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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God Help us!

"MAN'S help is God" is a common pulpit expression. Sometimes it is enlarged to "Man's *only* help is God," but that is when the situation appears to be awkward. The nature and the occasion of this kind of help are indicated by the cry "God help him!" when a man is in a very desperate situation. But in every instance there is the same fundamental implication. It is a cry of despair, a confession of frustration, an announcement of ignorance. The situation must be bad, man must have reached the limit of his resources, the outlook must be black, for him to call upon God. No one trusts in God while it is felt that his credit is good. When that is gone then he appeals to God, as the spendthrift, or the man in desperate need of cash, flies to the money-lender. Nothing better endorses the cynicism that gratitude is a keen sense of favours to come than the sight of a man on his knees thanking God for what he has done for him. It is the whine of a beggar—with a religious covering.

"The will of God," said Spinoza, "is the asylum of ignorance." No one has ever bettered that phrase and none ever will. It gives the maximum of information with the minimum of words. "God help us" is a synonym of ignorance. Spinoza's epigram gives us the philosophy of religion in a nutshell. A genuinely scientific study of religion is no more than illustrative of this generalisation. The whole of modern anthropology constitutes a storehouse of facts and situations demonstrating it. Sir James Frazer's eleven bulky volumes of "The Golden Bough" is a sustained and unchallenged proof that every essential feature of religion is based upon early man's ignorance of the nature of what was going on around him. Modern defenders of religion admit the truth of what has been said in the very act of declaring it to be false; for in no case do they rest their case for God on what is *known*. They insist that we must believe in God because science cannot tell us all we wish to know, or answer all the questions we care to ask. What is this but saying that where knowledge ends, religion begins? If a scientific man were to say, "You must believe what I have said about the phenomenon before you because we have no knowledge about it," he would be laughed at for a clown. The clergyman says it with an air of authority, and demands to be recognised as a mouthpiece of divine wisdom. From the dawn of human thought until to-day "God" has never meant more than the phrase with which helpless ignorance seeks to narcotise a consciousness of its own ignorance.

One often wonders whether there really are people who sincerely believe that "God" actually does help. Large numbers say they believe, and it is difficult to believe that they are all liars. The clergy say that *they* believe, but

as Heine said of God's forgiveness, it is their trade. They must say so; besides, we may readily agree that God does help *them*. The comfortable and high positions held by so many obvious mediocrites prove this. Many a parson asserts that without God life would not be worth much to *them*. We have been endorsing that—where the clergy are concerned—for many years. But the mass of the people who say that God helps them have no obvious ground for telling a lie. So we must put down their testimony to a mixture of fear and cultivated ignorance. Man is inclined to be a great humbug, and also to be a terrible coward concerning the unseen.

But just as life in its primitive stages, when gods were as plentiful as caterpillars and bulked on the landscape with mastodons, so modern and more civilised conditions rob man of the belief in gods. Ultimately, man has to come to terms with reality. If a parson is sick he consults a doctor or goes to a health resort. If he cannot afford the health resort his congregation may have "a whip round" and the parson gets a rest—so does the congregation. The layman is more affected by his surroundings because he has no obvious personal interests in fighting against them. The Minister of Health does not pray to God for the people's health, he dwells on the benefit of playing fields, and is silent about going to church. He thinks of strengthening the backs of the people, but is silent about bending the knees. He looks after the appointment of doctors, but there is no suggestion of increasing the number of parsons. Milk and not Masses is commended, and only in the editions of Roman Catholic papers, issued where that Church is strong, is there printed, much in the style of curses effected through quack medicines, accounts of illnesses cured by burning, to the Virgin or to a saint, holy candles—purchased in church. The Government in its rearmament scheme pays not the slightest heed to the Church, the Clergy, or to God. In earlier periods there would have been religious processions, prayers in the churches and the sanctification of implements of war. All we have left is the blessing of a battleship and the breaking of a not too expensive wine, followed by an adjournment to a luncheon at which the wine is put to a use that meets with much greater appreciation. Facts will tell, in the long run, and the lesson of experience has a method of working its way into the thickest of skulls.

Why should we expect God to help us? All we know of the world has been gained, not merely by the slow growth of human knowledge, but in actual opposition to the message God is said to have given the world. The Christian God is the only deity who has attempted authorship, and the consequences have been deplorable. For either he did not know what he meant to say, or he did not know how to say what he meant, or he forgot what he had actually done, and got everything wrong in his first, and last, venture in literature. So man had to set to work with nothing but

his native wit to discover the truth about himself and the world in which he was living. And the result to date is that even the parsonry, who might have remembered that it was their job to keep God on top, have handed the world of verifiable knowledge over to science and philosophy. Religion admits that for everything that can be known we must go to science. Prayers for rain are still offered (it must be admitted that in every case the rain does come *after* the prayers are offered) but much greater reliance appears to be placed on the non-religious forecasts of the B.B.C. There is general agreement that all that is known or may be known is the legitimate sphere of science, and for information and help we can look to no other source. So far as the present position is concerned, religion has not merely surrendered to science; but has given everything to it as spoils of war. But religionists still have a spark of hope. After all, science may never be able to tell us all we want to know. Beyond the known lies the unknown, and, as both Bishop Barnes and Dean Inge have warned their fellow-believers, it is dangerous to build upon the present ignorance of science. Religion dare not challenge the known in the name of *God's Word*. And it is dangerous to claim the unknown, for to-morrow the unknown may become the known. Over every altar there should to-day be written, "Here is worshipped that of which we know nothing, and we worship in the security of knowing that our worship may never be tainted by the iconoclastic influence of developing knowledge."

God has never saved man. That is a fact of history. But man has saved God; that is a disaster of history. Man does not anywhere surrender his ill-informed guesses at the riddle of the universe quickly or easily. Ignorance begets fear, and fear hesitates at adventure. More, ignorance gives its decisions quickly and easily. Knowledge, which knows only the method of trial and error, reaches conclusions slowly, and states them with circumspection. So it happens that man clings to his fears—fashions gods after he has acquired the knowledge that deprives them of justification. He endows them with judgments born of his own knowledge, with designs that owe their being to his own socialised nature. He takes upon his own shoulders the blame for events that, if there was a God, properly belong to Him. He shapes language and attributes it to a God, he cultivates the earth and thanks his god for the products of his own industry. He civilises his gods, not always to bring them up to his own level, but to at least the extent of making them sufficiently decent not to affront human society. Christians tell us that man is always seeking after God. It is not true. It is nearer the truth to say that God is always seeking after man. It is a fact of history that men can and do exist without God; but history cannot show us a god that has survived man's neglect. Man is the great god-maker. He atones for it sooner or later by destroying his own creation. Deicide marks the road of progress.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To deny the eternity of everything that exists and can exist in order to degrade and misrepresent it as having been made from nothing by an outside agency—that is true blasphemy.—SCHOPENHAUER.

THE BEST OF CHRISTIANS

THAT great German philosopher, Nietzsche, once said that there had been only one Christian and that he died on the Cross. Indeed, the rarity of the true Christian is proverbial even in the Christian world. For my part, I have regarded the late Count Tolstoi as one of the very few and taught by experience, I have never expected to meet a live Christian myself.

The other sort—nominal or pseudo-Christians—are, of course, as plentiful as paving-stones or bits of broken bricks in bombed areas.

However, quite recently I was in Dunkirk—or rather in what Christians in an ebullition of Christian love for Christian brothers have left standing of that little French port. There, not far from the place de la Gare, I met a true Christian.

I recognised him at once. How, indeed, should I do otherwise? I myself am a theoretical Christian having had (as I have been many times assured) a good Christian upbringing, although I do not go so extremely far as to practice Christianity any more than the rest of us do. But being a Christian, I could not fail to recognise one—the only, practical working one—"of the household of Christ" whom I have ever met.

He was—a horse.

To be precise, a cart-horse. Toiling along the cobbled street, bearing others' burdens as a Christian should, he had a settled expression of Christian resignation upon his face that reminded me of "The Maiden's Prayer" or Mercia in Wilson Barrett's "Sign of the Cross."

His knees were worn—doubtless by the exercise of prayer. His ribs, lean as Don Quixote's, showed that he had kept plenty of Christian fast-days. I felt sure that he did not even presume to eat fish on Fridays or in Lent. Humility, poverty, soberness, chastity and all the rest of the Christian virtues were written all over him.

I contemplated my Christian brother with that love and pity which one Christian is well-known to feel for another. He had four legs and I had only two. I was terrified lest Christian charity of the order of Saint Martin should lead him to give me one of his legs under the illusion that my necessity in that regard was greater than his. But he was blinkered, blind in one eye, and lost in holy meditation as he dragged his heavy cart along so that he saw neither me nor my leg-shortage. Otherwise he would have done his Christian duty by me, I am sure.

The blue-bloused peasant driving him reviled him in his horrible French *patois*. Yet "being reviled he reviled not again." He was struck with a whip mercilessly upon one cheek of his rump but instead of merely turning the other cheek to the smiter as Christian theory bids us, he went on continuously presenting both cheeks, a piece of super-Christianity one cannot sufficiently praise.

Obviously he kept the Commandments—all Ten of that old-fashioned Decalogue which bears so little relevance to modern social development. He had no multiplicity of gods. He did not worship any graven image. He took no god's name in vain. And he was only too willing to rest on the Sabbath or any other day, poor over-worked beast. Never did he commit adultery, even in thought, for he was a gelding. Not once did he steal or bear false witness. Nor did he covet his neighbour's house, or his neighbour's wife—who could? or his ox or ass or anything that was his. In brief, he was a perfect paragon, observing the Law and the Prophets—at least the profits of his master.

I had often heard "horse-sense" praised. That must be because a horse is Christianity in action, so different from the recalcitrance of the stupid donkey or the stubborn mule.

It was two days after these meditations upon him over a coffee filtre that I saw my Dunkerquois horse again. Minus the cart and service as ever, led now by a single rope as beauty draws us by a single hair. Piety! Thy name is horse as frailty, thy name is woman!

That Christian horse could have kicked his oppressor into eternity or the middle of next week with one kick of his iron-shod foot. He could have sunk his teeth into the man's neck and savaged him to bloody pulp. (If I, child of the devil as I am, had been that holy horse what do you think I would have done?)

"Where are you taking that horse?" I asked the carter in most careful French.

"To the knacker's, monsieur."

"But why?"

"He is finished. Old. Worn-out. No use. Yes: his time is come to make an end."

No doubt he was indeed almost finished. Even I who am no connoisseur in cart-horses, could see that. Already a colony of flies—present-day Dunkirk is a town of flies—was settling upon his sole, sore eye.

Texts from the famous 53rd chapter of Isaiah came into my mind:—

"Because he had done no violence. . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief. . . For the transgression of my people was he stricken."

I saw the patient, quiet creature stricken—with the pole-axe. I saw the great bulk fall, a quiver pass over the prostrate frame. They eat horse-flesh in Northern France and Belgium. A Holy Eucharist indeed. *Consummatum est!*

What difference was there between this horse-Jesus and the man-Jesus? I saw, I see none. Except that the man-Jesus was extremely vocal over his life and death while the horse lived and died in dumb dignity. I must correct the great-German philosopher, Nietzsche, for here is another Christian. Nay, the best of Christians, following the tradition: "To the slaughter!"

C. G. L. Du CANN.

MORAL LANDSLIDE

ON the one hand we hear with monotonous reiteration in Christian circles that we are witnessing these days a "moral landslide," particularly amongst youth. Yet there has recently been every sign of a signally placid acceptance of the recent book by A. S. Neill who declares categorically that the practices attributed to the depraved and licentious young people concerned are completely devoid of sin. Neill is, of course, a rebel, and in Christian circles will no doubt have long suffered on that account, sharing the fate of all pioneers of thought from Jesus to Bradlaugh.

Nevertheless, one must face the fact that with the decline in religious belief there must inevitably be a new attitude towards sex, and whatever ultimately transpires it is quite certain that association with "sin" will completely disappear. Fornication will cease even to be known by that name, already becoming so strangely archaic, and adultery's last status in the realm of crimes and torts a question of contractual breach at most. Nothing but the revival of a powerful sex Myth can ever put the clock back on this inevitable change, since modern youth rightly now demands reasons rather than rules for conduct involving instinctual renunciation, and the older moralists will find those reasons hard to formulate and still harder to justify.

I am not sure that the most truly moral figures in a typical session of the Divorce Court are not very often the victims in the witness box.

Somewhere dragging tardily after the New Morality, accelerated by two recent wars, Divorce Laws, Juvenile Court procedure, and the public attitude towards the body generally, all suffer a slow and painful change, trapping their host of victims, emancipated by the new ideas, but still entangled in the dangerous and sinister meshes of a law and tradition rooted in the past.

Neill puts a challenging question in some such form as this. A boy becomes sexually potent at, say, fourteen. Owing to economic considerations he cannot marry until he is twenty-seven. What has he been doing with his sex during those years? The answer of course is to be found in any sensational Newspaper, the Police Courts and too often, the consulting rooms of doctors and psychiatrists.

Traditionalists who fear "Free Love" may calm themselves from the outset. For there is NO SUCH THING, unless it be the thrice blessed licence encouraged without regard for consequences inside marriage by the Catholic Church. Let anyone in doubt as to the natural restraints inherent in a free association of the sexes give a thought to the severely regulated behaviour of his dog. For truly natural relations will always be regulated by two powerful factors with their roots deep in biological history. The highly selective discrimination of the female, and the law of diminishing returns. With children protected against aggression, and by law against neglect by voluntary parents, the rest of the community can safely be left to itself.

But there is another moral landslide becoming evident, a more insidious and far more dangerous social defection than the one which we have been considering. Almost everyone to-day is to a greater or lesser degree more dishonest in all manner of small and everyday matters than within living memory, and the position is steadily deteriorating. Never in recent history has there been such a spate of petty pilfering, mean little burglaries, and disregard for the rights of personal property. Burglars these days are abandoning the slightly gallant and glamorous raids on the jewellery from great houses and are taking more and more to miserable little thefts of clothes and household fittings from the little suburban villas and even working-class flats. Parcels are pilfered in the post, and hardly anything is safe in transit on the railways. Fewer and fewer lost wallets and handbags are now returned to the police or their anxious owners, though there was never a time when identification of these things was easier. And the cause is not far to seek. Commander Campbell in the perfect Brains Trust "faux pas," hit the nail on the head not long ago by blandly admitting to an astonished and vast audience that "we were all more or less in the black market" or words to that effect.

Groaning under ten thousand new crimes now incorporated in the mass of regulations and restrictions, so many in fact that no one man living has even read them all, there must be few of us indeed who at one time or another have not broken the law. So that the black market offences, rapidly becoming "respectable" constitute a dangerous bridge of uncertain length and indefinite termination between the thinnest edge of the wedge and downright crime. In a world of infinitely variable personal values, is there any wonder that huge numbers of us are slipping imperceptibly towards the wrong end?

For after all, ration cards, points and permits are but a special form of money. And it is not difficult to see how dishonesty with any of these as a matter of principle, shades imperceptibly into a slackening of commercial morality in general. There is little or no moral difference between the Black Marketeer and the "Fence."

J. STURGE-WHITING.

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ACID DROPS

The Churches of the upper order appear to be working hard to pose as the only saviour for Germany. We are assured that what the world needs, and particularly Germany, is more religion. Well, those who can throw back to about the last quarter of the eighteenth century will remember that Germany was being held up as a pattern for our loose religionists at home. Then came activity on the part of the Germans to widen their possessions in various parts of the world. Quietly, and as things were, naturally Germany began to make efforts to secure and expand its "possessions." Equally naturally, Britain did what it could to prevent that. But still the religious strength of Germany was being constantly praised. Whatever else Germany might be, it was still a strong centre of Christianity.

Then came the first world war, with the Germans our direct enemy. Then our belief in Germany's non-Christian behaviour began to show our religious folk that Germany was not quite so saturated with Christianity as it was. This was followed by the second world war, and the desperate state in which this country settled our advertising of the Germans as being Christian leaders. Of course, the evidence was always the other way. Christianity was still so strong in Germany that the Church was the one factor that was able to make some sort of a stand against Hitlerism. Now the war is over the Churches here are beginning to fish in muddy waters.

Mr. William Hasbridge, a bank official, asked to be allowed to affirm. The coroner asked, "What are you?" The reply came, "I am an Atheist." Said the coroner, "Well, I suppose no oath at all would be binding on your conscience. There are few Atheists to-day, but I know there are plenty of Agnostics." To that Mr. Hasbridge pointed to a New Testament and said, "That certainly would not bind me." He was then affirmed.

Mr. Hasbridge did well, but it is high time that these officials were ordered to cease baiting witnesses who are willing to act honestly. To say there are only a few Atheists is insolent and untrue. In any case, officials from the Government should do their duty without acting impudently to witnesses. If the law is to be respected, its Ministers should set an example.

A recent story about the Pope puts him in a light that seems to please his followers. The story runs that a diplomat—name not given—asked the Pope how he would deal with an unnamed question. The Pope replied, "God would not like it." To most people that would look like dodging the question, but his followers appear to think that is an excellent answer and illustrates the power of the Roman Church. We can see in the answer nothing but an evasion of dealing with the question put, and the degree to which Roman Catholicism deadens the intelligence of its followers where religion is concerned.

We can all agree that we are a civilised people—in splashes. And in some areas the splash is large. Thus at Sudbury, in Suffolk, the Church has had special prayers said in order to remind God that if he does not control the weather better the crops will all be spoiled. However, God seems to wink the other eye, and the poor farmers suffer just as though they had not prayed. Also from Sussex comes the information that God will not stand any fishing on Sunday. In proof of this, one fisherman, Skipper Clapstone, confirms this by telling the "Daily Express" that when he put out to sea on a Saturday evening—which meant work on Sunday—his nets were caught up by mines and all were destroyed. There can be no doubt that God is grossly neglecting his duties, and as "strikes" are quite popular pastimes, we suggest that it should be publicly proclaimed that unless God and his angels attend to their duties and control the weather better, all prayers will be suspended. It is time that the gods were reminded that they are dealing with men, not with apologies for such.

There has been much talk of late concerning the iniquities of compulsory Church attendance among the Forces. There have been some reforms that *should* make for treating soldiers and sailors as though they were men and not automatons, but as things go, and as human nature is what it is, the pressure on the men is too great for the majority to stand up for their rights. They grumble at Church parades and inwardly laugh at the sermon—and preachers—while every effort is made to keep the Forces in close touch with religion. We have the "chaplain's hour" at least twice a month, etc. One may sum up the situation by saying that there will never be real freedom of opinion in the Forces until religious services are only for those *who ask for them*. Not many men have the courage to persist against authority, and it is true that not all officers are sufficiently developed to encourage freedom of thought with the men under their command.

Whether Lourdes will continue to hold its own in the face of the expense of travelling, etc., remains to be seen. The cost of a five-day trip is about £30, and there are certain to be more expenses. Why does not the papacy institute—with the aid of God—some long-distance marvels, so that the operating saints could shoot long-range miracles. After all, when a miracle can only be performed at a particular place the power of the saint involved suffers a little in the direction of character. Our own prophecy is that the papacy will arrange with some other saints for performances in other places, leaving Lourdes to be run by the people nearer home.

According to Dr. Orchard the Roman Church in the U.S.A. which has passed the 24,000,000 mark, will soon become the dominant Church in America, as it shows "an example of religious unity" to the rest of the world. While here in England, Mr. James Walsh declares that it is time for Catholic movements to leave the "defensive" for a more "positive Christian attitude" against the Church of England. And what are the Protestant Churches in the U.S.A. and in England going to do about it? What *can* they do about it? We suspect that some of their heads have an uneasy feeling that, after all, the Roman Church is right—and if that feeling dares to express itself it may mean the beginning of the end of all schisms. For the Roman Church, like the elephant, never forgets.

It is supremely ridiculous to speak of "faith" in the abstract. When we are told that a man has "faith," we should ask "faith in what?" It may be faith in God. One may have faith in honesty, or in stealing, faith in paying debts or in dodging payment of what is due. One may have faith in the Virgin Mary or in Mumbo Jumbo. You may have faith that a certain priest will help the poor or that he will rifle the money left in the church. A former editor of this paper spent 12 months in prison for what he believed to be the truth concerning Christianity. And the judge who sentenced him had faith—like a good Christian—that a man who "insulted" God ought to go to prison. Faith means anything. It covers rascality and honesty. Above all it is the chief cover for religion. Therefore, have as little as possible to do with it.

According to Archbishop D'Alton (Ireland), the stage is set for a terrible struggle between the forces of Christ and anti-Christ, but this time it is to settle the quarrel once and for ever. We do not believe it. The "forces of Christ," ever since Christianity was heard of, have been fighting for existence, and now the anti-Christ forces appear to be stronger than ever. The Archbishop says that the forces of Jesus are now fighting with "renewed" vigour. We rather think that the wording should be "fighting with desperate determination," that is certainly more descriptive. The historic fact is that Christianity has always found difficulties in establishing itself, and still more difficulty in retaining its position. Today there is not a single country in Europe where Christianity is not losing ground. No system you never can count on maintaining the perpetuity of any religious system. The gods carry the stamp of decay with their birth.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

R. S. OLD.—The story of Member of Parliament who came to clergyman with tears streaming down his face, and with intention to commit suicide but was brought to common sense, is too elaborate to be true. It has humbug written all over it.

F. ARMITAGE.—Right and wrong. There was, of course, no official bringing of God into the war on the part of the Russian Army. In Russia, people are free to have a god or go without him. Whichever it is, the Government—and God—remains silent. There must have been many prayers said in the Russian ranks, but they were not official. Pleased to have your praise of this journal.

E. L. WILLIAMS.—You have got the wrong end of the stick. There is no such thing as a Jewish people; there are only people who believe in Judaism. There has not been a Jewish people for nearly two thousand years. There are believers in the Jewish religion all over the world, and there has been as long as we come into contact with Jews. A Christian people does not exist; there are only people who believe in the Christian religion.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We have often wondered why people should talk about seeing and feeling God and never talk about smelling him. After all, seeing and smelling connote the activities of certain organs and if an object may be seen or felt when can it not be smelt? True, it is said of some saints that they did smell a great perfume when they got into touch with the deity and his angels. In the far off days when people really believed in God they did not hesitate in putting in huge Bibles a picture of God with a flowing beard, and it may be taken for granted that a god who let loose currents of perfume would be very convincing to those who are searching for him. What people are doing now is cutting down God from one level to another, and presently all that will be left will be the equivalent of nothing at all.

The following we take from Lecky's "History of European Morals":—

The period from the accession of Nerva to the death of Marcus Aurelius, comprising no less than 84 years, exhibits a uniformity of good government which no other despotic monarch has equalled.

Each of the five emperors who then reigned deserves to be placed among the best rulers who have ever lived. Trajan and Hadrian, whose personal characters were most defective, were men of great and conspicuous genius; Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius, though less distinguished as politicians, were among the most perfectly virtuous men who have ever sat on a throne. During 40 years of this period, perfect, unbroken peace reigned over the entire civilised globe. The barbarian encroachments had not yet begun. The distinct nationalities that comprised the

Empire, gratified by perfect municipal freedom, had lost all care for political liberty, and little more than 300,000 soldiers guarded a territory which is now protected by more than 3,000,000.

But then, these men were not servants of Jesus, they even went so far as to put human development on this earth to be of greater consequence than preparing for heaven.

Branches of the N.S.S. are getting into their peace time stride and a syllabus of indoor lectures has been arranged by Manchester, Glasgow, Bradford and Newcastle. Others are in course of arrangement and details will appear in our Lecture Notices column as they fall due each week. We might again repeat that the Executive is prepared to send speakers to Debating and other organisations to put the Freethought point of view to their members.

We are asked to announce that the West London Branch of the N.S.S. has secured the use of a room of The National Trade Union Club, 12, Newport Street, London, W.C. 1, for Sunday evenings. The first meeting will be held on October 13. Fuller information later.

H. G. WELLS

I.

IF there are any compensations in old age, they have not yet come my way. On the other hand, one of the most tragic things which accompanies it is the inevitable disappearance of the "old familiar faces" as Charles Lamb called them.

The authors, the artists, the actors and great variety turns, and many others with whom we have grown up, so to speak—all, all fail by the way. The king is dead—long live the king; but often the loss is one which can never be replaced.

I did have the pleasure of talking once with H. G. Wells, but of course I cannot say I knew him personally; yet in another sense I seem to have known him all my life—at least since the time I emerged from the schoolboy stage.

His "Time Machine" came to me very early, and I sensed at once that he was in a different class from the Deadwood Dicks and Jack Harkaways with whom I had spent many delightful hours. Wells was at once admitted into my "esoteric" circle, the circle in which ranged Charles Dickens and Thackeray, Scott and Dumas and other classics. I read everything written by Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard, but I put Wells even in those days more than a shade higher.

Much as I revelled in Jules Verne and Andre Laurie, there was something about him, an impish humour, an extraordinary descriptive power and characterisation which betrayed the hand of a master; and re-reading some of his early romances recently again I see no reason to alter my opinion. Wells was again just as brilliant and dazzling as I found him in those far-off days.

This goes as well for his later books, "Kipps," "Mr. Polly," "The New Machiavelli," "Ann Veronica," all of which I read as they appeared; and it was with no little regret that I saw Wells slowly but surely turn from his creative genius in fiction and try to become a great social reformer. In those inimitable futuristic speculations of his, he attacked with all his superb gift of inventive the worst side of capitalistic industrialism, and did his best to plan a world in which all men should enjoy to the utmost a collectivist regime dominated by scientific gadgets and scientific planning. I cannot remember at the moment if he ever repeated that well-known parrot cry that man was living in poverty in the midst of plenty, but certain it is that Wells was a convinced Malthusian—like the late J. M. Keynes—and it is difficult to imagine any Malthusian who could write such nonsense.

To combine a great gift for storytelling with the role of a reformer as did Dickens is a combination very rare indeed,

and Wells perhaps thought it best to keep them as far apart as possible. But the state of the world with its miseries and poverties, its cruelties, horrors and shame, weighed very heavily on him, and he poured out book after book full of indignation, amazed that we could still go on in the bad old way, and almost terrified at the debacle which he felt more and more was our inexorable fate.

Though always calling himself a Socialist, Wells seemed aloof from the many socialistic organisations, fighting a lone hand, and never afraid of clearly expressing his opinion of some of the heroes of the socialist world. He had no use for Karl Marx, for example. He called "Das Kapital" "a monument of pretentious pedantry" and no doubt agreed with Bernard Shaw who said it was "not a treatise on socialism but a jeremiad against the bourgeoisie." Said Wells, "I have always had a peculiar contempt for the mind and character of Karl Marx, a contempt and dislike that have deepened with the years." He considered that Marxian "bad manners," and Marxian "dogmatism," wrapped "a blanket of fog" round the minds of two crucial generations. While as for socialism, he claimed it was "vague, divided and unprepared" to undertake the work of reconstruction. Such pronouncements made Wells anything but liked by his fellow Socialists, and "The New Machiavelli" did nothing to recommend him to them. It is still heartily disliked by present-day Socialists for the unhappy pictures it gives of his contemporary "comrades."

All this independence of thought and his free expression of it showed a strongly individualistic trend in his character, and it is not surprising that he veered more and more to the Free-thought position. Yet he must have found giving up a God very difficult, for he felt compelled to write a Theistic tract, "God the Invisible King," which I must confess I never read. I never had the heart, in my strong admiration for him, to go through it, but the late William Archer made mincemeat of its nebulous ideas. Whether as a result of this or his own further pondering over the problem of Theism he came to reject God and all that Deity stood for, I do not know, but there can be little doubt that to all intents and purposes Wells became as much an Atheist as any of us.

And it is good to see that he had no use either for "Agnosticism." Here is a passage from "The Outlook for Homo Sapiens" which is worth noting and preserving when the religion of Wells is being considered:—

"Even now many Atheists prevaricate. If the word 'God' means anything at all, it means a powerful being sufficiently anthropomorphic to have reciprocal relations with the individual man. A God who is not a personality is a contradiction in terms. But because of the ribald and ungentle associations of the word 'Atheist,' a great number of Atheistic thinkers and teachers and writers have clung ambiguously to the entirely deflated name of 'God.' God, they say, is the Absolute, he is a force not ourselves making for righteousness, he is the whisper of conscience, he is the brainless Thinker responsible for the mathematical order of the world, he is immanence. These are mere subterfuges, God-shaped vacuums."

That passage might well have come from the pages of this journal at its most iconoclastic. But it shows how far Wells had travelled during the years, and how like so many other great men he was forced to come to the conclusion that the only true philosophy in the ultimate was Atheism.

It is in this book, "The Outlook for Homo Sapiens" published in 1942 (Secker and Warburg), where will be found almost all of Wells's maturist thoughts on the "reformation" of mankind, and hundreds of comments on all aspects of life as we know it.

Wells did not like (to put it mildly) Roman Catholicism. He recognised it for what it was—a huge imposture, and his scientifically trained mind rejected it with not even humorous contempt. It aroused his indignation too much. He held his

hand in spite of that, for he could always have made his indictment far stronger. He saw quite clearly that in a little more than three centuries after its "foundation," it had become "a synthesis of all the religious cults of that mentally festering age." It became "the most extraordinary jumble of absurdities and incompatibilities that has ever exercised and perplexed the human intelligence." Wells could never understand how such "a natural born scoffer and rebel as Mr. Hilaire Belloc" could remain a Roman Catholic—just as he could never understand how Professor J. B. S. Haldane could be a convinced Marxist. These things bewildered and distressed him. Full of optimism in his early manhood, certain that with the advancement of science the world would become inevitably better and better for man to live in, as he grew older he became less certain of the Utopias he had imagined would dominate the future of mankind and, I think, he died a disappointed man. He came to see in fact that "progress" was slow, very slow, and that time, in the age-long history of the world, was as nothing. The evolution of man was not accomplished in a hop.

H. CUTNER.

SOLOMON AND THOMAS COOK

THE recently concluded war heralded the beginning of the Atomic Age and already people are discussing inter-planetary travel. Yet try to make the journey from London to Glasgow and you will discover how difficult travel can be these days. My astonishment is, therefore, the greater when I review the different places in which King Solomon left evidence of his visits long before multi-sailed clippers took the place of the heavy, sluggish trireme.

With a million others I spent over four years in the Middle East and early in my stay I went to Jerusalem and made my first Solomon discoveries. In that city can be seen Solomon's Quarries, the site of Solomon's temple, and a thousand-and-one ruins associated with his son, David. The works of Solomon in Jerusalem alone must have demanded the attention of a lifetime from a normal energetic monarch who did his own plumbing.

Some months later I found myself in Eritrea and, to my surprise, I found that Solomon had been there long before either Mussolini or I had given the place a thought. He must have been there for I saw hundreds of tapestries showing his dalliance with the Queen of Sheba, a native of those parts it appears, and although the scenes depict amorous adventures which took place at Solomon's own home, it is difficult to believe that he never visited the little lady's folks.

Two years ago I sailed into the oven which is called Aden, an extinct volcano crater which holds a sun-baked town isolated from civilisation by hundreds of miles of sea and sand. One of the first things I was shown was the great stone reservoir which centuries ago held Aden's water supply. A nimble old Arab, who was skipping up and down the steps at the side of the reservoir, stopped and pointed at the great engineering feat. "King Solomon," he said, and waited for baksheesh. Again I marvelled for here before me was an achievement which must have taken the engineer a life-time to produce. Yet Solomon had done this as well as all the other things which I had seen thousands of miles away. I noticed, incidentally, that the wise old monarch was so much a part of Aden life that the old Arab, when asked what time it was, still replied: "King Solomon." In fact, it was his answer to every question which we asked.

How did Solomon do it all? Thomas Cook can take you round the world in a few months; but to equal Solomon by present-day standards of work and travel, you would have to build St. Paul's Cathedral in London; construct Boulder Dam in America; enter into a complicated romance with a Japanese film-star and still find time to write a book of the wisdom which a lifetime had taught you. Let us therefore not mock this man—he was able to achieve the impossible.

LYNDON IRVING.

WHEN SNAKE BITES PARSON!

SURELY when a snake dares to bite a Minister of God the event is worthy of more space than the small paragraph allotted to it in a daily paper recently—especially when the Minister in question *dared* the snake to bite him.

For the benefit of those who happened to miss this delectable item of news I will relate the circumstances. Somewhere in the United States a certain preacher, in his eagerness to convince his flock of the all-mighty power of the Lord, decided to give a first-hand demonstration of Faith—and how it works! Said he: "In order to prove my faith in the power of God I will allow myself to be bitten by a venomous snake right here before your eyes so that there can be no deception. The Lord will protect me from harm!" The snake, always ready to oblige, bit him good and well, so that he died horribly.

It is rather a pity the report does not go on to say what effect all this had on the congregation; but one may suppose, being Christians, it had no effect whatsoever. They would merely say "It was the Lord's will" and leave it at that. They would never have the intelligence to argue that, 1—God must have been dozing at the time or else that he couldn't be bothered anyway. 2—God allowed the man to be killed when he could have saved him and was therefore guilty of murder. 3—The snake was more powerful than God. 4—There is no God!

It is certain they did not believe any of those logical conclusions because the Christian mind is never logical. It is always so easy to fall back on the good old tag—"God knows what he is doing better than we do—it is not for us to question his mysterious ways." That will always get them out of any tangle quite nicely thank you, so it was really very foolish and quite unnecessary for the priest to *try* to prove God's power. It has never yet been proved and never will be proved but there will always be simpletons ready to take it for granted.

Is there any reason why *all* the clergy should not be required to prove their faith publicly? I, for one, would be all in favour of a compulsory test of this kind for all men seeking Holy Orders. Why should they take good money for telling *us* to have faith if they have none themselves? Let each man who proposes to obtain his living by ramming his belief in the All-Mighty down our throats first prove that he *really believes* what he is talking about.

What a Roman Holiday it would be if, once a year, we could let ourselves to the nearest Zoo and witness an Ordeal of Faith performed by all novitiates! Apart from being bitten by snakes they might, for instance, put their heads in the jaws of a lion or tiger, be trampled upon by an elephant, or torn to pieces by a pack of wolves. In fact, the possibilities are endless. I am confident all Atheists would be quite content to abide by the resulting proof of God's power.

So now, you Christians, what about it?

W. H. WOOD.

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE (concluded from page 336)

Salvation lass feels so suddenly qualified to instruct older experienced people in the "way of salvation." I have often hoped that they will advance to another and greater mental (spiritual) revolution—another personal experience in their own mind (soul) and experience a greater joy (that none can deny or take away), in which they will learn that terrible Gods, Hells, Devils and Damnation are only primitive myths, and they have no such things to fear, either for themselves or others. This is the Atheist's joy, also the cultivation of his own thinking powers, free from all inhibitions and taboos and Holy days, Holy or unholy ghosts. He enjoys a freedom such as no religion can give. He may appear illogical in opposing Faith by Reason, but basically that is the choice—intelligent reasoning or emotionalism.

M. J. LEROI.

OBITUARY

FRANCIS CHAMIER RICHMOND

With deep regret we announce the death of Francis Chamier Richmond which took place at St. Mary's Hospital, Islington, after an operation. A very staunch Freethinker, he was perhaps better known on the continent, especially in Brussels, where he contributed articles to their Freethought magazines. French Freethinkers also received his help. His remains were interred in the East Finchley Cemetery, London, N., on August 28, when a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. E. A. Willets.

R. H. R.

THOMAS HENRY ELSTOB

It is with regret that we announce the death of T. H. Elstob which took place on August 19 last, at the age of 67. Mr. Elstob joined the N.S.S. nearly 50 years ago, and contributed to this journal for many years. He also worked for the Secular Education League, of which he was Secretary, and for the South Place Ethical Society. He was cremated at Golders Green on August 26.

H. C.

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. SAPHIN, J. HART and E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "Repeal of the Corn Laws."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Burnley Market.—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. BARKER.
Liverpool Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, opposite Lewis's).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., a lecture.
Oswaldtwistle.—Saturday, September 7, 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Worsthorne.—Friday, September 6th, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

WANTED.—Debates by Charles Bradlaugh, and on any other subject. Write: Watling, 3, Larchwood Close, Romford, Essex.

WANTED in any London District, Unfurnished Flat or three rooms. Write or phone: J. Seibert, 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C. 1 (HOLborn 2601).

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CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

ALTHOUGH religion has a vast number of professional exponents, and vast resources of all kinds, it still needs the Christian Evidence speakers. They presume to defend and support the policy and institutions of an Almighty God. This must require a considerable amount of conceit and credulity at any time, and much more so just now, when the professional preachers admit their failure, and their greatest efforts do not prevent the continual loss of adherents.

It is generally agreed that one word from God could transform the whole world, just as in Creation "let there be" and there was.

If God put forth the faintest effort, the whole of the opposition from unbelievers and the indifference of others, would be instantly transformed into support.

For a very long time, there has been an unlimited amount of prayers, all beseeching God for a little assistance, in his own work.

As there are no reports of any change in the situation, it is quite clear that God has not given any effective assistance.

God shows no more interest in Church troubles than he does in world-wide famine or slaughter.

The Christian Evidence given in Finsbury Park is as much a retreat as a defence. It seems so much easier to abandon a lot of religion than to defend it, and it is found to be a most useful way of dodging an awkward question.

Claiming to believe in Creation and Miracles, but will not defend the tale of the garden of Eden, or the Miracles of Aaron and the Magicians in front of Pharaoh. Usually orthodox views of Jesus Christ are given, but it is denied that he taught or believed in Demonism—he did not cast out Devils from lunatics, and the accounts of Jesus talking (with Demons) is merely that he used common language of that time.

One or more Devils obeyed the command to come out, leaving the person in a sound state of mind. There was recognition, favour asked and granted, which caused the drowning of a lot of pigs, and we can read how the people reacted to the things they saw happening. This has always been received as an account of what actually happened, and it is recorded as such. To dismiss it as merely the use of inexact terms, just as we say "Sunrise" or "Sunset" is such a gross travesty, as to be nothing less than a falsehood. Every student knows it was a very common superstition.

If Jesus is held to have acquiesced or condoned the belief or practice of such ignorant superstition instead of destroying it, he was to blame, and he missed a great opportunity for doing good work.

It is also stated that "the Bible is not the Word of God, but it contains the Word of God." Actually the Bible is not defended nor any definite creed. This is of the utmost convenience to the Christian Evidence speaker; he can quote or ignore any part, just to suit any point of view, but that is the usual dodge of the twisters.

Years ago, as Christians, we had a reasonable argument—if God existed (as most people agreed) then it was quite right to expect a communication from him. To us, the obvious message was the Bible. We accepted it, and tried to defend it, in spite of the difficulties it landed us in. In these far off days, we did not think it was good only in parts, nor did we say that it did not mean exactly what it said. We did, at least, try to be honest.

Since then, these Evidencers, along with us, have learned sufficient to know, that it is quite impossible to defend the Bible, but it is never frankly admitted by them.

They cling tenaciously to religious emotionalism, and give up the assumption of intellectual understanding, which is quite foreign to religion. "You may be saved by faith, but never by understanding" (C. Cohen). The real wholehearted devotee has

no real concern with any reason for or against. All he seeks is a reassurance of divine favours, some doubts may occur, but he goes and performs his devotions—prayer, praise and offering—and regains some confidence. He gets the satisfaction that comes from a sense of duties fulfilled. He is reminded that his "Lord God Omnipotent reigneth" and as far as he can, he tries to believe that "all things work together for good" to the believer. Evils do happen, but he still maintains that he is getting the best that is possible, and refuses to consider that the actual facts are all against such a conclusion. Ordinary intelligence would tell him clearly enough that "all things" do not work for his welfare, any more than they do for anybody else, but he prefers "the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

One rare speaker seemed to feel that his arguments were insufficient. Greatly agitated, he said he would give his unanswerable argument, which would prove conclusively that his faith had a solid foundation in facts, and that Christianity was the one true religion, because it was the only religion that could give these "spiritual" proofs.

Said he: "By your reasoning, you may prove everything against our religion to your own satisfaction, but you must admit that anyone can be quite sure of what he feels, and no one can deny what another feels in his own soul. No one could persuade me that I have not had personal 'spiritual experiences,' which were entirely my own. I have known what it is to seek God's salvation, and to receive the assurance of forgiveness, and have felt the relief from the burden of sin, which brings great joy, which no one can deny or take away."

In this way he belittled critical reasoning, and opposed to it his own personal (emotional) experiences—which "no one can deny."

But no Atheist need think of denying anyone's personal experiences. For if everything is quite fully agreed, it gives no proof of the truth of Christianity. St. Paul was right when he made the Resurrection the most vital basis. "If Christ be not risen, then is our faith in vain."

Whatever is experienced in a soul to-day cannot prove that an impossible event happened thousands of years ago.

Such experiences are the hard core, the essential value of religion to believers who claim that the experience is supernatural.

It is really quite easy to understand—youngsters are taught that they inherit guiltiness of sin through all their ancestors, and they are even involved in Adam's sin. Preachers emphasize this load of guilt, and although the youth's most serious crime has been to steal from the sugar basin, yet by dwelling on this idea it quite often becomes a very serious trouble. God is to them a terrible judge, who will some day inflict a terrible punishment on all hell-deserving sinners, including themselves, whereas to those who get his pardon, he is a loving, heavenly Father, giving favours now and a Heaven hereafter. The penitent seeks this pardon, and cries: "Lord be merciful to me, a sinner." It is pointed out to him that there is really no need for him to worry any more, because all God's benefits are for the penitent sinner, they now belong to him, including a free pardon. He is reminded that it is the self-righteous (Pharisees) that are the condemned. When he grasps this idea, and faith in Christ's sacrifice to exonerate him from all blame, he feels the heavy burden of guilt and fear is lifted from his mind, and he is very glad.

The intensity of the joy depends on the intensity of the fears and sorrow which have been removed. He feels he is in a very favoured position—he has escaped Hell, instead of suffering that, he expects to enjoy Heaven.

Most likely, he or she will feel a deep and serious concern for many others who are still unrepentant (unsaved) sinners, who are still in danger and Hell-deserving. They believe they have received esoteric information from above, that is why the youth

(Continued on page 335)