

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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IEWS AND OPINIONS

Piety at Bay

THE other day one of our newspapers published the news that the Methodist Church was dying. That was what Shakespeare would have called "The Lie Suggestive." It is not a lie in fact, but it is one when a single Church is selected as though it stood alone, when in fact it is characteristic of religious bodies all over the civilised world. In England there is not a single Church that cannot be brought within the category of decline. Those who are the strongest are those who give their congregation watered-down political essays that are calculated to make people go for the nearest "pub" and get joyfully, but honestly, drunk. Indeed, it is rather difficult to say whether getting honestly drunk is not to act more manly than listen to foolish hymns and wishy-washy sermons from preachers who lack the courage to tell their congregations where religion really stands to-day.

What was meant by brandishing the news that the Methodist Church was dying? The Churches—not a Church—have been dying for many, many years. Dean Inge—who was called the Doleful Dean because he told some of the truth—said, with truth, that Christianity—historic Christianity—died with the establishment of the teachings of Copernicus. But the work of Copernicus was only one step in the disintegration of historic Christianity. His work was followed up with the work of Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Tylor and hosts of other discoveries, that put historic Christianity out of court.

Of course, the decay of Christianity proceeded slowly in terms of other advances, and destruction of superstition is far from complete. Indeed, no man can give the date and place of the gods that die. The only fact is that they die. Physically, civilised man has learned to trace his animal ancestors in his own structural form. It was a very great step forward when man was able to see the human development of culture repeating the story of animal growth culminate in man's own story.

No man knows where a god dies, the only solid fact is that sooner or later he does die. There was, indeed, an unconscious wisdom on the part of the godites when they agreed that "in the beginning" man must not eat of the tree of knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom, between them, caused many gods to bite the dust. It would be well if our museums, when exhibiting the figures of gods, put up a notice, "Died from eating of the tree of knowledge."

On what grounds was it that the newspaper said the Methodist Church was dying? Obviously, the Methodists are losing ground. But so are all the other Churches. The only distinction is that the Methodists said openly that in ten years the Methodist Church had lost 85,000 worshippers. But that loss is not peculiar to the Methodists; similar losses can be found in the case of every

Church. The plain fact is that there is not a single Church in existence, in this country, and we expect in any other, that is not dying. So far as the Church of England is concerned it is crying out about the difficulty of finding suitable men to enter "Holy Orders." The cry is that they need more priests to induce more laymen to come to Church. But this is quite wrong if we are to take it that people do not come to Church because there are not enough priests to minister to the spiritual wants of the people. The first fact here to be considered is that there are increased avenues for even tolerably able young men to try without saddling themselves with an outworn theology. There are fewer people going to Church because more people are beginning to understand what Christianity is, not merely on the scientific side, but on a better understanding of religion in general. The Methodists say they have lost 85,000 members of their Church in ten years. But that is a flea-bite when we note the number the Church of England has lost. Church of England leaders have proclaimed publicly that of its assumed members, not more than a quarter attend church. In the recent "Conversion of England," a document sent out by the leaders of the English Church, it said:—

"There can be no doubt that there is a wide and deep gulf between the Church and people."

This "gulf" was not a consequence of the war, the war only solidified ideas that were well afloat before it was thought likely to occur.

What we have been saying for years, this religious document of 1945, summing up opinion of those who were in close terms with the Forces, says:—

"The evidence of chaplains and others in close touch with all three Services, and with munition factories, may be conclusive. They testify with one voice to the fact of a wholesale drift from organised religion. The present irrelevance of the Church in the life and thought of the community in general is apparent from two symptoms which admit of no dispute. . . . It is indisputable that only a small percentage of the nation today joins regularly in public worship in any form. . . . The most depressing reports come from large industrial cities."

And there is this doleful summing up:—

"The obvious fact of the decline in church-going throws into high relief the need for finding new means whereby a hearing may be gained for the gospel message."

Rather pitifully the Archbishop of Canterbury asks, "Why has such a drift from the Christian religion occurred?" It is very pitiful to see an Archbishop asking, what is the cause of this decline in religion? Well, it is certainly not for want of preachers, nor for want of effort. The explanation is given in the old saw, "You can fool

some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." The condition of the Christian Church is not singular, it is not confined to a Church here and there, it is an exhibition of the direction in which human thought is drifting. And when a man has once learned the possibilities of life, when he understands the origin of religion and the changes that have taken place during the last century and a half, you cannot satisfy him with an "Our fathers have told us." I do not say that our parents are not the best-meaning friends we can have. But they are likely to be burdens when a man or a woman takes his or her parents as infallible guides, and still more dangerous when parents themselves insist upon being accepted as the best teachers one may have.

I have said very little about the Methodist Conference, mainly because it said very little that was fresh, and was more concerned to get a kind of combination of Christian bodies to join in fighting against the common enemy. And the situation must be very bad indeed when a Doctor Ronald Bridge made a plea for a greater friendship towards the Catholic Church. He said that "If the kingdom of God was to be advanced we must help our Catholic brothers." The situation must be very bad indeed if the Methodist Church comes to the point of joining hands with the Roman Catholic Church. It looks as though the trouble is very, very acute.

There were also indications that Christians should work together irrespective of their differences of interpretation of what is God's will. But real union must rest upon a definiteness of meaning and aims, not upon mere words. A thick fog may be a good medium for stopping a row, but it is not a good one for clarification. These Christians who talk so glibly neither see clearly nor hold opinions strongly. Their thinking is like a river that has burst its banks. It gains width at the expense of depth. The advanced Christian is ready for co-operation with other Christians because he lacks the strength to stand alone. He is a slave to phrases and will not, perhaps dare not, look facts in the face. The reality before the speakers at this meeting was that there is no such thing, there never has been such a thing, as a common Christianity. There were vital differences from the outset, and the longer the discussion lasted the more complicated became the principles claimed.

At its strongest point even the Roman Church could not count on complete uniformity. Protestantism, with its alleged open Bible, was a ghastly failure. The infallible Bible was as great a failure as the infallible Church. What Christians have behind them is an unbroken tradition of quarrel and hatred. The continuous breaking-up of a common belief in Christianity is one of the historic pictures that meet us. Every Christian eyes other Christians with distrust, they can no more resist a quarrel than a cat can resist going after a mouse. Making a ladder of moonbeams or a rope of sand is child's play to establishing peace and harmony in a Christian camp. To be told that this sectarian squabbling contains the key to human development is an insult to common sense.

Christian unity is a mirage. It never has existed, it never will exist. There is really nothing that Christians have in common than what sensible men would not get rid of as soon as possible. There is not a gathering of Christians, even when belonging to the same Church, that

could agree together for five minutes if they were once to settle down seriously to define what it was that each understood by the formula used. They will agree with each other just so long as they do not express precisely what they understand by the terms used. Even the Roman Church, with all the force of a secular state behind it, could not create unity. And where that mass of lies, stupidities and superstitions failed no other Church is likely to succeed to-day.

Modern science, modern life, modern freethought, have together so undermined the ground under the feet of believers that they can no longer feel certain of anything. The God of the would-be liberal Christian is as meaningless as Bernard Shaw's "Life Force." The liberal Christian professes belief, but he is not sure what his belief stands for. He is certain of nothing but his own uncertainty. And meanwhile, he is confronted with the menacing figure of Freethought, flushed with conquests, strong in the certainty of its own attitude, and confident in the ultimate triumph of the principles for which it stands.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SUBLIMATED HAGIOLOGY

ARTICLES initialled S.H. are usually worth reading, but in the "Detective Story To-day" he appears to slip rather badly; to lack perspective; to be unable to see the wood for the trees. That he is himself doubtful is shown in his remarks on "trickery," his doubt whether it can be called "art," and his remarks in defence of "Escapism."

To begin with, it will not do to assert that "The detective story was invented by Edgar Allan Poe." This is not so much a slander on his memory as a misunderstanding of his work. As for the lack of "Human interest," it all depends on what is meant by these words. Consider, in the "Murder of the Rue Morgue," there is no crime motive, no criminal (the murderer was by an escaped gorilla), consequently there was no moral question, no justice being served. The essential features of the modern detective story are lacking. What does our armchair detective deduce from that; that he was in fact challenging the very basis of accepted tradition in crime-detection?

To get a better understanding of Poe we must compare this with his other stories. In "Down into the Maelstrom" we have nothing more than a psychological study, and this gives us a clue. For even in "The Pit and the Pendulum" there is no consideration of theological or moral matters; that also is a study of the thoughts and feelings of the tortured victim. In the "Gold Bug" we have the same characteristic, but this time of a more intellectual kind. In "Premature Burial" the thoughts and feelings are more definitely related to the senses, especially the sense of smell, and this is our final clue. What we have all through is not that "the solution of the crime mystery was made a logical process," but that Poe was expressing the enlightened psychology of his time; that our understanding must be based upon evidence, upon observation, upon the senses, and not upon any hypothetical motive or moral. His attitude was the scientific as opposed to the theological.

It is often claimed that literature and art are the zenith of culture, but few people appear to consider either as cultural developments, or to relate them to changing circumstances. The modern detective story shows an attempt to square the circle, to combine two vitally different cultures. The scientific approach expounded by Poe is mixed with the older one, demonstrated in the typical melodrama, derived from the morality play, which shows a clear indication of its theological character. The angels and devils have been transformed into the hero and villain, the

STRANGE GODS

At a risk of being charged with "whoring after Strange Gods" if not something worse, I must confess to a sneaking partiality for Bernard Shaw's ubiquitous and entirely amoral "Life Force" if not also the more respectable "Deity" of Bergson, that restless persistent Spirit in search of superlatives in conscientiousness—or what you will.

To thorough-going materialists, I am aware that either of these speculative abstractions involves the heresy of anthropomorphism at least in principle; the personification of function—perhaps a dangerous speculation, but the temptation is considerable. For, as Shaw asserts, there are many aspects of life and what we call "mind" which are most difficult to conceive as functions alone of purposeless "Pressure," even allowing for the myriad final forms attributable to intervening factors which mould and modify the irresistible stream. In short, it seems simpler to allow oneself the excusable latitude of giving a name to what appears to be some form of unified Cosmic function, possibly even related to some far off though quite inscrutable "purpose," than to try and account for the mysterious and complex manifestations of Nature in their highest forms in terms of mechanism alone. Or does it?

One thing at least can be said of the Life Force, the cry of Shaw, though, I think, with less justification in the case of the Elan Vital described with such beauty by Bergson. It owes little or nothing to tradition, even unconscious tradition. And as a product of pure speculation in the mind of a man, who in early life had the courage to throw out the Gods lock, stock and barrel, it should command the Freethinkers unbiased respect. For Shaw's Life Force is, if anything can ever be said to be, a true child of the free mind, and has its being on a basis of what he at least perceives as overwhelming evidence. Great art, great music and great moral courage, wrought out of sacrifice and human agony, may, of course, be the products of natural and psychological forces conditioned by resistance and apprehended by mankind as superlative values. On the other hand it seems easier to explain, for instance, the immortal beauty of Handel's "Messiah," as the product of an inner compulsion using him as its instrument through three weary and sleepless nights from which he emerged in a state of collapse, than anything attributable to Handel himself.

That the Life Force owes nothing to any recognisable conception of God, is at once apparent from its character of utter amorality. For it is seen in action as surely and as often in such manifestations of human depravity as the worst German sadism, the most brutal premeditated rape, as in martyrdom, or the creation of sublime music. It is thus as dangerous and unjustified to fall down and worship it as it must ever be futile to thwart its power without some form of deferential compromise.

Nevertheless, a social and moral structure wherein the inevitable "instinctual renunciations" so deplored by Freud could be reduced to a safe minimum, would, it may seem, tend towards an alignment with the Life Force towards its unknown goal. For the Life Force, I take it, is ethically neutral. In terms of morality we can learn nothing from it, yet by it we live and have our being. A pretty nice philosophical kettle of fish! To cling to its lifeline and accept its movement must mean for one man abandonment to passion and the gratifying of the senses, to another the renunciation of the martyr—no lesson can be found in that. "Get into the stream of the Life Force and you will succeed, thwart it and perish," or words to that effect, was once, I believe, the doctrine of Shaw himself. But what such a doctrine would mean in terms of individual behaviour it seems impossible to imagine. Will Mr. Shaw even yet enlighten us?

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

detective and the criminal. The change from sin to crime gives us the ghost of a god and also the ghost of a devil; with the moral that good triumphs over evil, that crime does not pay. It is not a question of "new men with new tricks," detective fiction fails because it is based upon antiquated psychology and is sociologically bankrupt; it is basically false. It is time we had a better understanding of both the criminal and crime.

The detective story is a continuation of the old crime story, but there is also another aspect of the case. With the old folk stories of Robin Hood or of Hereward the Wake, and in the tales of Dick Turpin, the criminal was not necessarily bad. He robbed the rich to give to the poor. Even the old buccaneers robbed from the plundered gold of the galleons. But the characteristic conflict between rich and poor seems to have dissolved in the transformation of the Buffalo Bill Redskin stories into the modern gangster stories. We now have a censorship, official, unofficial, and self-imposed. The criminal is necessarily bad and it is vitally necessary that the law shall prevail. This indicates not only the character of the cultural clash but also "the matter of the supposed degeneration." It is not a question of "a lack of young people," nor of "idiosyncrasies," nor of "tricks," but of a change in circumstances, and the persistence of an anachronistic ideology.

It is not a question of "the war years," the character of the degeneration is more marked if we survey a wider period. Edgar Allan Poe's work did not depend upon "new tricks." There was a depth and intricacy which was characteristic of his time; reminiscent of the time of the three volume novel. If we compare Charles Reade's "Cloister and the Hearth," which took twenty years to write, with an Edgar Wallace yarn which took twenty minutes to dictate, we can see that there is a very different attitude towards literature. Then, there was a growing industrialism, an expanding market; now we have flooded markets and the collapse of private enterprise. In those days a developing science, to-day we have the tabloid newspaper with big headlines and the mass-produced novel. Then, literature was educational; propaganda. It was not a question of an "escape for an hour or two." To-day the commercialisation with its consideration of box-office returns, its appeals to the lowest common denominator, has swamped us with tripe, so that for those who want something decent, it is like searching for a needle in a haystack.

We have become so commercialised that the question, does it pay, has only one meaning. In these days of mass-production and labour-saving devices it is idle to plead "scanty leisure," and it is not a question of an hour or two's escapism, there are so many forms of it, so much of it; so much labour, ingenuity, time and money spent catering for it. Of course there is "a public demand for them," and it is true that "people like these tales of violence," and that we get "thrills" out of them. In the days of Edgar Allan Poe, people "liked" the blood and thunder evangelism of a Spurgeon, they "liked" public executions, they liked the ideas of heaven and hell, and they got a kick out of the condemnation of sex and sin. Our likes and dislikes make an interesting study, and there is something in common between detective fiction and the crucifixion, for that also offers an escape from the troubles and trials of this vale of tears.

Neither Freethought nor religion are forms of amusement, and it is to be hoped that S.H. will think again before wasting space in "The Freethinker" to discuss such things as literary crossword puzzles.

H. H. PREECE.

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ACID DROPS

The Secretary of State for War has now announced that he will soon publish the draft regulations concerning the abolition of compulsory Church Parades. There seems little to announce if men in the armed forces are treated as ordinary human beings, and not mere figures to be moved about as though they were incapable of deciding their own opinions with regard to religion. The present regulations are an insult to every member in the forces—whether they are Christian or non-Christian. We see no reason why men and women who enter the forces should be treated as incapable of selecting a religion for themselves, or rejecting them.

Our leading Christian officials must have a wonderful control over their faces. Here, for example, is Cardinal Griffin who says it was "never more clear than it is today that without the guidance of Christian philosophy we are faced with ruin." But up to date the world has had a very large dose of "Christian philosophy," and the result lies before us. Does anyone believe that the world could be in worse condition—all things considered—than it is at the moment?

What the "News Chronicle" calls "serious allegations" were made against some of our officials in Germany. The matter was raised in the House of Commons, and the charges of "interference" and "flagrant immorality" were made. We would not be surprised if to some degree the charge was sound. No sensible person would be surprised that the end of a war such as the one we have witnessed was followed by a relaxing in morals generally. We have witnessed the result of war at home. Robbery has been common, and of a type that could not have happened in peace time. The breaking or evading of the law is met with a smile, and all the talk of trying to teach the world the benefits of a decent life is read, or heard, with a smile. However inevitable a war may be, or whether it is for righteous or unrighteous purposes, war is largely a form of defiance to the higher forms of life. We had the same lesson in the case of the last "world war." We have had it again in the war that can hardly be said to be quite over, yet. Degradation of character always follows war. It may survive or it may be of a more or less noticeably evil character. If we all study that fact we may at least get at least that degree of benefit from the world war.

The Bishop of London is not lacking in the nonsense that seems to ooze out of our ecclesiastical dignitaries. He is particularly angry over what he calls "the new morality" which lays special stress on the love of pleasure. But pleasure is pleasure, whether it is based on something that is acknowledged to be either good or bad. What the Bishop really means is that the only pleasure that is good is that which leads to a church, and particularly when it leads to the English Church. But times have changed. Instead of pretending to find pleasure in attending church the present generation finds its pleasure in a variety of ways and all of them generally healthy and profitable. But they do not attend church as the Bishop would wish, and the Bishop is "riled." So far as we can judge, the youth of today is really better than the youth of our own childhood. But, then, we are not a Bishop, so we do not feel inclined to suggest that people who do not go to church are missing a desirable life. In our opinion the youth of today is better than the youth of yesterday. But they do not go to church and Bishop Wand is "wild," and foolish.

Some of our religious journals have discovered a way that may help God and his Church. They advocate a two days' rest from work instead of one. They explain that on this plan Christians may have their day of rest on Saturday and reserve the Sunday for church and home games for the family. There is plenty of cunning here, but one may be running risks. People who go out on a Saturday may be too tired to go to church on Sunday, or they may go on making holiday on both days, or Sunday outings might be directed by the clergy. In any way it looks as though the churches will have to suffer. We are afraid that whichever road the Churches take they will certainly get into trouble.

Christians talk a lot about the "Love of God," but there is little doubt that what they are chiefly concerned with is *meeting* God. "Prepare to meet thy God" used to be a very common cry, and morally it was on the same level as the warning which one burglar carries to another in the middle of an act of house-breaking. "Look out—'Cops,'" is precisely on the same level as the constant warning of one Christian to another. The good Christian is not so fearful of doing wrong as he is of being found out. One may disguise this in many ways, but the fact remains. God takes the place of a policeman on earth, with the distinction that the heavenly policeman cannot be for ever dodged. On earth the cry of one burglar to another is: "Look out—'Cops.'" In the religious field it is more elaborate but it is the same in essence. It runs: "Be warned. God will face you in the world to come." God and "Cop" are essentially one, with the difference that we are more certain of the "Cop" than we are of the God. In sober fact in the history of the Christian religion there is little essential difference between the fear of God and the fear of the policeman.

Turning over the pages of a book by a once famous Christian champion, Dean Farrar, we came across a few sentences that are as fresh now as when they were first written—some half century ago. Commenting on the character of the earliest Christians, he says: "Hatred and party spirit, rancour and misrepresentation, treachery and superstition, innovating audacity and unspiritual retrogression, were known among them as among us." Actually that kind of "brotherhood" was very common at all stages of Christian history. If there is less of it in public, it is because that the choice that now lies before Christians is to hang together or to hang separately. In the circumstances the leaders find it better to pretend agreement where no real agreement exists.

He must be a very innocent kind of a man, but his existence appears to be real. We are referring to a Roman Catholic ex-serviceman who writes to the "Universe" complaining that in spite of all his efforts not one of his brother R.C.s has been induced to find him an empty room to sleep in until some better shelter could be found. Now we are not going to condemn R.C.s any more for this than we should condemn others. It is not we Freethinkers who pretend to be superior people, it is the Christian who claims to be better than others by virtue of his faith in Jesus. Of course, it is all bunkum—but so is a great deal of Christian doctrine and Christian talk.

The battle for Sunday cinemas is still going on, and in most places the vote runs in favour of the cinemas. Why not? Why should not a form of enjoyment be carried on without causing troubles to any, and give pleasure to those who attend, without it being treated as though it was a question of criminality or indecency. The police have witnessed over and over again that where Sunday cinemas are there is more order and better personal behaviour. No one is compelled to attend these shows, it is just a matter of preference, and no one accuses cinemas of leading to drunkenness, quarrelling or misbehaviour in any form. It is just a question of one of the most stupid things that ever existed, and when one looks for the most likely cause of injustice and narrowness of mind you may write "religion" in capital letters. We wonder whether our present Government will have courage enough to do away with this kind of religious humbug and petty tyranny? Candidly, we think it will not. It is in power, but it is looking towards an election to come. We are a free people, but that really applies only, in any quantity, with regard to foreign groups where Sunday freedom is concerned.

The Deputy Assistant Chaplain General complains that he has too few ministers to deal with the young conscripts. It is to be noted the conscripts are not crying for parsons. It is quite another way about. Allowing for a few exceptions the recruits do not want to be bothered with the parsons and it would certainly make for a better type of man if conscripts were left alone to pick their own parsons if needed. We are living in a new era and it is time that these hawkers of worn-out superstitions were kept in the background.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. BEESLY.—Spinoza's first name was originally Baruch. Later, this Hebrew form was displaced by *Benedictus*—the Latin form. It has been suggested that the latter was adopted to mark his rejection of the Jewish religion. There have been many studies of Spinoza—we owed him much in our early years. The finest "Life" is by Sir Frederick Pollock.

A. R. WILLIAMS.—Received with thanks.

G. W. FLINT (Auckland).—You make us blush, but pleased to hear that what we have written has been useful to you.

A. HANSON.—We join you in asking what "the hell" the passage means that you send us. But we think that some men write books in the hope that some reader will explain them.

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SUGAR PLUMS

The Rev. W. A. Oyler-Waterhouse has been to Russia. He has seen things and he has observed that churches are permitted, any one may visit them in safety and in many cases the churches are filled. He also announces that relationship is good between the non-religious Government and the church people. He adds that "both are very happy." We take it that the Rev., etc., has had his eyes opened, and we feel that a large number of people in this country will not be pleased at the news.

Perhaps it will come as a surprise to this clergyman that from the beginning of the revolution those who had seized power had to deal with a very large body of priests who for many, many years had acted as the servants of one of the vilest governments that existed in the "civilised" world. The preachers were ignorant and vicious almost beyond belief. Forced to reform—in appearance—the government did what it could to demoralise the people. That story is well known and we cannot repeat it now. With the revolution the first thing that was essential was to hold in leash the priesthood and those who would have done anything to break the revolutionary government. Churches were closed but there were many left open, and others were opened when sufficient evidence was given that they were no threat to the new Russia that was being built. We do not think there are very many who would deny that the Russia of today is a great improvement on the Russia that was overthrown.

Those who really wish to understand what the revolution meant cannot do better than read two books written by Dr. E. J. Dillon. Dillon had lived in Russia, and held posts there. He was not an anarchist, nor Socialist. That makes his books of greater value. The two books are "Russian Characteristics," 1892 and "Yesterday," published by Dent and Sons, London. The first-named was published by Chapman and Hall. Both were very, very respectable publishers. What more could an Englishman desire?

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

III

THE Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" can be considered as a purely ethical one, not a religious one. If the story of how it was given to the Israelites in the Wilderness is true, and they looked upon it as a solemn teaching from God Almighty, it is rather astonishing to find how speedily it was forgotten. For the way the Israelites were called upon to kill their enemies, and the way they proceeded to do so, forms, to the modern mind at least, some of the most tragic portions of the Bible.

As a mere commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," without reservations of some kind, is just nonsense. There are circumstances in which we are bound to kill—or be killed. In a general sort of way the Sixth Commandment may have its use in making a man think twice before committing a wanton murder, but in law a jury has to decide on the evidence before them and not on the "divine" law. Murders have been justified again and again—or, at least, murderers have been acquitted for all sorts of reasons.

Many murders have been committed by people who were strongly religious, and who would have been horrified at being seen talking with an Atheist. Over and over again fathers have killed their sons in imitation of Abraham—though he did not actually do so. He slaughtered a harmless animal instead—and religion reeked for centuries with the blood of innocent animals murdered to "appease" some mythical Deity.

In his book, "The Ten Commandments," Mr. Joseph Lewis has collected many stories of parents murdering their poor little children in the name of God, and very harrowing they are. The point to note is that the Sixth Commandment was always God's solemn word to them, yet it never prevented their committing murder. And it is a fact that animals like pigs, and even inanimate objects like a stone statue, have been tried in a court of law for "killing," the animals being subsequently hanged and the statues destroyed. Needless to say, the courts were thoroughly Christian in every way.

As Mr. Lewis points out "a veritable encyclopaedia could be compiled of the crimes committed by ministers of religion," and historians as a rule are very loth to call even a cold-blooded monster like Torquemada a murderer. The Inquisition was responsible, that gentleman being merely a sort of tool of this holy religious organisation, and therefore not really to blame. Besides, he was so very sincere—even if mistaken. And anyway, the Roman Catholic religion these days must not be blamed for the erroneous beliefs and their consequences by such stout defenders of the Faith.

And is War murder? Read the way our men of God justify the wars of their own country and are always ready to bless the arms and flags of their countries' armies. A defensive war is, of course, justifiable, and parsons have little difficulty in proving that their countries' wars are waged entirely for defence. It was Hitler's great card, and he played it for all he was worth. Most Germans believed him, and their future historians will move heaven and earth to prove that the Fuehrer was obliged to attack and invade other countries as a purely defensive measure. In slaughtering their unfortunate inhabitants, Hitler, backed as he always claimed by God, was merely acting in self-defence; it was admittedly war, but not murder.

The fact is, if we wish to understand the Sixth Commandment, we must go not to religion or ethics but to Anthropology. It is the study of this science which provides us with the key to almost everything in religious belief, for even what may be called a harmless doctrine may well have its origin in some idiotic conception of a primitive mind.

As Mr. Lewis points out, the Sixth Commandment "was a taboo based on the superstitious belief in animism against

spilling blood because of the fear of blood pollution . . . (it) was based upon the ancient belief that blood was life and that the spirit of the slain would return and seek revenge . . . it was devoid of any moral implication." And in proof he cites several significant texts from Holy Scripture which prove conclusively that, in spite of everything done by the editors of the Pentateuch to make Judaism something different from other religions, Animism could never be completely blotted out. The examples collected by Mr. Lewis from Frazer, Westermarck, and other anthropologists, indisputably prove his point.

Volumes could be written on the Seventh Commandment, the famous "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Behind it lie many conceptions of sex, mostly the perverted and jaundiced views of primitive religions.

Of course, if monogamous marriage is taken as the ideal and the only view of sex-relationship worth considering from any right ethical standard then adultery is wrong and the commandment is justified. But the way in which parsons have used the prohibition to enlarge upon what they call sexual purity, the many books they have written in which sexual conduct is analysed in minute detail, the many sermons they have thundered forth from the pulpit denouncing what they insisted was sexual immorality in thought, deed and sight, proves the close relationship between sex and religion. Mr. Lewis contends that "there are no sins of the flesh, there is only ignorance." And he adds, "Outside of this Commandment, the only references to sex in the Bible deal with rape, incest, sodomy, whore-mongering, sexual perversions and other reprehensible deeds within the sexual realm. There is not one enlightening truth about sex within its pages."

What is adultery? is a big subject and it is impossible to give a simple answer. With it must go the question also of bastardy, and Mr. Lewis gives them both an exhaustive analysis far too long to be given justice in an article or two in these pages. There are also the questions of prostitution and celibacy, of religious mutilation, of the Confessional, and of eroticism in general including virginity and chastity. The conclusion the author comes to is that the Seventh Commandment "was a prohibition not founded on morality. It was a taboo based upon sympathetic magic. It became part of the Decalogue for the same reasons as the previous ones."

Basing his work on Anthropology, Mr. Lewis has produced a book of great interest for all Freethinkers. It was badly needed for, as far as I know, no similar study from our ranks had ever been made. In spite of the immense labour that hundreds of scholars have bestowed on the Old Testament we are very far from its complete understanding. Only through a rigid scientific analysis such as the "Ten Commandments" can we see what was at the back of these religious beliefs, can we recognise their origin in primitive fear and hopeless ignorance. We are only on the fringe of many discoveries—as Sir James Frazer said, "At present we are only dragging the guns into position, they have hardly yet begun to speak. . . . We cannot foresee, we can hardly even guess, the new forms into which thought and society will run in the future. . . . We must follow truth alone. It is our guiding star."

He had no illusions about the "Word of God." For him "some of the old laws of Israel are clearly savage taboos of a familiar type thinly disguised as commands of the Deity." No finer justification of the work of Freethought, and such books as that of Mr. Lewis, could be given.

H. CUTNER.

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

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST. An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 9d.; postage 1d.

"THE WHEEL IS COME FULL CIRCLE"

(Continued from p. 284)

THE extracts from C.C.'s "Grammar of Freethought" have been justified as useful and essential Ideas for, and an appeal to, the Reasoning Power of the Younger Generation. There are, however, other and more general purposes to be served by the reprinting.

(1) They fit in with what has been discussed recently about varieties of Freethinkers and Rebels; and so should help to a clearer understanding. I might not agree with every word, nor express it in quite the same way, but written years ago, they quite provide a needed Guide now that Political Democracy has been saved from "Nazi" Fascism.

(2) They illustrate the value of that Scientific Atheist Philosophy of which Chapman Cohen has been and is the chief exponent and which is stated simply but clearly in "Secularism." They show how Human Life, Individual and Social, Past, Present and Future, can be understood only by an Evolutionary Sociology, based upon Evolutionary Economics, but with all ideologic Forces and Processes integrated in one complete but complex Science. The prospectus of this new Conspectus of the Social Sciences has been sketched before in the light of a Scientific Atheist Philosophy. Rather should we say that this Evolutionary Sociology actually is that Philosophy; because this new Sociology includes ALL Spiritual Beliefs and other Godisms along with their priests, parsons, rabbis, etc., merely as Sociologic phenomena to be evaluated, not by Godology or Metaphysics, but by Scientific method.

The last, but most important, reason for these extracts is to be seen—by those who can—in the economic, political and religious (Godist) conditions of the Human World, which are the outcome of the World War to save Political Democracy. Every "liberated People"—including the British—have demanded or are demanding the right to elect, by a "free universal franchise," the Government which shall rule and run "their" Land. Pent-up feelings against exploiters, native and foreign, "mental" and material, mixed with frustrated Ideas of Freedom, in a sociologic heredity of more than one hundred years, have burst the bonds. They need no "propaganda" from any "far Country" to inspire them to "rise like lions"; and they may have done so more in the manner of Bakunin's spontaneous revolt than in the "Stalin" method of disciplined action by Scientific Guidance. Conversely, the Democratic elements among the Victors have been still crippled by that "Curtain" of Mental Confusion, generated out of Spiritual Beliefs and Proudhon-like Metaphysics, which was among the most serious factors in the 50 years' drift to Fascism and War.

Without details, what are the general conditions in the Human World, while these, more or less, "Democratic Governments" are being elected—mostly in spontaneous and/or provoked confusion and disturbance? 'Tis not exaggerating to say that there is a World-wide mix-up of antagonistic "Interests" and "Beliefs"; Economic, Political, Religious (Godist), Patriotic, Racial, Class, Sex, etc.; somewhere and somewhere apparently static, but always dynamic, according to the Principle of Gravity, as applied to the movement of smaller Social existences in relation to those of greater Mass and Force. World intrigue, open and concealed, inside and between every Nation, is far more extensive and intensive even than during '31-'39. And a very large proportion of the Common People realise this, which tends to make them too sceptical about the birth of World Democracy.

I have differed at times from our old friend, Jack Lindsay, but in "Tribune," July 5, 1946, while reviewing two books about the—misnamed—"American Century," he describes very clearly how this mixed-up conflict of many antagonisms is operating inside U.S.A. Still, he makes no reference to some, and errs about other most momentous Forces—integrative or disruptive—in that great Land. There, the "Civilisation" of Economic

Individualism, c. 400 years old since it began in Christian Europe and interlinked with many varied "Interests," has reached its most "critical" stage—to itself and to others. It is a potentially explosive Force of great Gravity (in a double sense) in every "region" Geographic, Economic, Political, Ideologic, of the Human World. The People of the U.K. at home and overseas are in an, at least as dangerous but more difficult, "position" —G.E.P.I.—Somewhere between the "Sociologic Gravitational Forces" of the "New Civilisation" and the Old. Evolutional Sociology based on Evolutionary Economics has been the Sociologic Obstetrician of the New—to adapt a memorable dictum of Karl Marx: Christian Godism, chiefly the Vatican variety, may yet be the Undertaker of the Old—not for the first time!

In all this there is no cause for Freethinkers and Secularists to lose their usual philosophic imperturbability. Without any prejudice for or against the U.S.S.R. or Communist Party, the statement is justified that the "New Civilisation," as the Webbs named it, has been tested and proved. It has also burst—for ever, can we hope?—the "Mental Confusion Curtain" of anti-Scientific speculative Beliefs which, for more than 50 years, has shut off the Rule of Science in all our Social Problems. Democracy is being "re-born" in the Western Lands by applied Social Science not by Spiritual Beliefs; and World Democracy is beginning—as the only alternative to Human World disaster. Its growth depends on us, on all of us; and what Freethought and Secularism has been in the development of British Democracy, the World Union of Freethinkers should do and may be, in the growth of World Democracy.

We can give credit to C.C. for his life-work in maintaining the policy of G. W. Foote and his enduring zeal as the exponent of a Scientific Atheist Philosophy, practically expressed in Secularism. That was not obvious to me at first, years ago, but integrating each year's experience with that already gained, the meaning and the wisdom of Foote's change of policy became apparent. I have neither reverence nor worship for any one or any thing, but I respect and admire Chapman Cohen for his life-work, above all others. We may regret that a World War was required to prove that Secularism is the only way, but we can rejoice that our President and Editor has lived to see the day.

ATHOSO ZENOO.

STILL LOOKING BACKWARDS

Extracts from Syke's Local Records of Remarkable Events

AUGUST 12, 1723.—This year, the steeple of St. John's Church, in Newcastle, was pointed at the expense of the Corporation, Matthew Featherstone, Esq., Mayor; and, the same year, the body was pointed at the expense of the parishioners.

JANUARY 27, 1742.—George Clark, joiner, better known by the name of "Skipper Clark," a gormandizing eccentric character of Newcastle, for a wager ate at a public house, a leg of mutton, 10lb. weight, a three-half-penny loaf, and drank six pints of ale; in the last half pint of which was put a half-pennyworth of snuff, which he completely performed in two hours.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1745.—In the night, All Saints Church, in Newcastle, was broken into, "and thereout taken a book intitled BERRITT upon the New Testament, with a well-polished chain belonging thereto. If such book or chain should be offered to be pawned or sold, the person or persons to whom such offer shall be made, are desired to stop the same, together with the person or persons, and give an account thereof to the wardens of All Saints." This is merely to show that at this period there were books chained in this church.

MARCH 24, 1751.—In heating an oven in a gentleman's house, near the new church at Sunderland, the fire took hold of some wood adjoining, when a woman servant went running into the church (being Sunday), calling out fire! fire! on which all the congregation made the best of their way to the door, in the utmost confusion, and in their hurry to escape broke the font, of very curious workmanship, all to pieces.

JUNE 29, 1754.—The following challenge appeared in the "Newcastle Journal," viz: "I take the liberty after this publick manner, to acquaint the country that Peter Ditchburn, of Mainsforth, in the county of Durham, will throw the long bowls, a pound and a-half weight, leap, and pitch the bang with any man in England for ten or twenty pounds and meet them at any place within twenty miles of Mainsforth aforesaid."

Query—"Pitch the bang"?

E. H. S.

CORRESPONDENCE

OTHER PEOPLE'S GODS—SHAKESPEARE.

SIR.—I have been so busy defending the living that I have had no time to defend the dead. But surely your correspondent, Mr. W. Kent, is a trifle unreasonable? He asks me fifteen easily-answered questions and then, to prevent my replies, says they cannot fitly be answered in "The Freethinker." Then why ask them?

It is kind to offer to "give" me an opportunity to defend Shakespeare, but this is no gift but a taking of my time and professional skill upon which I live. However, I am to be branded with lack of courage if I refuse, though surely I should show lack of sense if I accepted—unless for a fee!

There is no doubt that the writings of Bernard Shaw could not be written by one who had virtually no education except self-education, and never attended a university, and his plays, prefaces and polemics were obviously either the work of that brilliant Lord Chancellor, Birkenhead (continued by Jowitt), or the present Lord Chamberlain, Lord Clarendon, even if Shakespeare was not Lord Chancellor Bacon or Lord Chamberlain Oxford! Goldsmith, who "talked like poor Poll," was undoubtedly written by that monument of learning, Dr. Johnson; and who can believe that a mere uneducated newspaper reporter like Charles Dickens was capable of the masterpieces attributed to him by his credulous contemporaries? Somerset Maugham's plays are also, I am fully convinced, written by his brilliant brother, Lord Maugham, the former Lord Chancellor, who in letters to "The Times" uses some of the very same words used in the Maugham plays.—Yours, etc.,

G. L. DU CANN.

THE CATHOLIC BIRTHRATE.

SIR.—With reference to your quotation from "Britain's Birth Rate," by Francis J. Corina, which appeared under "The Birth Rate and the Future" in "The Freethinker" dated May 5, 1946, I should like to know what you think would happen to, say, England (a Protestant country), in which a goodly number of Roman Catholics live, in 50 years, during which time the R.C.s continue to breed promiscuously (as their Church encourages them to do) and the Protestants and others who have accepted the modern teaching of controlled production.

With R.C.s developing in numbers as they are doing now, I can foresee them outnumbering all other groups in the future.—Yours, etc.,

J. B. MACAULY.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. ENRY. Parliament Hill Fields, 4 p.m. Debate—"Christianity and Slavery," Mr. ARTHUR H. von LERSEN and Mr. L. ENRY. Highbury Corner, 7 p.m., Messrs. ATFIELD and LEPSON.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—6 p.m., Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN and J. HART.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., a lecture.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—7 p.m., a lecture.

Liverpool Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, opp. Lewis's).—A lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—3 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

DOGMAS AND DIGESTS—A WARNING

"If you take away Religion what will you put in its place?" is the frequent final question of a Christian whose stock proofs have been exploded one after the other by an unbeliever. The answer uttered like a triumphant checkmate invariably is: "If you take out an aching tooth why put another aching tooth in its place." But I suspect that the closing answer is only partially sound, for growing up around us day by day are beliefs which rush in to fill the vacuum left by lost religion. Many of these beliefs are just as ill-founded and as damaging as Christian dogma and their roots lie in the same soil, though the leaves and flowers are different to the eye.

The priests of the new religions are our popular scientists, and their missionaries are the editors of popular digests with the Mother Church in America. I except the World Digest which Sir John Hammerton has, in the main, been able to run on adult lines.

As the priest begins to despair of convincing man of the future life, the scientific reporter rushes into print with news of a Russian doctor's elixir which may before long prolong man's life on earth indefinitely. Thousands believe but the insurance companies do not lower their premiums. The Infidels!

As the parson finds less and less sale for the Blood of the Lamb as a solvent for stains on the soul the digest provides a hundred new panaceas for ills of the body—gland extracts, deep breathing, diet, vitamins, electric massage, sea-bathing, brown bread, new surgical operations, penicillin, M. & B. drugs, etc. Each new announcement causes a nucleus of believers in the idea that one thing will prove the salvation of the world. The true scientist stands aghast to see his tentative experiments trumpeted abroad as "the one and only truth," much as the world's great philosophers must have been surprised when they saw their own thoughts fed out as Christian sandwiches between two pieces of sanctimonious nonsense.

Some time ago I entered the Italian colony of Eritrea and arrived at Asmara just as the Americans were leaving. Packets of vitamin tablets were selling at a sovereign each though their true price was only just under two dollars. The food of the Italians at that time was better than we can imagine here in England to-day and required no supplementing, but the word had gone round that Vitamin E maintained the sexual apparatus at a high pitch and money which would once have been spent on prayer candles was squandered on unnecessary tonics. It was the same in Palestine where atabrine tablets given free to the army were resold to Palestinians at a high price to guard against malaria. M. & B. sulfa drug tablets were sold by Arabs on the Red Sea coast for as much as 2s. 6d. each once some digest reached the Middle East relating the wonderful new cure for venereal diseases. Saints' bones of yesteryear are the pills of to-day.

The rationalist may prefer to see these new beliefs supplant the old rather than see no change at all but I submit that basically there is no change. All are founded on the wish for personal survival and advantage, fear, ignorance and superstition. All the effort which has for centuries been wasted in the self-delusion of religious sects is finding new channels of waste at a time when one might have hoped to see it swell the river of human progress.

Look at your bookstall and count the digests upon it. Attractively presented and making no demands upon the reader's intelligence these pocket magazines are month by month culling the nonsense from the world's press and concentrating it into an essence. These books are entertaining in style and the habit of reading them is quickly formed and owing to their concentration its statements tend to stick in the mind as facts and already I

have heard people quote the such and such Digest as an authority as unchallengeable as was Genesis centuries ago.

The rationalist should beware of the New Dogma for he is fighting an attitude of mind, not just a few religious groups exemplifying that attitude.

LYNDON IRVING.

PIETY IN GAOL

Do good, for good is good to do;
Spurn bribe of heaven and threat of hell.

—The Kasidah of Haji Abdu el Yezli.

IN 1943 Professor John Anderson, Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University, was censured by both chambers of the New South Wales Parliament for having said this: "If religion, then, were to play a part in education as the development of understanding, it could only be as a subject on which various views could be considered by the child and grasped in terms of his own experience. . . . I should argue (1) that the morality natural to an educational system is the morality of education itself, of scholarship, of freedom of thought; (2) that the protecting of any morality from competition makes for moral weakness; and (3) that the clergymen who give instruction in schools are not experts in ethical science. Teachers, then, would be well advised to keep the clergy out of the schools."

Clergymen, both Protestant and Catholic, always claim that good conduct depends on religion (supernaturalism). Does it?

According to the census of 1933, 21 per cent. of the people of New South Wales stated that they were Roman Catholics. Approximately two-thirds of the Catholic children are educated in schools conducted by the Catholic Church in N.S.W., receiving an intensive religious training from priests, brothers and nuns. Therefore, if religion conduces to good social behaviour Catholics should have a low rate of delinquency. Actually, they have the highest rate!

Each year the Government Statistician of N.S.W. publishes in the Official Year Book of N.S.W., statistics showing the religions of prisoners in N.S.W. on June 30 of each year. Now read these revelatory statistics:

Year ended June 30	Total prisoners	Catholic prisoners	Catholics (per cent.)
1934	1,515	540	35
1935	1,398	454	32
1936	1,330	464	34
1937	1,183	404	34
1938	1,176	422	35
1939	1,364	481	35
1940	1,357	487	35
1941	1,236	423	34
1942	1,497	471	31
1943	1,558	529	33
1944	1,739	614	35

Delinquency amongst Catholic women is higher than the average male Catholic rate, there being 63 Catholic women incarcerated in 1943 out of a total of 139 women prisoners on June 30, or 45 per cent. The figures are not published with the intention of belittling Catholics, but with the object of proving that the claims of priest and parson are false. Protestants generally send their children to State schools, but what figures have been collated for Church schools conducted by them show that the rate of delinquency is higher than that of State schools. In short, the Catholic one-fifth of New South Wales produces one-third of the delinquents. Professor Anderson is right! The clergy should be kept out of the schools.

(Compiled by B. Calcutt and issued by the Queensland Rationalist Society)