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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Atheism

I THINK we may take it that "Atheism" has at last been climatised in this country. People now talk about it, discuss it, and the godite—if he is not a half educated individual—accepts the other man being an Atheist, and there the matter often ends. I recall being at a friend's house one evening—I was then about 20 years of age—where there were several ladies and gentlemen present. When I arrived the hostess said to me, "Mind, Mr. Blank is very religious so do be careful about what you say. Perhaps the way in which it was spoken riled me. But after I was introduced to my very religious gentleman I shook hands in the usual manner, and fell into conversation, also in the usual manner. But something was said that made me say, "Mrs. Blank, our hostess, tells me that you are a very fervid Christian. I like fervid men, but I must tell you that I am an Atheist, still I have no wish to prevent you saying whatever you feel inclined to say. Just talk as though we both believed in freedom of thought." He shook hands again; we spent a very friendly evening together and we remained friends for a long time. He never altered me in the least, but I am quite sure that he was not so sure about his religion as he had been. Both of us could differ in opinion concerning religion without wishing to cut one another's throat. But taking a broad and comprehensive view of human nature and of man's inclinations, it is a solid truth that, in the past, particularly in certain countries, people have hated each other, ill-treated each other, and have even killed each other, not merely because a man had no god but because he was believed to be a living threat to the well-being of the whole community. Why? A very easy explanation can be found in the biblical story of Jonah. Jonah was told by god to do something. Instead of obeying he bolted and tried to escape by sea. But if the Bible-God sometimes forgot people who did not disobey him, he never forgot those to whom he owed a grudge. So God sent a storm that promised to send the ship with Jonah to the bottom of the sea with all its passengers. But in good time Jonah was discovered, and while the crew had no ill-feeling against Jonah as a man, they satisfied God by throwing Jonah overboard. So good-bye to Jonah and his God, so far as we are concerned. Now this form of collective guilt is very, very old, and in many instances it roots itself in religion. You find it in primitive societies, and as life develops it is to be seen embedded in laws and customs. More than that, it becomes a matter of concern with each member of the group. You find it in most countries, particularly when a country is at war. In war time all Germans are looked on as "sinners," and in turn, Germans look upon Englishmen as scoundrels. The idea of collective responsibility rules. Keep this idea well in the front and you will make for understanding social

developments. There is the common saying, "I am proud I am an Englishman," or "I am proud I am a Dutchman," or "an Italian," etc., etc. Anyone can get a bagful of illustrations of this.

So we have now reached, I think, an explanation of why some very excellent Christians have felt it their duty to hate and ill-treat an Atheist, and why people are shy at saying that they are Atheists. The Atheist was not merely wrong, he was religiously vile. We have a case and explanation why that monument of ignorance, Bishop Winnington Ingram, was in the habit of saying publicly that when a man told him he was an Atheist he always asked him, "Where did you spend last night?" The Bishop would have been a shining light in the time of Jonah. Jonah was born in early times, but his descendants are still very numerous. Some of them are to be found in the Houses of Parliament. That, perhaps, is only fair since they form part of our population. Whether the representation is too large or too small I cannot say. I know they are there. I am merely trying to find out why Atheists are, or were, so disliked, not because they were bad citizens—the champions of boycotted ideas are never the worst of citizens, taking them in groups—but because their standing for an unpopular idea is a good test of intellectual honesty. Christians have never persecuted heretics because they thought their opponents might be wrong; they were rather afraid that they might be right.

I think that what I have said will serve well as a background for what I set forth to say. But I have a fiend of a typewriter and when it once gets a grip of a line of thought it is a very hard task to get it to be obedient again.

I have been told by hundreds of godites that they could never be satisfied with Atheism. I haven't the slightest doubt that is truthfully said, but satisfaction must ultimately be a personal matter. In the majority of cases the question of satisfaction—especially when religion is on the boards—is of no greater importance than whether a man prefers tea to coffee or ginger ale to whisky. But from another standpoint there are involved large questions of philosophy, of the desirable and the undesirable, the essential and the transient quality of human nature.

A great deal obviously rests on what we are looking for and how we search. A human nature that is constitutionally unreflective and superstitious, one that has been fed upon religious legends and accustomed to the use of a religious terminology is, of course, not likely to be violently attracted to a view of life that puts superstition on one side and strives for exactitude of speech and thought. But then neither does the confirmed inebriate show any marked partiality for tea, coffee or ginger ale, although his repugnance cannot be taken as evidence of the undesirability of these articles. Also, if one comes to Atheism with the belief in a heaven and a hell, in gods and angels, and demands substitutes for what they are asked to dismiss, their appreciation of the Atheistic position is not likely to

be great. Atheism cannot meet him. To Atheism all these religious beliefs are artificial, even though they may be perfectly natural given the conditions of their origin and development. They are obviously engendered by ignorance and error. They are kept alive in later years by interested instructors, and so take the place of more accurate knowledge but neither the belief in a god or a soul fall into line with present-day knowledge and understanding. They certainly have no logical connection with modern thought. They are heritages from a far-off past, and have long ceased to bear serious connection with contemporary life.

Atheism, therefore, does not seek to satisfy every demand made by an ill-regulated or badly directed human nature. Our aim is to disentangle the true from the false, the essential from the non-essential, and if possible to guide life along more profitable roads than mankind has hitherto trodden.

The common cry that mankind longs for another life is one of those falsehoods that has lived on a series of misunderstandings. What would be the attraction of a future life if a sufficiency of life here was provided? What strength would the cry for "divine justice" have in a world where justice was strong and clear and infallible? What room would there be for any religious systems in a world where humanity was completely instructed and socially perfect? Religion retains a place in human life only by appealing to the partly satisfied instincts and desires of man, and gives a transient satisfaction at the sacrifices of a more complete realisation. Of course this process is not always conscious, even with religious leaders; they are still less so among the rank and file. Those who transfer natural instincts to supernatural objects are not always lying, they simply misunderstand the nature of the feelings by which they are moved. And it is obviously not to the interests of religious systems and religious leaders that their followers shall be encouraged to develop a more accurate understanding of man and his possibilities.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

(Concluded from p. 344)

POLITICALLY, however, the unity of the new Greek-speaking civilisation was not achieved by Greek hands. For Alexander himself died prematurely, his posthumous son was murdered and his dynasty extinguished. Whilst his generals, his self-styled "successors" (Diadocht) were a band of mere military adventurers, who were entirely devoid of their master's political genius. In fact, the only thing that can be said about these "successors" was that they one and all failed to succeed! However, the idea of a cosmopolitan, of a "world" civilisation, was now an economic, political and cultural aspiration; and to whatever mankind aspires with sufficient ardour, to that he eventually attains. After three centuries of internecine war the Mediterranean world and civilisation were eventually united, not by Alexander's own Greek-speaking "successors" (of whom Cleopatra of Egypt was the last), but by the alien Romans who, in the centuries after Alexander, extended their sway over the Mediterranean world, conquering Alexander's own "successors" en route, in a manner that we have already described in our preceding article.

By the time the later Christian era arrived, the Roman Empire was fully-fledged. The "Pax Romana"—the "Roman Peace"—had been imposed upon the world—by methods that were the

reverse of peaceful!—from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. And the first Roman Emperor, Augustus, who always wore a signet-ring with an effigy of Alexander; set to work consciously and successfully to establish the Roman Empire as a permanent World-power. (Following in the steps of the Macedonian Conqueror, the Romans made repeated efforts to conquer Asia, but Persia waged a successful defensive war against the "Drang Nach Osten" ("Eastern Expansion") of Roman Imperialism.)

One must add that despite the extreme brutality with which Rome effected its conquests, a brutality at which we have already glanced in our earlier article, yet the resulting political achievement was an authentic masterpiece. As a modern anthropologist has recently declared: "The Roman Empire represented a new kind of political creation in the annals of mankind"; only, as the Romans were not a people at all gifted with originality they acted, probably consciously here as in so many other aspects, as the pupils of the Greeks, and, particularly, of Alexander of Macedon, the "forerunner" of the eventual unity of the human race.

Alexander, however, was not only the forerunner of human unity, but, more specifically, of Christianity. For the new world-empire which was founded by his Roman disciples found itself, from its very start confronted by two major problems of ever more pressing urgency. At the first of these we had already glanced. At all costs, the insurgent slaves must be kept quiet and spiritually reconciled to their miserable lot. There must be no second Spartacus to strike terror into Roman nurseries. (For we learn that for centuries after, Roman mothers quieted their unruly offspring with the fear of the "bogy-man," Spartacus. The gladiator's military prowess and the formidable character of the servile insurrections, could receive no more convincing testimonial!) No future Bar-Cochba must do to the Roman Empire in fact what "the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" did to it in fiction!

At all costs, the slaves must be kept quiet and was not religion the supreme "opium" for this purpose? But a religion for slaves must be itself of servile origin! And what better symbol of such a servile religion could there be than the cross; the symbol par excellence, of fear to the servile; its "servile supplicium"—its symbol of despair and of death? Moreover, since the slaves represented a hundred nations conquered by Rome, such a religion, to be at all effective, must be also cosmopolitan, "universal" ("catholic") in its appeal.

This last necessity also confronted the new ruling class of the Mediterranean world. For in doing away in the real world with the hundred odd states which, prior to the era of Roman imperialist expansion, had made up the Mediterranean world, Rome had also done away equally effectively in the spiritual sphere with a hundred odd national gods who had failed to protect their votaries against the Roman legions.

For we must not forget that in classical antiquity "god" and "state" were synonymous terms. The cosmopolitan gods came after the cosmopolitan civilisation created in and for the West by Alexander. For the pre-cosmopolitan world the Greek author Plutarch recorded its everyday practice when he wrote that to be a genuine "City-State" (Polis) required two things, "a god and a town hall" (viz., seat of government—F.A.R.). And now that the "Universal" political Roman Empire had done away with the latter, a new, also "Universal," spiritual empire was required with equal urgency to do away with the former also, and thus to supply an indispensable moral cement to its terrestrial political partner, the Roman Empire.

Thus, we have observed that both the ruling classes and the slave masses equally required, though for quite different reasons, a new brew of spiritual "opium," a cosmopolitan, universal (Catholic) religion, no longer national but universal, like the civilisation and temporal power of its political counter-part, the Roman Empire. For both were equally necessary products of the new cosmopolitan culture that arose after Alexander.

And Christianity supplied the needs with its gospel, so essentially congruous with the needs of the new age: "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, circumcised nor uncircumcised": Catholicism, cosmopolitan "opium" which promoted the servile cross from a symbol of the defeat of the slaves in this world to their symbol of salvation in the next. A belief which originated in Palestine, where, as we have noted, the Messianic tradition was strongest. Voltaire once wrote that, "If god did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him"! The same, we may add, was true, also, of Christ. Perhaps, after all, they *did* invent him. At any rate, Christianity was essentially a social and not an individual creation.

Marx, as we have seen, regarded religion as "the opium of the people," whilst Darwin affirmed that "the fittest" survive in the given social milieu. What we have written above is designed to demonstrate that the origin and rise of Christianity conforms perfectly and entirely with the theories expressed by these illustrious thinkers.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE EPHEMERAL PRESS TOWARDS RELIGION

FREETHINKERS justly deplore that free examination of religious claims is not permitted to appear in either the daily or the weekly papers. It is the proprietors, not the editors, of these publications who are primarily responsible for that inhibition. The cause of the ban itself is fear. All the more important, and many of the less important, of our papers support one or the other of two political parties, the Conservatives and the Socialists. It is feared that if articles adversely criticising religious beliefs, say, for example, the inerrancy of the Bible, appeared in a paper belonging to either party, members of the opposite party would charge that paper with teaching heresy, and perhaps reintroduce effectively the antiquated slogan of "the Church in danger." The cause of the above fear may be termed "political terrorism"; whilst the existence of such a factor obliquely explains why several of the papers in question contain an hebdomadal column of religious trash. Here the Conservatives are less to blame than the Socialists, because the former, like the deeply regretted Wilberforce, apprehend that the poor are likely to become unruly by the increase of their knowledge, whereas the latter profess to regard enlightenment on all topics as essential to the well-being of the disinherited classes.

Besides the political papers, there are some which claim to be politically independent, and yet from their pages likewise anything with a tendency to undermine religious fallacies is strictly excluded. The reason of this exclusion is that the proprietors, thinking many of their subscribers, and especially of their advertisers, may either be fond of religion, or fancy it good for others, fear to lose the custom of these estimable patrons. This fear, which is largely shared by the owners of the great political organs, may not be altogether groundless; and "commercial terrorism" is the correct name for its inspiring cause.

Freethinkers are here confronted by what psychologists term a "fear-complex"; how are they to abate it? From the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 onwards into the 18th and the 19th centuries, many belonging to the upper classes were of a freethinking disposition; but, most of these regarded superstition as proper for the lower classes, and looked with disfavour upon those who sought to spread Freethought among the commonality. There is no doubt whatever that the immense advance in secondary education which the Universities have made during the last 100 years has greatly increased the proportion of educated people who take a more or less rationalistic view of life; but it is to be feared that not a few

of these have no desire to see the multitude enlightened on religious matters. There is, however, an increasing number of young people with lower educational advantages who are beginning to take interest in such questions as the origin of religious ideas and ceremonies, the formation of the Scriptures, the influence of religion upon conduct throughout the ages, and similar matters, regarding all which they have but the vaguest knowledge, or, worse still, the false information which the clergy, for their own advantage, have been imparting to the people with endless repetition for countless generations.

If the owner of one influential paper let some well-known Freethinker dispose of as much space as is now usually allowed to parsons, it is not unlikely that the circulation of the paper would rise considerably, as was the case with the *Clarion* years ago, when whole columns of it were devoted to the discussion of problems concerning the history and nature of religion. The fact that, unlike the B.B.C., the Press is not an organic unity acting from central control, and possessing legal monopoly, renders it liable to external interference. Hence, it seems probable for a day to come when the editor of a first-class paper can be persuaded to convince the proprietor that the course now suggested would not injure the circulation and might even increase it. . . Did I hear somebody whisper about the chance of pigs flying?

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

COLOUR BAR

One marvels at the puny mind of Man
That puts on Colour such a senseless ban;
That makes it such a terrible disgrace
To have a different skin or shape of face.
Of course God is a White Man—there's no doubt;
All Christians would say you were up the spout
To even hint he might be black or brown:
And as for yellow—well, you *are* a clown!
Of course he's white. It's always understood
That no one coloured could be any good.
That's why the White Man votes himself supreme;
Of all the races he is quite the cream.
But ask him "Why?"—the poor fool cannot say;
Such questions are too childish anyway!

The white-skinned man is *not* a god by far.
By craft and cunning and by bloody war
He has enriched himself and trampled down
The peaceful tribes whose lands were once their own.
For greed and lust for gold the White Man stole
The birthright of the natives—Pole to Pole—
And made them servants by sheer force of arms.
Does that make him more worthy, full of charms?
Too well he knows his only chance to keep
What he has taken is to treat like sheep
All coloured people—lest they take the lead
And rise against him. Hence the vital need
To hold them as inferiors; a low
And lesser breed who must be made to bow
The back—not dare to ask for equal rights
With white men! But the day will come, you Whites,
When men of colour will no longer stay
Mute in their pens, your orders to obey.
The rising tide is slowly gaining height
And when it floods—not all your strength and might
Shall hold it back. But there is still one course
Left open—not the way of foolish force—
But justice. Give the coloured man his due
Before he takes it—and far more—from you!

W. H. WOOD.

ACID DROPS

The Vicar of Wilton (Taunton) is a most amiable gentleman, but he sets one thinking. For instance, there is a bread shortage, and that may interfere with getting the eatables required for the Church service known as the Communion. So he, our Vicar, suggests that some of his congregation should go without their breakfast before the service. Religiously, that may be very good advice, but even ardent Christians are not altogether without commonsense, and they may remember that Jesus once fed a "multitude" with only a handful of bread and a few fishes, and then had some food left. Why not get that repeated? It would do more to fill the Church than any amount of preaching.

The Bishop of Liverpool is "anxious" to meet boys who want to prepare for "ordination." There was a time when no bishop would allow for a moment that there was any cause for anxiety, but that was in the Golden Age. In these more materialistic times, most boys who go to school, and have a modicum of intelligence, realise that the miracles, demons, and angels of Christianity cannot be squared with science—or even with what they are taught in history. Moreover, boys do not like to be laughed at, and they know that is the fate of most parsons—at least, until they reach the dignity of bishops and gaiters. The supply is therefore becoming shorter and shorter; no wonder the Bishop is anxious. We fear that anxiety will continue.

If God there be, then we must bow before His often manifestation of His complete carelessness, when He starts throwing things about. For instance, one would expect that God, when He is out for mischief, to punish his enemies and protect his friends. But not a bit of it. He hits out "promiscuous like" and never bothers whether his victims are friends or foes. For example, in Beverley, Yorks., there is the finest Church school in the county. But the school is allowed to be burned as though it was an ordinary secular building. No wonder God is running short of worshippers, and gods cannot live for long without them.

Here is an example on the low-down side of religion in action. It is furnished by Archbishop McNicholas who lets himself go with regard to an argument about Russia. He says:—

"Just as we do not expect a person who is deranged mentally, it cannot be expected that Atheistic Soviet rulers can act normally. We need only ask for any other body of people who have brought as great a change for the better in so small a time."

The truth is that no other revolution has done so much for the good of a people as has the revolution done for Russia. That we take to account as one of the causes for certain people hating Russia so heartily.

More cures are reported from Fatima, that hallowed spot where the Virgin appeared and talked to a few Portuguese children, and where the sun played high jinks in the sky to prove this was a genuine appearance of the Mother of God without any impressario. A blind and paralysed girl of 15 was completely cured, new eyes and everything—or at least, "appeared to be cured." We have to be a little more careful in our language in these materialistic days. Anyway, in addition, 200 other sick pilgrims were "blessed." We are not of course told if the blessings included cures. Now that the Portuguese authorities are finding Fatima a regular money-making concern like Lourdes, we can be sure it will be boosted to the utmost—especially its "cures." And Lourdes will have to do something far bigger than recently to maintain its popularity and its finances. But the Virgin can be trusted to look after that.

Professor Stanford, writing about Irish Christianity of the more or less Protestant variety in the "Church Times," does not seem very encouraging. Religion and politics are so mixed, he declares, that the result is "pernicious," while intolerance and jobbery "have been encouraged to the detriment of both Christianity and statesmanship." It takes "much faith," we are told, of

"wisdom and courage to shepherd a dozen or more souls scattered over many miles," so few appear to be who are still Christians. Hope for the future lies in the younger generation of Churchmen—but if this younger generation is anything at all like England's that hope is indeed a very meagre one. No, Christianity is decidedly not very strong in Ireland.

The last issue of "The Freethinker" was substantially out of our hands when the result of the "rushed" day of prayer for fine weather occurred. Actually it was a very artful hint to God that he was not playing the game. Evidently God sends the rain, and he should see that the supply, in proper quantities, are forthcoming. But in this case all the churches were telling God that he had overdone it, and advised him that he should turn off the tap. Lives have been lost and much valuable growths destroyed. Man had done his share, but God had forgotten his responsibility. That is the common sense of our national day of prayer to God asking him to turn off the tap.

The dumbness of God was killing the small respect the people had for the clergy. The clergy hoped by the day of prayer to get some of it back. We are sure that all the day of prayer has secured is laughter from the growing number of unbelievers and doubts as to the value of gods and priests from others. God at least had the sense to say nothing. The clergy called attention to the shortcomings of God, and so he lost more of his worshippers. The day of prayer for better weather, surely one of the oldest of all superstitions, has come and gone. But the plea from the clergy, who had been dumb, working the trick of calling on God just as the weather was bettering was one of the most contemptible tricks we have seen for some time. We need only have said that the ruined crops stand as a monument of the stupidity of these days of prayer, and the rascality of the priesthood that so plays upon a superstition of a section of the community.

Now was the time for action. God might be brought on the stage, and this could not be done in any better way than a day of prayer. It was done, the day of prayer came and went, and the weather specialists had prophesied the rain ceased. It was, we think, the most contemptible piece of manoeuvring that even a bunch of clergymen had ever tried. But the ruined crops remained and the smile of the people grew wider. It was really a small matter of contempt.

Most readers will be familiar with the story of the minister of a church who wound up his sermon with "Thank God there has never been a 'Happy Sunday afternoon' in my church." Times have now turned with a rush, and to-day there are all sorts of pleas and attractions to come to the Sunday gatherings. Others have gone so far as to provide shelter for cars if those who are travelling will halt and attend church. On that we would suggest that if they guarantee the cleaning of the car while the owner is in the church that might secure more attendance.

The daily papers continue to publish announcements of this and that place in which it has been arranged to decide whether cinemas shall be allowed on Sundays. In nearly every case the voting is heavily in favour of cinemas. A great deal of time and money is lost by this method, so we suggest that a better method might be adopted. We suggest the following: Let the Government arrange that no other conditions than that which occurs when any place of enjoyment commence business. Let us also remember that cinemas are not run for the sake of encouraging music or acting. The main motive is just cash. If the people do not want to have the Sunday plays the cinemas will lose money, and they will soon close. If they flourish, the clergy will at least cease publishing their impotence by the vote at the poll. There will be full liberty for everyone to go to church or cinema. Or to put it another way, it will become a matter of Cinema versus Church. At any rate, it is surely time that men and women were treated as men and women capable of deciding for themselves. We grant that to one with a clear and clean sense of the ridiculous men and women should be trusted with how they should spend their spare time in their own way. The freedom of doing as one please is not great; it would be something if we were allowed to go to a theatre, a cinema or a church. It is the Church that is afraid to face the test.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We are convinced that when the history of Christianity is impartially and scientifically written, its ill-effects in the world of mental life will be found to be one of its greatest evils. It commenced with a theory that damned people for wrong belief and so made the critical use of the intellect the most dangerous of occupations. And so soon as it gained power it added terrestrial punishment to celestial damnation. It burned, it tortured, it imprisoned, it slandered, it boycotted. It suppressed truth and circulated lies. It made heaven secure for the fool, and promised hell to the thinker. The thousands who died at the stake or in Christian prisons for heresy deserve the world's sympathy, and they have had it. But the millions who remained alive deserve it still more. For the evil that Christianity caused did not end with the people it killed. So far as they were concerned the wrong ended with their death. But they who were left alive were fully exposed to the influence of a creed which exalted the worst intellectual qualities and ostracised the better ones. Christianity created and perpetuated an environment which lowered the level of mental life, and it is the effects of this heredity we are experiencing to-day. We can have a better press when we are strong enough to demand it. We can have journalists more conscientious than they are when we make it possible for them to be so. But to accomplish these things we have to break the official and unofficial control of a Church whose rule has been one of the greatest blights in the history of the race.

When all is settled and done the Church in politics is one of the most dangerous things that can overtake a country. The Church in Spain brought that country to the verge of ruin, and left as a heritage some of the most obnoxious habits that the country has. The worst features of Czarism in Russia depended for their existence upon Christianity. In this country the hatred of Protestantism for the Roman Church embittered the feeling between Ireland and this country. It also threw the Irish people into the hands of the Catholic priests. And, above all, there is the indisputable fact that every State has, sooner or later, to curb this or that Church on account of the evil influence of religious domination.

The following was said by a well-known writer and Freethinker. It was written apropos of the first world war—the one that was to end all wars. Fitly it is given the form of a prayer:—

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, Idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be Thou near them! Be with

them in spirit; in spirit we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the cries of the wounded writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriendly through wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sport of the sun-flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travel, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it; for our sakes, who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, prolong their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their ways with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask of One who is the spirit of love, and who is the ever faithful refuge of all that are sore beset, and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Grant our prayer, O Lord, and Thine shall be the praise, honour and glory now and for ever, Amen."

It was written by Mark Twain, and a suggestion of where religion stood and stands in war time.

One of the presents that reach us recently was a letter from a lady reader—not a regular reader of "The Freethinker" as the reader will see. But a copy of "The Freethinker" had been sent her by a friend. She was so interested with it that she spent 2½d. to make sure that it was returned to us. The copy of "The Freethinker" was carefully torn to a number of small parts—they were then sent to us in an envelope with an accompanying note in which it was said that she never wished to see again a copy of our paper. That we take as complimentary. "The Freethinker" must be very satisfying. We feel sure there are few papers could leave behind it so strong an impression.

We need say only one thing—we did not send the paper. But if she would like to have a copy we will, on hearing from her, send a free copy for three months. We feel sure she will help in its circulation.

H. G. WELLS

II

IN his "Outlook for Homo Sapiens," Wells deals with a very great variety of subjects—the Germans, Fascism, the Jews, the Russians and Communism, and so on, everything illuminated by his gift for expression, his powerful mind, and his burning desire for a better world.

Although writing his book between 1939 and 1940, and therefore before the Germans set about the systematic robbing, raping, looting, and torturing, which characterised their conduct of the war, Wells was under no delusion about them and their methods. He does his best to explain them and their undoubted "inferiority complex," and holds back his pen in his attempt not to allow passion to get the better of his judgment. What he says is in marked contrast to the hysterical slobbering over the "good" Germans which we get from their apologists and friends in this country—even in these pages—so eloquent a testimony to their pathetic ignorance. Wells does not deny what he calls the "peculiar filthiness and malignity of the Nazi concentration camps," but he will not have the Germans characterised as "a specially evil-spirited variety of human being," a description which would "concede to the Nazis" their claim to be a "unique people."

Yet he is obliged to make some admissions. He says:—

"There is a concensus of evidence by those who have been there, that in the British and Russian prisons the attitude of the guard, the warder, the turnkey, and so forth is generally sympathetic to his charges. Fellow feeling is his quality. He regrets his instructions and does his best to

mitigate them. At times he may lose his temper or dislike and bully someone, but that is an individual lapse. But his German equivalent, there is no doubt of it, does his tortures with zest, hates his charges as though they were loathsome animals, and is ingenious in devising new pains and abasements and suffering for them."

Wells does his best, however, to prove that this delight in torture and sadism is not "innate," for then "biologically it would be an excellent thing to kill all Germans." Actually, Germans are known to be just "as humane and helpful as most people." Wells may be right; but we know from the evidence at Nuremberg and from other witnesses that no matter how kind and humane a German might be, he is almost always ready to obey the foulest and most sadistic order—so long as it is an order, so long as that order comes from anybody connected with the militarist beasts known as the German High Command, or from the various Hitlers, the Himmlers, the Keitels, who get themselves into positions to issue orders. Some of the very worst beasts in the concentration camps were not the guards but the doctors and men of science, for whom no considerations of decency or humanity had the slightest effect. I knew personally a young Czech (who, alas, was killed in an air battle) whose parents and young brothers and sisters were burnt alive in red hot ovens. The horror of that can never be felt, of course, by the Fascist friends of Germany in this country. But, however we may individually feel over the Germans, there can be no good now in prolonging the agony; and so long as we take care that they can never again commence another war, they should be helped in re-establishing themselves and working out their own salvation.

With every good will to be as fair to the Jews and their problems as he could, it must be admitted Wells had very little patience with them. They were a nuisance. They insisted "upon the strict letter of a bond," they were not "citizens of the world," they wanted Palestine "and the rest of the world may go hang," they "sustain a solidarity foreign and uncongenial to all the people about them," and therefore "no country wants them on such conditions."

"Why should any country," asks Wells, "want these inassimilable aliens bent on preserving their distinctness?" Of course he is right here, but the "inassimilable" Jews might reply that is exactly why they want their own country. He pours scorn—quite rightly—on the "Chosen People" myth (he quotes W. N. Ewer, "How odd of God to choose the Jews!") and favours complete assimilation as the remedy for anti-Semitism. Wells notes that millions of Jews "are rapidly ceasing to be Jews at all" yet even then—like Israel Zangwill who was no more an orthodox Jew than Einstein—they talk of "My people," as if there was a distinct Jewish race. Sometimes, in discussions with Jews, Wells felt every sympathy with Miss Rebecca West whose "rough and caustic wit" compelled her once to ask the Chairman whether she would be in order to move a pogrom?

It was Heine, I think, who said that Judaism was not a religion but a misfortune, and this brilliant piece of bitter wit could as well be applied to Christianity. That is certainly the opinion of Wells, whose chapter on "Christendom" is a perfect example of his urbane contempt for the childish beliefs lumped together as the Christian religion. He notes how the early Church began to develop "sexual obsessions unknown to its cognate Judaism," how it took over Isis and Horus and made them into the Virgin and Child, how the "intenser religions succumb very readily to the suggestions of such phrases as 'the Bride of Christ,'" and how they made the Virgin "sinless" by endowing her with an "Immaculate Conception." "It is difficult," adds Wells, "to tell these things without a touch of derision." Only a touch! "Why do intelligent people accept this strange heap of mental corruption as a religion and a rule of life?" asks Wells. And his reply epitomises the arguments known so well to Freethinkers—they believe because it was there

before them, because it was taken for granted and treated with respect, because great men have believed it, because other people insist, "Do as we do and all will be well," because "it is all so tremendously established"—and so on. And "fantastic, defiantly absurd as this vast pile of the Faith becomes," it is "far less fantastic than the actual organisation of the Church." For Wells, it is this organisation, the Roman Catholic Church, which "is the most formidable single antagonist in the way of human readjustment to the dangers and frustration that now close in upon us all." You must read the whole chapter to see what Wells thought of religion in general and Christianity in particular.

But I still must reiterate what I said the other week. Wells, the author of "Kipps" and "Ann Veronica," of the "Invisible Man" and the "War of the Worlds," to say nothing of short stories like the "Country of the Blind," proved himself a creative genius to be classed with Dickens and Balzac, Scott and Edgar Allen Poe. For all who love the fire of imagination, the bringing into being of a world in which live and move andying characters depicted for us by a master of humour and story telling, and who, in addition, was like Leigh Hunt's Abou Ben Adhem, "one that loves his fellow men," it is Wells the writer of fiction that will outlive the reformer. Yet the two are really inseparable. For behind everything he wrote was the burning desire to do something more than merely talk and amuse. He wanted something done—like Thomas Paine—he wanted the annihilation of poverty and misery and fear. Away with religious delusions and pie in the sky, away with the grasping and inhuman "boss" class, surely with the advancement of science and humanism, a free and happy world could not only be envisaged but realised!

There is no doubt that nobody in our generation contributed more to such ideas than H. G. Wells, nobody who did more to shape the things that come. Like Heine, he can be counted as a brave soldier in the cause of humanity. And, like Heine, he was a Freethinker.

H. CUTNER.

ON HARVEST PRAYERS

Give Us This Day Our Rationed Bread

THE National Farmers Union has asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to pray for better weather because the crops are being utterly ruined by recent rains. The West Sussex farmers have also asked their local Bishop, Dr. Bell of Chichester, to decree prayers similarly throughout his diocese.

They have not asked the Pope. Perhaps because His Holiness is an Italian and so only to be regarded as, at best, a c-belligerent if not an enemy. Perhaps because he is too high and haughty a Prince of the Church to listen to a few English sons of the soil grumbling about the weather. Or perhaps our English farmers think in their English insularity that an English Archbishop has more influence in the heavenly courts than any more Roman Pope.

Our farmers—and their N.F.U.—are fond of running to the Government with their troubles. But even our capitalistic-labour Government cannot control the weather (or much else judging by the profiteering, shortages and the rest of our afflictions). So the farmers go to God hoping that where an earthly Government fails, a heavenly Government may help.

And now Heaven is to be bombarded with Anglican supplications for sunshine. Archbishops, bishops, priests, deacons, archdeacons, deans and chapters, canons, minor and otherwise, prebendaries, rectors, vicars and curates as well as lay-helpers, choirboys, acolytes, and even the rank-and-file laity from the church-wardens down to Sunday-school children—all will pray. One of two things will then happen. Either the rain that rained every day will stop. Or (more likely, England being what she is) it will go on.

And what then?

If it stops, God will have "answered" and the N.F.U. should pass him a vote of thanks. If it doesn't, God's will be done for God knows best (we should have thought that before correcting him by prayer) and if our crops are ruined, we must receive evil at the hands of God and laud his wisdom, which is beyond our understanding, saying: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every one whom he receiveth."

In either event, God's credit does not suffer. And his pious worshippers are satisfied or must pretend to be.

Now in this matter of praying for a gift we may concede that the Church of England—for once in a way—is obeying Jesus Christ. Certainly Jesus bade us pray for our daily—not our rationed—bread (bread only being required daily in Galilee in his day and not thrice-daily as in England in ours. But if we asked God for thrice-daily bread the clergy would be shocked at this departure from a traditional formula!) Jesus also said: "Ask and it shall be given you" and "Whatsoever ye ask of the Father in my name he will give it you."

But was Jesus right? He also said that if Christians took up snakes they should not be harmed and that we could cause mountains to remove; but when an American religious gentleman quite recently, relying on Jesus, picked up a snake to illustrate the truth of Jesus's words, the snake bit him and he died to the edification of newspaper readers. Which seems to show that if you take Jesus literally, you may also take the consequences.

If you take Jesus literally in this, "Ask and it shall be given you," the result is absurdity. I might ask for the sun, moon and stars or for the crown of England; but I certainly should not receive these embarrassing gifts if I did. Jesus exaggerated. And why shouldn't he? I myself exaggerate sometimes. It is a permissible literary and oratorical device, and Jesus was no more addicted to literal truth and its horrors than I am, I am glad to say.

But if he was right in exaggerating, was he right in urging prayer for gifts—the real point? I think not. Beggary like flattery is a low form of prayer. For myself I dislike obvious flattery and still more obvious beggary. Most men do. Must I assume God has a lower standard of values than myself or other men?

Besides God is omniscient—he knows all. Already he knows all that we are telling him about his rainfall and our needs. He is omnipotent—able to do all. Then he could stop the rain without our impudent prompting. Presumably he knows his own mind (and ours) and does not change it at the will of the blind ignorant creature who knows nothing of Omnipotence and Omniscience.

Anatole France, the great French writer, saw this clearly enough: "What an act of impiety it is (to pray to God)! It is tantamount to believing that it is possible to enlighten his intelligence, to change his heart and to persuade him to mend his behaviour." But no one put that point of view before Jesus Christ. Yet it is inherent enough in the problem of prayer to an Almighty and All-loving and All-knowing Father.

But really the difficulty was put long before our day in answerable words by Epicurus the philosopher, who said: "Either God wants to prevent evil and cannot. If so, he is impotent. Or he can and doesn't want. If so, he is perverse. Or he both cannot and doesn't want. If so, he is both impotent and perverse. Or he does wish to and can (this last being the Christian acceptance). And if this last, then why does he not?"

This is unanswerable by human reason, and indeed Voltaire, thinking this over, said that there was no answer to it but a sigh! On the prayer-concept—that idea of a God as a Big Man or Father to be cajoled—and ceased to be false to its own 39 Articles which depicts God as non-human, "Without parts (i.e., personality) or passions."

And what shall the poor farmer and his N.F.U. do? He had better take a word of advice from the immortal Candide: "Let us work without arguing for that is the only way of rendering life tolerable." Let him cultivate himself when he cannot cultivate his fields, for in his own activities not in other's prayers lies salvation. In any event, this wretched English climate is past praying for.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

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).—11 a.m., Mr. J. KATZ, B.A.: "Ethics and Imperialism."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Lister Lane, Bottom).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A lecture.

Merseyside Branch (Ranelagh Street, opposite Lewis's).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., a lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday 6-30 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—7-30 p.m.: A lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Rooms).—7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: "The Birth of the Soul."

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Rooms).—Wednesday, September 25, 7-30 p.m., Mr. F. A. RIDLEY: "The Political Aims of Roman Catholicism."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—3 p.m., Mr. GEOFFREY THOMPSON: "Religious Influence To-day."

DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL? By Chapman Cohen. Price in cloth, 2s. 8d., post free; paper cover, 2s. 2d., post free.

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

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

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, by Lady (Robert) Simon. Price, post free, 2s. 8d.

COMMENTS ON DESIGN

(Concluded from p. 356)

was: "No kindness to man, from birth-hour to ending; neither earth, sky, nor gods care for him, innocent at the mother's breast. Nothing good to man but man." God receives credit for that which is produced by the labour of man. Thanks solely to the toil of past generations, man's progress on the whole has been triumphant, but the lesson should now have been learnt that there is "Nothing good to man but man." Perhaps this lesson forms the basis of true humanitarianism.

C. McCALL.

COMMENTS ON DESIGN

"If the ignorance of nature gave birth to gods, the knowledge of nature is calculated to destroy them."

—BARON D'HOLBACH ("The System of Nature.")

THE principle argument used in defence of the god-idea is still that of design. Shattered though it has been so-often, it remains the commonest refuge of the religious opponent in the face of Freethought criticism. Logically, of course, design can never be proved, for—as Chapman Cohen has many times pointed out—in order to do so, one's first requisite would have to be knowledge of the designer's intentions, which is impossible, regarding a demiurge. Strictly speaking, then, all discussion on the subject is irrelevant. But the idea that the world was planned and created appeals to people who have suffered from a Christian—or similar religious—upbringing, and lingers even after much of the religion has been rejected. Indeed, it seems quite prevalent among students who have had a certain amount of scientific training, if the experience of the present writer is typical. Certainly, the belief dies hard.

Yet the absurdity of it should be blatant to all. Let us leave aside the colossal and useless expenditure of energy in the stellar universe; the complete absence of any "planned" arrangement, for the average person is not acquainted with these matters. It is quite understandable that the beauty of the sky at night might lead the unenlightened to the completely erroneous view of the Psalmist that: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." But what of things upon the earth? The things much nearer to us, those which affect us much more strongly and cannot be ignored. Was the Psalmist any more correct when he claimed that: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein . . ." ? The clear-sighted investigator cannot avoid answering in the negative, for here again one discovers anything but a "sensible" arrangement.

Everywhere there is struggle, fighting, premature death. Even in an industrialised land like our own, we cannot fail to notice it. As a matter of fact, in his baser moments, man utilises the terrible conflict as "sport." When, for example, he sends the greyhounds coursing the hare or the hounds hunting the fox. And he will praise the household cat when it catches a mouse—though he is sometimes illogical enough to scold it if the victim happens to be a bird—but he is often repelled by the cruelty involved therein. Occurrences such as these are obvious to all, and the natural struggle for existence must have been far more noticeable to our primitive forebears. They were so much more a part of it. Aldous Huxley has given a very good picture of primitive life in his essay on "Wordsworth in the Tropics," where he twits the English nature-worshipper, and says: "The sparse inhabitants of the equatorial forest are all believers in devils. When one has visited, in even the most superficial manner, the places where they live, it is difficult not to share their faith. The jungle is marvellous, fantastic, beautiful; but it is also terrifying, it is also profoundly sinister."

Professor Edward Westermarck supplied conclusive evidence to show that the gods of savages are mainly of the malevolent type. "From all quarters of the savage world," he wrote ("The Goodness of Gods"), "we hear that terror or fear is the predominant element in the religious sentiment, that people are more inclined to ascribe evil than good to the influence of supernatural beings, and that their sacrifices or other acts of worship more frequently have in view to avert misfortunes than to procure positive benefits."

This is what the evolutionist would expect, for the world in which man finds himself is a hostile world, the forces around him mostly detrimental to his well-being. It is only as he becomes more and more the master of his environment and

harnesses the forces of nature for his own use, that those forces lose their fearfulness. And the supernatural beings that he has identified with those forces improve accordingly. Still, the transformation is by no means complete, for there are many natural calamities that man is powerless to prevent. Storms, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, and the like, still take their toll of human life, property and crops. We may build stronger dwellings, reinforce river banks and take other precautions, but we are still largely at the mercy of the elements and natural upheavals, and news of the ravages of these is continually coming to our notice through the Press and newsreels.

It is significant that Voltaire's deism received its severest blow when Lisbon suffered its terrible earthquake on All Saints' Day, 1755, and he gave vent to his anguish at the misery of mankind in the famous poem on the disaster. It did not cause him to relinquish his belief in a god, but there were times when his doubts were strong, and he found himself totally unable to accept the view that "all is well" in the world—which should be the case if there is a guiding intelligence aback of everything. Shakespeare, too, experienced similar doubts, as when he made the blinded Gloucester (in "King Lear") say:—

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport."

Many ordinary mortals are content to by-pass such problems—all are not Voltaires or Shakespeares—but there come times when human misfortunes are brought home to us very forcibly. A few months ago, newsreel pictures showed the devastation caused by a hurricane which struck the Canadian-U.S. frontier, and onlookers could not remain unmoved. More recently, parts of the West Indies suffered from an earthquake shock, once again with much damage. In each instance the commentator endeavoured to discern the workings of Beneficence, and we were told—in the first case—that "by a miracle" the Ford Motor Works escaped damage (God, it would appear, is on the side of big business!), and—in the second case—that by an act of Providence the worshippers had left the churches an hour before the shock!

All too often such remarks are treated as pearls of wisdom, and the religious person is ever on the look-out for a tiny example of God's mercy when surrounded by horror. Nevertheless, all men and women are compelled sometimes to ask if suffering is necessary; if the scheme of things could not be improved. What possible "good" can be achieved by hurricanes and volcanoes? What "purpose" can there be behind them? Why should there be pain and disease in the world? It is no use falling back on man's misuse of free-will, for infants suffer too, and other animals.

The primitive belief in devils is more in conformity with natural conditions than the belief in a beneficent creator, for the latter involves the—religiously—insoluble problem of evil. Both beliefs, however, suffer from the same defect, the defect that is common to all religious world-views. They are centred around man, and are—as Feuerbach observed—man's objective projection of himself. However "divine" they may claim to be, actually their fault lies in the fact that they are too human. It is true, of course, that no view held by human beings can avoid being human. We cannot see the world from the standpoint of a fly or from that of a hypothetical god, only as we stand it might appear to the fly or to the god, respectively. Everything, of necessity, be viewed through human eyes—that is a limitation we are forced to accept—but we can endeavour to make our view as detached as possible. In a word, we should be scientific. That, it seems to me, should be the aim of all philosophers.

Certainly the idea that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" will have to be discarded. Richard Jefferies, England's greatest nature writer, knew from his observations that there

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