology which gives us a convincing account of the birth of the Gods, their development, their decay and ultimate death. The God of Mr. Lynd once did everything, today he does nothing. Gods are today neither useful nor picturesque; and Atheism is a one-way road. There is no way back. It is this that is frightening Christian leaders. They know that no man can undo knowledge and understanding. It is, of course, difficult to say just when a God dies, but they die and history is covered with their decay.

But in justice to myself, and to those whom I am proud to represent I must call attention to the fact that Mr. Lynd is using language more fitting to the early part of the last century than to 1946. Mr. Lynd says that he heard an Atheist speaker say: "You tell us that the world must have been created by somebody, and that somebody was God. Isn't it equally logical to say that God must have been created by somebody? I would like you to tell me who created God."

Mr. Lynd appears to think this so shocking that he declined to answer. But he is arguing that things could not be born by their own impulse, and if God is there he, or it, or she, could only have come into existence as a sequel to something that went before. Very lamely, Mr.

Lynd says that the retort—it is not a new one—is not applicable because with God it is not a question of time and space. I do not wonder that Mr. Lynd did not stop to work out his position, and learn which of the two were in the "soup."

Mr. Lynd's capacity for replying to an Atheist who knows his case may be seen by the following. He says:—

"The theory that mankind and its civilisation, nature with its innumerable laws observing hosts of birds and beasts, fishes and insects, trees and flowers, are all the products of a fortuitous concourse of atoms is to me incredible."

Now, whenever a man repeats that string of things, and in that way, he may fairly be set down as being in a fog. There is that blessed word "fortuitous." Whenever that is brought out by a Theist one may safely count him as being in a fog. Fortuitous is taken to mean something that exists without antecedents or cause. But that is not what the word means. Substantially it stands for something that happens, as we say, by accident. But "by accident" does not wipe out causation, it means only that we are not aware of the chain of causes to which this particular incident belongs. There are a thousand and one things that even scientists cannot tell you exactly "why" certain things occur; and even when the "cause" of a particular phase is found, the cause is only pushed back a little further. Really the man who shocked Mr. Lynd had, either by skill or by accident, a far better grasp of the position than had Mr. Lynd, who walked away with the conviction that the repetition of a formula indicated understanding.

Mr. Lynd says he heard that retort in Hyde Park, and that was too low a level for a man who might feel proud of his education. So I will cite, from memory, a passage from a man who died in the last quarter of the 17th century. He said:—

"If a slate falls off a roof and kills a man who is passing, someone will ask why was the man directly under that slate? You reply that he had business that brought him down that street. Then comes, why had he business in that street? And so it goes on: Why after Why, until we reach God, the asylum of ignorance."

That is surely a case that fits Mr. Lynd's and the other man in Hyde Park. The man would not rest with putting back causation to one degree. He insisted that if we started tracing cause and effect we must continue with it. And he was right.

I think I may as well give the name of the man who said that appealing to God as a cause resulted in the asylum of ignorance. His name was Benedict Spinoza, and I count it much to my credit that I began to live with him when I was in my teens. But if Mr. Lynd had met him in Hyde Park he would probably still write as he does in the "Church of England Newspaper."

But we will take Mr. Lynd and his championship of God. I recognise the chivalry displayed because he is defending an obviously dying cause. Mr. Lynd says that:—

"No one can deny that Jesus was a genius as surely as Shakespeare was a genius."

Mr. Lynd should have said the things attributed to Jesus—some of them were very good, even though they were

said long before Jesus Christ was heard of in history, and others were just foolish. But we will waive everything and say that Jesus taught man how to live, how to conduct himself, etc. But when a good thing is said or taught it remains good for ever, it lives independently of whether the supposed teacher lived or not. But that is not the case with this mythical Jesus. You must believe in him—believe that he lived, that you would not have appreciated these sayings if he had not been "God of very God." And that is double-barrelled foolishness. It is evident that we are dealing with a personage who in all probability never lived. Whatever good thing was said by "Jesus," when it is said it ceases to be his. It is mine, it is yours, it is the property of mankind, and it came from mankind. Perhaps one day Mr. Lynd will master the truth that all the fundamental moral beliefs and practices existed in action long before they were expressed in writing or in set speech. But I am probably taking Mr. Lynd into too deep water, so we will let the matter rest—save to advise him to attend a few Freethought meetings when he gets the chance.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

II.

IN his work "The Ten Commandments," Mr. Joseph Lewis devotes no fewer than 60 pages to the Second Commandment—it is the second to the Jews, but to Christians the first: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," etc., and with a wealth of illustration drawn from historical and anthropological sources shows how it is based on fear, ignorance and superstition.

Of course the Jews have a ready answer to all or many of his charges. Their leaders were evolving a new religion based on the one God idea, the only true God according to them, and they had a pagan and credulous people to convert. Their religion was to be, as far as possible, exclusive, they wanted few converts, and in its final reaction it was to be something which all other religions were not. It is not surprising that they failed, for Judaism, in spite of all that was done, is packed with pagan ideas, symbols and myths.

They were obliged to insist that their one God was a jealous God, and that he would "visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Mr. Lewis thinks this is a shameless and vindictive piece of God's malevolence, and so it would be if the children were actually made to suffer for the iniquities of the fathers by God Almighty; but as there never was a God who could do these things, it does seem to me that the framers of the Commandment were doing their best to keep men healthily clean so that an illness could not be passed on.

Making God a jealous God and a vindictive one, is proof that the Jews were then a barbarous race; as Mr. Lewis points out many Gods of savages and primitive peoples are also savages and extremely vindictive. The Gods of the Maoris were responsible for pain, misery and death, and it was a religious duty to appease their wrath. The Gods of the Tahitians were always ready to punish lack of homage or obedience. The Fijians had no illusions about their Gods. They were positively wicked. And needless to say, the Gods of the Santals of India, of the New Hebradians, of the Indians of Hudson Bay, to name but a few primitive peoples, are all jealous as well as cruel and vindictive.

Even according to their own story the early Jews or Israelites appear to have been always ready to turn to "strange" Gods.

and it was necessary if the faithful were to be kept to the path of strict monotheism to threaten the direst penalties if the urge to go "a-whoring" after other deities was not at once arrested. The picture of God Almighty as given for us in the Old Testament is naturally revolting to modern ideas, and it is quite possible that if Judaism were being framed now its makers would picture the All-High in a quite different light. In the ultimate, as there was no God at all but merely a figment of the imagination of some early (and in their own way remarkable) writers, I often feel that whether the Jewish God was jealous or cruel or savage does not matter two hoots. Rather should we blame the priests for trying to impose—and for really imposing—such a picture of a God on a people, and for keeping them in fear of the Lord for over 2,000 years.

Then there is the prohibition against making any graven images of God or the likeness of anything in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the sea. This had been the practice of nearly all the nations surrounding the Israelites, and so it was forbidden them as part of the plot to work up something entirely new in religion. The Jews took this so much to heart that for centuries they stifled every artistic impulse they had, though if one reads the Commandment carefully it does look as if the only reason why they should not indulge in art of the kind was that they might use the piece of sculpture as a deity. "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them," are the words—not that it is absolutely forbidden to make them. Mr. Lewis points out, and I am quite sure that he is right, that the actual origin of the prohibition "against making and worshipping images is based on the belief in sympathetic magic." This sympathetic magic is explained as "the superstitious belief in the direct association and influence between similar ideas and things." Thus, if you want to kill your enemy through "magic," you make a wax image of him (or take a doll and insist that the doll is your enemy) and stick a pin through its "heart," and he will surely die. It was a favourite experiment 300 or 400 years ago with the more fraudulent alchemist or magician when most people were literally scared of witchcraft and the curses of a sorcerer. And by the way, it is still believed in by lots of people who cannot even produce the excuse of being savages.

Be this as it may, it takes a very courageous Jew to defy his God (or rather his rabbi) and become an out-and-out sculptor.

When these superstitious ideas are tracked down as far as possible to their source, as Mr. Lewis does, and he gives copious examples drawn from the manners and customs of many tribes, old and new, one can only feel ashamed at the appalling misery they have created in the history of man. And it is no good always blaming the Jews. The Christians who accepted the Old Testament as the Word of God set about destroying whatever they could find of the marvellous statuary left by the Greeks and the Romans. The more fanatical of them became known as "Iconoclasts" and they played havoc with everything and anything which could be classed as art. In this they were supported by the Emperor Leo III., but the worship of images eventually prevailed in the Church of Rome. It declared that when pagans worshipped idols that was utterly wrong, but in its own churches it was quite right to worship, adore, and supplicate stone and wooden idols—and a fig for the Old Testament, even if it is the word of God!

"After the Reformation," points out Mr. Lewis, "there was a revival of the earlier sect of Iconoclasts . . . the first object of their fury were the statues of the Virgin Mary. With obscene imprecations they dragged them down . . . broke the figures into a thousand pieces. . . Next in line were the statues of Christ which were shattered. . . The more statues the infuriated Iconoclasts found, the stronger became their lust for destruction. Every image of the Virgin, every Crucifix, every sculptured saint met the fury of their wrath . . ."

Hell indeed has no greater fury than a thoroughly religious being impelled to destroy.

Mr. Lewis gives some interesting extracts from Josephus (that famous writer so well known by name and so little read) which prove the baneful influence the Second Commandment had on the national existence of the Jewish race. They have paid dearly for their belief in one God—a God who has let them down on every occasion, and who has given them nothing but their "Torah." It is perhaps the saddest story in history, and it will not really be finished until the Jew becomes convinced that his religion is a myth. To accomplish that end, books like "The Ten Commandments" will give valuable help.

H. CUTNER.

PATRIOTISM

DOWN the ages they ring, the hackneyed phrases of patriotic emotion. "Love of country leads me on!" "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" "Our country—right or wrong!" and many similar injunctions to fight more wars and cause more sorrow. The doctrines of hate, the poisonous propaganda of nationalism which distorts truth and defaces justice. The very word "patriotic" has lost its real meaning. It is now a label, a discoloured camouflage for degenerate militarists and discredited politicians. All that is brutal and despicable in world history is described as patriotism. All the bloody crimes of British imperialism are covered with the Union Jack and called patriotic actions. Religious treason, international intrigue, Hunnish cruelty, all patriotism.

One wonders if the blood lust of half the world is really arant militarism and not patriotism. One wonders if, to be a patriot, one must cheer professional butchers and describe all right-thinking men as pacifists. One wonders if the true patriot is the person who appreciates all that is fine in his country's history, and literature and art, and not the man who glories in the part his country has played in international tragedies. One wonders if it is not time that this Victorian convention, this "Charge of the Light Brigade" attitude to the most nauseating war-mongering, was destroyed. One wonders just how long capital will use nationalism as an instrument with which to incite labour to war within itself. One wonders how long the business of despising a man because he is a different colour, or treating him as an inferior being because he speaks a different tongue, will be allowed to continue. And having reached this point one feels inclined to spit in the eye of the next man who calls himself a patriot.

Surely this crazy nationalism has reached the height of all that is evil. Surely this worship of dyed butcher's cloth has gone on long enough, it must cease. But the end can only be brought about in the minds of the people, and that is why it is my opinion that it never will be. FRANCIS I. GOULD.

LOOKING BACKWARDS

Extract from Syke's "Local Records"

JULY 20, 1735.—Being Sunday Ann Flower, of a very creditable family in Northallerton, perverted by her husband, Francis Flower, formerly a supervisor of Sunderland, but upon his turning quaker, discharged; went, in the time of divine service, to the great consternation and confusion of the congregation, or, as she termed it, assembly into the church, at the latter place, and, though cautioned, nay positively forbid by the rector to dare to talk, or, as they call it, speak in the church, did, however, upon the conclusion of the church service, begin to hold forth. The rector, without further remonstrance than that it was the apostle's command that a woman should not be suffered to teach in the church, directly led her out, thereby preventing a mob from cooling her frenzy in a neighbouring brick pond which they began to threaten, though she said she was sent by the spirit.

ACID DROPS

According to the "Gloucestershire Echo" a man cannot take an oath in a court of law on the Douai Bible. The Judge says that this does not conform to the Oaths Act. With all respect to the Judge, we believe he is quite wrong. The Douai Bible is as legal as our English Bible, or the Bible may be discarded altogether, and a simple promise to speak the truth substituted for all religious formulæ. A Chinaman may break a plate, etc. All that the law really demands is a promise to speak the truth and nothing but the truth. If the Judge's rulings were right it would mean that no Roman Catholic has any place in an English court of law.

We hasten to add that no oath, or affirmation, can make a liar stick to the truth. And we question whether any judge really bases his opinion as to whether a witness is a liar or not on anything to do with a man swearing or promising to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. It seems to us that statements to the contrary prove us to be right. We know there is a saying that "Truth will out," but we also know that it is often out when it should be on hand and very vigilant.

Doctor Henry Bett, a former Principal of the Handsworth Theological College, told an audience that England was rapidly becoming a Pagan country. We see nothing to be alarmed about. The pre-Christian world managed to say some very wise things and to perform many good ones. After all it was the Pagan world to which the best men and women turned when the "New Birth" of Europe took place. And it was the Christian world that did its best to prevent the development of science and human liberty. We think that if we were to suddenly become a Christian we should probably cry out "God bless the people who never believed in Him."

Rochdale has decided to open its playing grounds for Sunday afternoons. That is a tremendous step forward for Rochdale, and if ever there was a town that needed more games and more brightness it is Rochdale. But why only the afternoon? Why cannot people use their own playing grounds on the day when nearly everyone has the leisure to play healthy games? The answer is, of course, Religion. The parsons do not like it, it keeps people away from Church and Chapel. The truth is that a large number of the people will never go to church if they can play games in the park. It seems to be a case of "God v. games," and God is left a long way in the rear.

One parson, the Rev. W. O. Smith, writes to the "Rochdale Observer" begging that those people who do play games on the Sunday should find a place during Sunday to "join us in common prayer." It is very touching to find one of God's representatives begging that when they have done playing games they might come to Church during the time the parks are closed. How the mighty have fallen!

We like thoroughness even when we disagree with conclusions reached. Thus, in the "Christian," there has been a discussion on God and His works, and as is usual, some of the religious advocates have tried to relieve God of the responsibility for the unpleasant things that happen. To these weak-kneed worshippers the Rev. Leslie Brett replies by rebuking them, pointing out that we must either reject altogether the activities of God *en bloc* or accept his miracles. We agree. Mr. Brett is at least honest in his opinions and logical in his application. But when cowards begin to explain what God does and what he does not do, his defenders can arouse nothing but discontent.

The recent storms have caused great damage to small farmers and smallholders. Indeed, the damage has been so great that the Rev. J. E. Sawbridge, the Vicar of Mildenhall, in Suffolk, has been offering up prayers in his parish church. Exactly what good this will do is not at all clear, for the rain, hail and floods appear to have left little but salvage, and to importune God after the event to do something when he could well have prevented the losses by acting like Jesus and ordering the storms to cease, was really going a little too far. At all events the Suffolk National Farmers' Union obviously cannot think much of the prayers for

they have opened a relief fund. The question now is: Which is going to be of more practical use to the unfortunate farmers, God Almighty or the Relief Fund? We give no prizes for the answer.

Whatever happens at other shrines Lourdes will try to go one better. During the war Lourdes was very quiet. In the midst of the war angels could not be expected to work for the Germans, and in order to keep the business running some miracles were displayed in other directions. Now that the war is over "Business as Usual" is promised. In 1937, Sister Margaret was very ill, so ill that obliging doctors described her as a "human wreck." But after a "Novena to our Lady of Lourdes" Sister Margaret was completely cured. That is a very good yarn, but it is nothing at all compared with the miracle of Fatima where Jesus came down from Heaven, first as a child, then as a man, and the Sun left its orbit in his honour.

One good thing about the Catholic Church is that it always presents us with wonders. We do not mean by that theological wonders and impossibilities, those are always in evidence. But we mean wonders concerning things with which anyone may be acquainted. Thus Archbishop McGrath (R.C.) has discovered that the present Spain saved Europe from destruction. We are aware that Spain has fewer independent minds than it once had, and even non-Catholic Christians are permitted to exist so long as they do not make themselves too much of a nuisance to the R.C. Church. And it must have been the hand of God which enabled it to give so much help to Hitler while Spain replied by giving Hitler as much help as it dared to. For other items of interesting news one might read that striking book, "An Interlude in Spain" by Charles D'Ydewalle. It is a very dispassionate description of what Spain was like—inside a prison. The book was issued during the war.

The terrible state of the Greeks is undeniable. There is an absolute want of food made worse by the open display of "Black Market." Mr. Bing Crosby is a very well-known figure connected with the radio and cinema. He has been engaged in selling rosaries to Roman Catholics and handing the money to starving Greeks. So we may consider the situation. A musical performer doing what he can to help a people who badly need food. A God who can—so say the Churches—work miracles when, where, and how he pleases, and so far as anyone can see, is doing nothing. God seems to be taking things in a very easy-going manner, but as Heine said, when lying for years on his mattress bed, the joke may be carried too far. A God who can do everything but prefers to do nothing does not meet the necessities of to-day.

There is among the godites of this country an "Industrial Christian Fellowship." We are not quite sure what it stands for; it might be a number of hard-working men, just a group of "good fellows" working Christians on so much an hour for their belief in Christianity, or a number of Christians celebrating the fact that they live together free from quarrelling. But whatever they were these people gathered to listen to the Prebendary Kirk, and he was anything but cheerful. He told his audience that whatever Bournemouth was, "in London most of our churches are empty." It was also announced that, "We are certainly not making progress."

But that is a very poor way of describing the situation. The Churches, it is admitted by all Christian leaders, are losing ground steadily, and the rate of the loss increases with the moving of the sun. The only Church that claims to making more ground is the Catholic Church, and it can make that claim because it is a greater adept in lying than any other Church. The Roman Church works on the ground that once a member of the Church always a member, unless he or she is formally turned out. The result is that there is an untold number of people who are as much living members of the Church as we are. It is not the fault of the clergy that the number of Christians are declining. We are witnessing the end of a dying God.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No. Holborn 2601. 41, Gray's Inn Road,
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TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Mr. J. Bryan, 10s.; J. G. Lupton, 10s.

Will Mr. A. Yates, of Liverpool, be good enough to send his address to the editor. A letter to him has been returned.

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.

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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

A few years ago Chapman Cohen was invited to deliver a lecture to the students of Manchester College, Oxford. The subject chosen was "The Foundations of Religion." There was a crowded house and interest was maintained to the end with a discussion that was both capable and interesting. The lecture has now been reprinted and is on sale at this office, price 6d, post free, 7d. We do not hesitate to say that the speaker was in his best form and the interest of the students was marked. It should be useful for distribution and would form a good introduction to a study of Freethought.

We take this opportunity of recognising the many letters we have received concerning the sudden death of our late manager, Mr. Frank Skidmore. He deserved all the good things that were said about him—loyal, trustworthy and independent. His first concern was the interests of our movement. He was a fellow worker in the fullest sense of the term.

It is announced by the Government that there will be an overhauling of the B.B.C. before the present period of five years ends. We must wait and see whether the Government will play with the needed reform of the B.B.C. or not. We are here only concerned with one feature of the B.B.C., and that covers religion. It is now openly admitted that the influence of religion is shrinking rapidly. But the B.B.C., laden with the curse of that No. 1 bigot, Reith, continues to deliver its broadcasts as if Freethought had never been heard of. Openly the B.B.C. has declared that it will permit nothing to be said about religion that would shock the most ignorant and the most superstitious of Christians. In common justice if broadcasts of religion are permitted something on the other side should be allowed.

We go further than this and say that if our political leaders, and the rank and file of members of Parliament, had a real affection for freedom of thought and expression they would keep their religious opinions outside Parliament. It is now openly admitted that so far as English law is concerned England is not, and never was, legally a Christian country. It was a country in which favours were granted to a certain form of religion, but that is all. Yet we have a paid priest in the House of Commons; we have religion praised by members of Parliament—in the course of their speeches—and never would any adverse criticism of Christianity be permitted. It is time things were altered.

It is also announced by the Government that before the charter of the B.B.C.—now running for five years—is renewed there will be an investigation as to conduct. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction being expressed, and all Freethinkers should do what they can to bring about a reform of the religious policy adopted. If religion is to continue the Freethought cause should be heard. But it will not be heard unless members of Parliament are made to realise that there are other people in the country save Christians, and a very primitive class of believers at that. Freethought should be heard, and it may be heard if Freethinkers are active enough.

We note the following remarks from our old friend Mr. H. Irving, from some notes in the "Barnsley Chronicle":—

"I protest against the growing clamour of making the parson the scapegoat for the decline in church attendance. It is manifestly unfair. The clergy have always resisted change. Never a new idea but it met with their sturdy opposition; and when the idea prevailed, never did they fail to reconcile it most artfully with their creed. It is the people who have changed. They are illiterate no longer. New knowledge gives birth to new duties. John Morley, in his 'Voltaire,' says: 'It is certain that the loosening of theological ideas and the organisation upholding them, was the first process towards making social ideas possible, and their future realisation a thing good men might hope for.' The loosening process has been growing ever since Voltaire's day, and social ideas are being realised rapidly. Scientific knowledge is widely disseminated, and the man in the street sees science not attacking but explaining religion away. Miracles are performed in the laboratory, and unlike the scriptural kind, they can be repeated. Prefabricated houses are more sought than mansions in the skies. Penicillin is more trusted than prayer, and National Insurance is expected to make a man, where charity found a cringing slave. This is not all, but enough to show that the facts of life are triumphing over superstition; that Man is outgrowing his Gods; and that the Church is becoming an effete institution."

Foyles, booksellers, continue to give us, through others, weekly converts to Christ, Christianity—R.C. brand. This time it is a Jew. He was brought to his—Roman Catholic—senses by an Irishman. Then he bought a Bible, then carried about with him a volume of Newman's writings, and finally became a Roman Catholic. But we know of a better story than that which comes down from the sixteenth century. A Jew visited Rome and came back a convinced R.C. His reason was that there must be a God and that God must be the Catholic one, because nothing so vile as the Roman Church could exist without supernatural power.

PLEA FOR SUPER-CHRISTIANITY

THE real quarrel that a modern mind has with the group of religions loosely called "Christianity" is that something better and nobler is urgently required to-day.

For in spite of its claims, Christianity is far below the higher aspirations of mankind. It is fairly arguable that the religion that has departed from Jesus Christ's teaching and yet calls itself by his name is lower than the religion that has evolved from Buddha. And it is certain that the average Christian is a lower human-animal than the average Buddhist. But since some form, or rather travesty, of Christianity is professed by the Western world in general, it is necessary for us in trying to progress, to start from the religion of Christ.

Now Christ's teaching is not good enough for modern men and women. If you want to realise how vile and wicked the Christian Churches are, you have only to reflect that they backed the recent war on both sides. To back a war at all is to betray Jesus obviously enough—but to back it both ways like a greedy hedging gambler! Not one of the Churches dared to denounce war while the conflict was on! But then of course, the Christian religion has ever been a religion of blood—from the blood of

poor Jesus to the blood of the last wretched conscript who, as the lying war memorials say, "gave" his life for his "country" or "freedom" or his "friends" when in stark fact it was stolen from him by cruel compulsion.

Or if you prefer another illustration of the degradation of the Churches, consider which "sin" Archbishops and Bishops most love to denounce. (It is divorce.) In their eyes if a man and woman copulate, that copulation is sin. But if a Registrar or a parson mouths a formula first, that copulation is a sacrament. Yet illicit sexual commerce rarely does much harm and Jesus expressly refused to condemn an adulterous woman. It is certain that cruelty to children or animals is infinitely more wicked than sexuality. So is enslaving and oppressing war captives; so is injustice; so is cheating the worker of his just wage and his hours of life. These evils, however, do not titillate the leaders of Christian Churches like the spicy garbage of the divorce courts.

How low the so-called Christian Churches stand today in the moral scale is patent from illustrations such as these, which could be multiplied! If only the Churches could and would rise to the hard standard of Jesus this would be something! But even a Jesus-standard is inadequate to modern moral requirements.

For we have developed a social conscience since Jesus's time. The duty towards God and the duty towards our neighbour that He taught (and thought adequate, as he indeed said) is not enough. We have to add our duty towards the animals, our children and our duty to posterity, for instance—duties of which Jesus never dreamed. Nor is it enough to be responsible for our own individual sins and to have these forgiven. We are responsible for the sins of collective entities; our trade or calling, our nation, our government, nowadays as well as our own. Such sins Jesus never even envisaged.

Yes—we must go forward from Jesus Christ or perish by atomic bombs because our moral progress cannot keep up with our mechanical progress. We must improve upon Jesus and his teaching.

Take the Seven Deadly Sins of the Christian Church! What poor little peccadilloes these are compared with such ghastly crimes as Stupidity, Apathy and Servility—that led Englishmen into the last two Great Wars and are rapidly leading them into a third. Is not a "patriotic" propaganda-lie on the radio infinitely more harmful than the antics of a male with a female in a private bedroom? Our Christian Bishops think otherwise.

How slowly and dimly the light of Truth breaks upon the darkness of the human mind! The world (so denounced by, and so morally superior to, the Christian Church) begins to see that the Church is impotent to save it from the Atomic horrors looming ahead. But even Jesus cannot save it. Better and greater doctrines than any he taught are necessary (for instance, the doctrine of the subordination of States to the moral law which forbids robbery and murder and lying to the individual).

In a word, mankind needs a super-Christ teaching a super-Christianity. But we are as little likely to get one, I imagine, as to get a race of Nietzschean super-men. Still, one never knows. Certainly there are voices enough crying into the wilderness and the Kingdom of Heaven may be at hand when the Kingdom of Hell seems to be in preparation.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

THE great sociologist, Karl Marx, has given us a classical definition of the social role of religion: "Religion is the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, the opium of the people." This definition is not only true of religion in general, but specifically, of Christianity itself. For Christianity had a social and not primarily an intellectual origin. It succeeded not because it was true but because it was opportune, because it fitted into the social milieu amid which it originated. Because in a world amid which "the fittest" (in the Darwinian sense) to survive do, in fact, survive Christianity, all things considered, fitted into the given social framework better than did its contemporary competitors.

In order to prove the truth of the above contention it is necessary to direct a glance at the character of the civilisation and social order amid which Christianity first saw the light.

In 202 B.C. the decisive victory at Zama, one of the really decisive battles of world history, gained by the army of the Roman Republic over that of its great rival, Carthage, made the Latin Republic the master of the Mediterranean world and civilisation. For about a century and a-half after that event the armies of the victorious Republic over-ran the Mediterranean world, established the Roman Empire, the last and greatest political creation of antiquity, and, so to speak, "sold up" not only assets of the conquered peoples but in accordance with the harsh practice of a servile economy, sold up, concurrently, the conquered populations themselves.

For we must ever bear in mind that the wars of antiquity were, in about equal measure, land-ramps and man-hunts. That is, the conquerors sought for both land to exploit—for in an agrarian civilisation like that of classical antiquity it is land that is "real property"—and slaves—human machines—to cultivate land. And never were so many lands conquered, or, simultaneously, slaves sold up, as in the era of the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean between Scipio's defeat of Carthage in 202 B.C., and Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul, the last major act of aggression of the Roman Republic in 59-49 B.C.

For, throughout this period of practically uninterrupted conquest by the "ever victorious" legions of Rome, the effects produced upon the hitherto stagnant civilisation of the Mediterranean were indescribable. Whole populations were uprooted and sold into slavery in distant lands. For the slave markets worked overtime upon a scale never again witnessed until the modern hey-day of negro slavery of "black ivory" in the slave markets of Bristol and Zanzibar. It was not unknown for ten thousand slaves to be put up for auction in a single day in the great emporium on the island of Pelos. And these were no barbarians, but often Greeks and Asiatics, heirs to an older and more advanced culture than was that of their Roman conquerors.

The social results of this gigantic debacle were as catastrophic in the economic as in the political sphere. They affected not only her provinces but even Rome herself. The free peasant proprietors of Italy who had immemorially cultivated their own lands, and who had themselves constituted the backbone of the Roman armies which had fought Hannibal to a finish and had subsequently conquered the Mediterranean world, found themselves driven out of business by the irresistible competition of the slaves evicted and sold up, they either sank into the ranks of servile labour or became a propertyless embittered class of (in modern parlance) "poor whites," the "lumpen proletariat" of the "dangerous class" of the Roman slums, and the predestined thugs for hire by any would-be dictator and unscrupulous adventurer. (In the last connection the name of Catiline and his famous "conspiracy"—64-3 B.C.—comes readily to mind).

MISTAKES OF MOSES, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

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

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

By the end of the second century B.C. so bad had become the economic situation of the formerly free population of Italy herself that the great reformer, Tiberius Gracchus publicly stated: "The wild beasts of Italy have their lairs, and the birds their nests; but the Roman people themselves have not a foot of land which they can call their own. Conquerors of the earth, the earth itself denies them food and shelter."

Nor was such a statement exaggerated. Huge "latifundia"—cast estates owned by absentee landlords and cultivated by slave labour became the rule. Whilst a professional mercenary army officered by the Roman aristocracy held together by brute force the whole unstable social structure.

And if such was the state of things in the free centre of the Roman Empire one may imagine, but can scarcely describe, the conditions by now general in its servile circumference. For gone was the easy-going patriarchal slavery of earlier times. Roman slavery, run by speculative capitalists for the purposes of quick profit, was indescribably brutal. Imprisoned in underground cellars (ergastula), working under the lash, liable for any cause, or for none, to that most horrible of all deaths, crucifixion (known to Roman law as the "servile supplicium"—"punishment for slaves," and originally borrowed by the Romans from their defeated rival, Carthage); the mass-misery of this vast servile mass may well have been what the great historian, Theodore Mommsen was later to describe as "the most terrible mass of human misery that the world has ever known." And we must again recall that the slaves were often more civilised than their conquerors, and, in addition, equally skilled in military art, for many prisoners-of-war must have been found among their ranks. As for numerical superiority to their free masters, it is certain that it was considerable. Whilst exact statistics are hard to come by, a proportion of 3 to 1 as suggested by the old author, Blair, is not at all incredible.

The reactions of this uprooted mass to the terrible fate that had come upon them like a bolt from the blue are described by Albert Kalthoff: "An agitation was stirring all minds from the Capitoline Hill and the heights of Etna to the Asiatic ridges of Taurus." Everywhere there circulated that deadly hatred of Rome which, thinly disguised under an often misunderstood Jewish symbolism, burns with passionate hatred in the biblical "Apocalypse" ("Book of Revelations"), which seems itself to have been the literary outcome of such a later Jewish revolt against Rome.

From early in the second century B.C., for the next century, a whole series of slave insurrections followed one another in automatic succession. Often distinguished by exceptional heroism and frequently associated with conceptions of Utopian socialism which centred around the dream of an equalitarian "Sun-State," these revolts several times won substantial victories over the Roman forces and undoubtedly represented a serious menace to the stability of the great exploiting empire, the "Scarlet Woman drunk with the blood of the saints," as the Messianic revolutionist who wrote the Apocalypse described the Roman Empire. The names of several of these slave-leaders have come down to us, but naturally we learn little that is good of them in a classical literature composed solely in the interests of their oppressors and suppressors. After all, what sort of a picture should we get of, say, the Russian Revolution if our sole extant authority was Herr Hitler or even Mr. Winston Churchill?

The last of these slave-risings, led by the Thracian ex-gadiator, Spartacus, was by far the most formidable. Spartacus was an undoubted military genius who repeatedly defeated the Roman armies. Between 73 and 71 B.C. he brought the Roman Empire to the verge of ruin. His final defeat and death in battle was followed by a repression so savage as to break the back of servile discontent. No less than 6,000 survivors of the ill-fated slave-army of Spartacus were crucified *alive* along the "Appian Way" outside Rome by the Roman General, Marcus Licinius Crassus.

F. A. RIDLEY.

PASTORAL SPANNER

NOT SO FRATERNAL

INTO the smooth workings of Canada's non-political non-sectarian, inter-racial Rotary movement a didactic spanner was heaved last week by the Right Rev. Eugene Limoges, Roman Catholic Bishop of Mont Laurier.

On the Bishop's instructions, a pastoral letter was read in all churches under his jurisdiction, warning the faithful against membership of non-Catholic clubs. These he classed with Freemasonry.

The Bishop's letter did not mention Rotary, but next morning 18 of the 30 members of a newly-formed Rotary club at Maniwaki in his diocese, north of Montreal, resigned. Among them was Liberal M.P. Maxine Raymond and the Quebec Legislature's Joseph Celestin Nadon.

Though the Bishop's own flock was quietly obedient, Roman Catholics elsewhere were soon in a tizzy. Rotary, originally formed by a Jew, a Protestant, and a Catholic ("News Review," May 9), has always prided itself on being free of race and creed prejudice.

Angrily, French Canadian Senator Teddy Bouchard, a Roman Catholic, said: "Bishop Limoges' letter is another of those unfortunate incidents which keep the French and English apart."

Typical of non-Catholic comment was Toronto's caustic "Orange Telegram": "The current outburst is simply another reminder that the Roman hierarchy will always prevent, where it has the power, the fraternal association of its members with those of other faiths."

"NEWS REVIEW."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 4 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY. Highbury Corner, 7 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.
West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., MESSRS. E. C. SAPHIN, J. HART, E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., J. McCABE: "Fifty Years' Retrospect."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Accrington Market.—Sunday, July 28, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Bramshawbooth.—Friday, July 26, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Higham.—Wednesday, July 31, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Liverpool Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, opp. Lewis's).—7-30 p.m.: A lecture.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Mr. F. J. CORINA.
Worsthorne.—Monday, July 29, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13, I.L.P.).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: "Discussion on the Polish Question"; various speakers.

ADVERTISER wishes purchase small house or cottage, any district. Two or three bedrooms, main water, W.C., gas or electricity essentials. Other amenities secondary importance. Price limit £1,000. Particulars to Gourmand, 34, Malvern Road, Wallasey (Cheshire).

YOUNG ENGLISH FREETHINKER wanted to exchange letters with young French Freethinker. Write C. B. Bonner, 92, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

COURAGE

WHO knows not fear is fortunate rather than brave, for cowardice and courage are cousins. The lip trembler who stammers, and the limb shaker who dares, may be braver than the forensic or the ferocious.

I never cease to be amazed at feats of physical bravery, and to marvel at exhibitions of timidity by warriors. To confront and dominate savages on foreign soil, and to be stricken with nerves in one's own country on meeting "the great"; such is the lot of many—at least, they tell us so.

Sometimes, by accident, a good question gets through at the Brains Trust. Recently there was one that ran something like this: "What do you account the most momentous decision in your life?"

Hoax, Dudley and Demander Damwell rushed in with Platonic, Zoological and Patagonian illustrations, while "our gifted lady member" modestly feared to tread; when I heard "by and large" (some economist!) for the fifth time I switched off.

I was sorry I was unable to give an answer that would go out to the world for I think it would be interesting. Well, here is what I would have said had I been a member of the Brains Trust:—

I have no hesitation in saying, that my most momentous decision was when I made an avowal of Atheism. I was 28 at the time, I had been married for a year, I was a proud father and a prosperous business man in a large new shop. Enter Father Power, one night about closing time. He was a big man in every way, and as a leading Jesuit he was conducting what is called "a mission" in Aberdeen. My mother was a devout Catholic, but at 17 I had read myself completely out of all religion. Most of the time after that age I had been abroad, and when I did return home I did not flaunt my opinions. Out of affection for my mother, and because they had a fine billiard table at the Catholic Club, I suffered myself to be counted as one of the flock. I side-stepped a religious marriage service, and as my wife was also an Atheist we determined that our children would not be brought up as Christians.

When the reverend gentleman appeared I knew exactly what I was in for. For the first time in my life I had had violent disagreement with my mother. She was determined that my young son had to be "Christened" and I sensed that I was to be subjected to priestly pressure.

My young sister was in the shop and, of course, treated Father Power with great deference. So did I, for he was a man of charming manners and fine humour. But I was not to be caught, and I saw through the Jesuitical game. I have mentioned my business, my new shop, and my sister to show you how cleverly I was being got at. A wise man doesn't want a heated argument about religion to the detriment of his business and the feelings of his relatives. We started warily, he knew that I knew what he was after, and that he didn't come to discuss amateur theatricals. We fenced for an opening. Yes, I had married an Edinburgh girl, and didn't go to "an old friend" to perform the ceremony. I submitted that my wife also had friends, and changed the subject.

"Father Shaw is very fond of billiards," I remarked. "I must drop in to the club some night and give him a game."

"Father Shaw has been gone for six weeks," was the answer, "which shows, my boy, that you have been neglecting your duties . . ."

That did it. I think the "my boy" irked me as much as the reference to duties. Anyway I made the decision there and then, and I took the initiative. I sent my sister home, closed the shop, sat down with the priest—and let him have it, probably for the first time in his life. I gave him Darwin, Huxley, Frazer, Ingersoll, Effel and a lot more. Geology, anthropology, evolution, the bio-genetic law, Omar, Shelley, John Stuart Mill

and Charles Bradlaugh. To say nothing of my opinion of the Jesuits. He was not amused. I strewed the floor with dead gods and outworn creeds. He became cross with me when I said we were both in business, and had he approached me reasonably saying trade was bad and they had to pay off one of their curates, I might have considered giving him an order.

He protested, but I overruled his objection. Tut, tut, Father, we're both in the game, both of us must have customers. But I do give them something for their money, you don't. Well, you didn't get my marriage order, and I'll take good care you won't do any trade with my child.

That's about all, but it was final. I don't want to create the impression that I got it all my own way, indeed I was threatened with physical violence. I dared him, and it was a bitter pill for him to swallow when I reminded him that we were not in his native Waterford. I shudder now at the thought of what would have happened to me had we been in Ireland.

Subsequently my mother was told that Father Power had never heard such a torrent of blasphemy in all his life! But I had won, and although the rupture caused pain, and I had to play billiards elsewhere, I felt a wonderful sense of triumph. To have it out with clericalism was the most momentous decision of my life.

Yes, but how many of my confrères on the Brains Trust would have used their stock phrase, "I quite agree . . ."?
J. EFFEL.

NATURAL SELECTION

The Man who bangs the drum and shouts the loudest
Still struts in fronts—a peacock at its proudest;
All honour, justice, right and truth forsaking—
The Earth and all it holds is his for taking.
Why is it that the virtues do not matter?
That helping others is but idle chatter?
And what about the crooks whose double-dealing
Still passes for Big Business, though it's stealing?
A hungry beggar stealing bread is gaoled;
The magnate—no! He's honoured, knighted, hailed
For his success in liquidating others.
So when you cheat—do it the big way, Brothers!
And when you lie—make it a lie worth telling.
No matter if it's loot or *lives* you're selling.

But if such ethics don't appeal to you
Why can't you hold to what is real and true?
Should you be cuffed and kicked because you're humble?
Because you do not grasp and grab or grumble?
Why can't you dwell in peace and sweet content—
To live the simple life as Man was meant?

If Darwin's creed is true, then Man's survival
Depends on overthrowing ev'ry rival.
In Jungle Law the fittest only live,
Which means, The Strong shall take—The Weak must give.
The Gentle must be crushed that Beasts may thrive—
The Ruthless and the Brutal thus survive.
So Wars and still more Wars will be our ration
Till one race stands supreme—the World's Worst Nation!
W. H. WOOD.

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

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST, by C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; by post 5d.