

# THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Mixed Dish

I HAVE called this week's notes "A Mixed Dish," but I think readers will find that the matters dealt with will have some connection to each other. The first dish offered is a reprint of a letter written by a lady and published in the "Sunday Observer" for September 29. It explains itself.

"I have just been entertaining a young cousin from South Africa, and his attitude to the racial question was to me quite alarming. When I met him in London he got a terrific shock to find black soldiers strolling about on equal terms and not expected to get off the pavement for him, and was profoundly disgusted to see white girls associating with them.

The next thing that happened was a sense of discomfort at being waited on by white servants. 'I don't know how to treat these people,' he said. He is so used to regarding black people as racial inferiors and only suited to menial tasks that it seemed degrading for white people to perform them. He is very mature and experienced for his 19 years; he speaks Afrikaans and Kaffir, and has mixed with and studied the natives, but nothing will shake his prejudice against them. He clinches his argument by pointing out the numerical superiority of the natives and says that if we don't keep them down they will soon have us down."

Now there is no doubt that this is the attitude of the white people, as a whole, towards the coloured folk. There is no clear exception. The British show no departure from the general rule. The U.S.A. must obviously plead guilty. The best that we can say for the whole of the white people is that some—the minority—are not so bad as others, and that it is largely a social question, although that would be stretching the truth almost to breaking point. The attitude towards coloured folk cannot be remedied in a day. Certainly the alleged inferiority of coloured folk cannot be substantiated by modern science. It is not a matter of the shape of the head, it is not at all connected with "stock," which appears to be a favourite term with Churchill. It is equally vain to justify it by "race" or "blood." Blood is not a carrier of wisdom or ability, although quality may be affected by the state of health. That, however, is a question of health, it does not come within the study of our subject. It is the unqualified white man that is responsible for the abuse of scientific terms.

What does stand out to-day very plainly, and with a force that has never before existed, is that the coloured people are beginning to revolt in growing numbers against a doomed and inherited inferiority. The war has brought the coloured people into a state of revolt. It is a matter

in which our press might help much in the name of humanity, but large circulations take first place. Our delightful press has not yet recognised—publicly—that the Christian religion is crumbling to destruction, and that it is going on under their very eyes. It is true that here and there a mild protest is ventured, but in the main there remains a state of things that justifies Paul Robeson in saying that he was anxious to prevent his people sinking to the level of the whites. A large section of the "whites" deserved the thrust.

It may also be noted that this dooming of the coloured people is of Christian origin. In ancient Rome and Greece, there were slaves but their slavery was a misfortune, not part of the divine grace of the gods. Modern coloured slavery was a re-creation of slavery by Christian peoples.

It was Christian influence that held the coloured people as an inferior "race." The Christian Church was always well to the front in damning people in this world in order to get them ready for the punishment in another state of existence.

### Churchill To The Rescue

Often have I been asked to say how many Atheists are members of the Parliament and of the House of Lords. Candidly, I do not know, and have often answered to that effect. In any case for me to give names would be a breach of trust, for in many cases the member has kept his religious opinions in the background. We are a free people, every man may say what he pleases, but where religion is concerned truth is a little out of fashion. I recall one case with which I was well acquainted—a man, who, in private, was very strong in his desire to put an end to all religion. But there came before the House of Commons the question of an alteration—or something of the kind—of the Prayer Book. This member astonished me, and pleased his leaders, by the manner in which he praised the Prayer Book, and with almost tears in his eyes protested against an alteration of so beautiful and so sacred a volume. That must have brought to him many friends—Christian friends. But perhaps these men are, after all, not so dangerous to truth as would appear. It is probably all part of the political game where truth is slim and a lie robust. Parliament has its own kind of truthfulness.

It should also be remembered that there is a specially paid preacher attached to the House of Commons. His function is to say prayers before the business commences. Sometimes, there are as many as twelve members praying to God to help them to become honest. Twelve is considered a full house. The preacher has never complained at the scant attendance. He is not paid per member, and all are left to go to hell in their own fashion—provided they do not advertise their determination. Meanwhile, as gods of all brands live upon the prayers of the people, the Christian gods appear to be taking the same road that so many have already trodden.

But there must have been some excitement in heaven when it became known that the leader of the Conservative Party had publicly declared that the first consideration of the Conservative Party must be to "uphold the Christian religion and resist all attacks upon it." This is not a suggestion, it is an order. It comes from Mr. Churchill—who has not before posed as a great theologian, but who now appears to be looked on by his friends and enemies as being a God-sent Defender of the Faith. Like a good Christian, Mr. Churchill offers his hand to help God in his difficulties—God's difficulties.

It must be noted that this defence of the Faith is to take first place when the Conservatives return to power, and as Mr. Churchill knows all the artful dodges of politics and is not easily overcome with the artful dodges of other Parties, it may be that he will not bring the Conservatives to power with the cry of "Religion in danger." In small towns that may work, but it is not likely to carry the big centres with him. The Churches are losing ground rapidly and even Christian leaders may think twice before they rely upon a thin political dodge to regain some of their lost power. It will, at all events, take more than a mere political row to reinstate the Christian faith. Probably Mr. Churchill may discover his blunder and will find another war-cry before a new election is on the way. Some protests have already been made. The days of the religious wars have gone. A crusade in favour of better life in this world is more likely to grow stronger as the days pass. Finally I think that this obviously artful and insincere call to the religious will be discarded before the new election arrives. It may be easy to fool a section of the people, but it will be difficult to fool all.

Of course, it is true that the Churches are in danger. They have been that for many years, and the dangers loom more fully as the years pass. The Churches have been in danger for centuries, and they have been forced to retreat year by year. It would be a capital thing—for Freethought—if religion could be forced to the front. But I fancy it will prefer to work underground.

The alternative concerning this apparently stupid move by Churchill would be that he hopes to drag into his section the Nonconformists, who are, I think, more honestly attracted to their religion than are the "upper classes." At least he may split the Nonconformists and a section only would vote for a Tory Government rather than see Christianity weakened. Some may be affected in that way, but I think the number would be small. Man is an animal that is easily gulled, but I do not think the Nonconformists will be so easily deceived.

But there are other features involved in the Churchill programme. The Conservative body is not made up of Christians only. Among them are Atheists and Nonconformists, all of whom may be credited with some degree of self-respect. There are also Jews. What is to be done with all these? Will the Nonconformists work to make the established religion stronger? Will the Jews do what they can to bring people into the State Church? Will those who do not believe any religion at all work to see that a particular Church is made to flourish through their activities? There are only two possibilities. Either these believers of different forms of religion will ignore their own convictions, or there will be several splits in the party which are certain to rob the Conservatives of many votes.

I really believe that some Conservatives will wonder what Mr. Churchill is driving at. The united power of Church and State, backed up with torture and the stake, has not prevented the decay of the Christian religion, and I fancy that a large section of Conservatives will take the same view as we do. To proclaim that the first duty of a political organisation is to see that a particular Church shall be protected is dead against freedom of opinion where religion is concerned. Mr. Churchill presents his followers with a mixture of impudence and intolerance. We wonder how they will take it.

There is another feature which Churchill ought to have considered. Some of the Church of England folk—to say nothing of the Free Churches—have openly praised Russia; they have declared themselves to be Socialists, which Churchill hates strongly. Will Churchill have the courage to denounce them as false to their religion and dangerous in their politics? We doubt it; and Mr. Churchill may find himself as he was before the war. We really cannot risk another war for the purpose of reinstating him in political supremacy.

There are many other considerations, but want of space will permit but a brief notice of these. Mr. Churchill must be aware that there is a large number of the clergy who have been professing a fondness for Socialism, and to be sympathetic towards opinions that Churchill promises war against. How are they to be treated? Already some of these have treated the "save the country" dodge with complete contempt. Really, there will be many who will not accept Mr. Churchill as a champion of historic Christianity; and they cannot well, after his address, accept him as a guide. The "Church Times" treats him as a champion of historic Christianity with thinly disguised contempt, and points out that he has not been remarkable for the aid given to the Churches. The Editor of the "Catholic Herald," Mr. Michael de la Bedoyere, asks "What does it mean?"—and evidently regards it as kite-flying, and of no great consequence to anyone or anything. If Mr. Churchill really intends to stand as a champion of religion, he is more likely to do the Churches harm instead of good. We may return to this matter later.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## RELIGION IN THE REIGN OF ANNE

IN the Middle Ages penurious parish priests were apt to range themselves on the side of the down-trodden peasants. The Wat Tyler rebellion was directed against the secular landowners, the opulent monasteries and the wealthy ecclesiastics, and in this the parish clergy played their part. Still, even then, the village priest was not too popular, but when the Reformation enabled the clergy to marry and removed certain clerical privileges, while gradually improving the social standing of the rural priesthood, there yet remained innumerable curates whose lives were penurious.

The fool of the squire's family was frequently ordained, but the majority of the parish incumbents were the sons of the vicarage or of the farm, for the yeomen often trained their boys for the Church. From the local school they proceeded to the University where, despite their humiliating poverty, they sometimes successfully ascended the educational ladder.

As Prof. Trevelyan states in his standard history, "England Under Queen Anne": "At Oxford, the 'Servitours' of this class sometimes slept four in a garret, pinched by poverty, and

earning their keep by waiting on 'Gentlemen Commoners.' A 'Servitour's' fortune was described in 1704 as consisting of 'the reversion of old shoes which Gentlemen Commoners leave off, two rags called shirts, a dog's eared grammar and a piece of Ovid de Tristibus.'"

The pronounced class distinctions then prevalent rendered the position of aspirants to social advancement extremely embarrassing, and scoffers sneered at their pretensions. The clerical profession was overcrowded and those who hungered for preference were many, and patrons who had livings to bestow were deluged with flattering appeals from rival supplicants for favours. As Trevelyan observes: "Even the proud souled Swift, though assuredly no sycophant, was assuredly preoccupied about his own promotion."

When members of the upper classes treated their private chaplains with contumely, these pitiful dependents suffered in silence. On the other hand, the parish priest on his induction became a freeholder and could act independently of squire or bishop, unless eagerly bent on gaining pluralities or securing a better benefice. Nor can the desire for higher income be wondered at when large families were so constant a feature in clerical households. For the stipends of the lower clergy were meagre, the average income of 10,000 parsons being estimated by Gregory King in 1688 at £48. Some livings were as low as £10 per annum, while many rectories did not return more than from £30 to £60 a year. It seems that: "In the diocese of Worcester a curate's salary was £24 a year while the Bishop had fifty times as much." Certainly, the purchasing power of money then, far exceeded what it is to-day, but as a rule, Mrs. Quiverful's crowded nursery left little surplus when the necessities of life were met.

The plutocratic incomes of the princes of the Anglican Church contrasted glaringly with the penurious pay of the village clergy, and this inequality led to the institution of Queen Anne's Bounty. At the Reformation, the first fruits and tenths, so long extorted by the Papacy, were appropriated by the Crown. This originally onerous tax had been reduced to £16,000 per annum for the whole country. "The fund thus derived from the taxation of benefices," writes Dr. Trevelyan, "had been used as a source of privy income by the Crown, not always in the most respectable manner. When Anne came to the throne, a thousand a year was being paid to a nobleman who had bought the interest in the fund enjoyed by Charles II.'s French mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth. And a thousand a year was being paid to Nell Gwynne's royal offspring, the Duke of St. Albans."

Bishop Burnet was a Latitudinarian who was ridiculed and calumniated by his clerical contemporaries for his humanitarian activities. He it was who suggested to William III. that first fruits and tenths should be devoted to the relief of poor benefices. The King assented, but his own straitened circumstances prevented compliance with Burnet's suggestion. But his successor, Anne, was induced by Sharp and Burnet to consent to the Reform.

In 1704 the Bounty was legalised by Act of Parliament. All arrears of first fruits and tenths were remitted to indigent clerics, while the fund itself was utilised for the increase of poor stipends. Still, the bad debts and charges on the fund left little relief until the reign of George II., when grants became frequent which were invested to augment the value of impecunious benefices.

Anglican zeal was more pronounced in Anne's day than in our time as anti-Puritanism and anti-Popery inflamed popular feeling. Smithfield burnings and other Romanist atrocities were painted in lurid colours in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, one of the most widely read works of the period. Also, the abortive effort of James II. to restore the Catholic faith contributed to sustain Anglican zeal. Moreover, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the pitiless persecution of the French Huguenots, led to the arrival in England of many refugees who had escaped from Roman intolerance, whose sufferings aroused feelings of indignation and resentment among Dissenters and Churchmen alike.

Furthermore, Louis XIV.'s bid for European supremacy and his championship of the claims of the Catholic Pretender to the English throne, served to estrange the High Churchmen themselves from any thought of reconciliation with the Papal Church.

Still, anti-Romanism coincided with a marked antipathy towards the Dissenters, constantly encouraged by the High Churchmen whose sentiments were consistently obscurantist. As the episcopal appointments of William III. were mainly Latitudinarian, no love was lost between these Low Churchmen and their High Churchmen enemies. So at Anne's accession, the Upper House of Convocation was composed of Low Churchmen while the Lower House championed High Church doctrines.

Dr. Trevelyan reminds us that: "The bitterness of invective in these controversies, as in most controversy in old times, is astonishing to most students of long forgotten pamphlets. Sacheverell, the leading High Church champion of the day, accuses the Low Churchmen as a body, including half of the most highly respectable Bishops, of immoral lives and unmentionable vices, on no grounds at all save his own party animus. Such methods of debate caused less astonishment then than now. Yet even then, such wrath among souls celestial helped to diminish the influence of the clergy, and to enhance that of 'scoffers and deists.'"

The Low Church Bishops favoured fellowship with the Dissenters at home, and the Protestant confessions on the Continent in the struggle with French aggression and Romanist ascendancy. Yet, while desirous of national independence, the High Church party disdained co-operation with Dissenters in our island or with other Protestants, especially the Dutch, abroad.

Even in those sectarian days, Freethought emerged in sufficient force to alarm the pious High Churchmen, who demanded the vigorous suppression of unorthodox and sceptical opinions. The Unitarianism of Newton and Milton and the Deism of Collins, Toland and, later, Bolingbroke, all served to liberalise religious thought. Now, we read: "Clerical writers complained that the word 'parson' was used in many companies as a word of contempt, and that young lawyers called them 'black locusts.'" Worse still, it was said that Atheism, Socinianism and other soul-destroying heresies were infecting the minds of the people.

T. F. PALMER.

#### A HARDEN SARK, A GUISE CRASSING AND A WHITE GAIT

"Two or three centuries ago (and even less), these were all the stipend of a Cumberland clergyman. The above, which has become a proverb, means, in other words, that his entire salary consisted of a coarse linen shirt, the right of depasturing his geese upon the moor or common, and the still more valuable privilege of using a knife and fork (the latter) and trencher at the table of his parishioners, free of all costs and charges. This privilege is now claimed by some of the rural schoolmasters." E. H. S.

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## ACID DROPS

Bishop Heywood, of St. Albans, addressing a "Christian Evidence Class," says that most people believe in God. We recall a time when the common cry was that all people believe in God; it is only here and there that an Atheist was to be found. Now the claim is sunk to "most"; the next stage will be "a few" and then—? But the Bishop is bound to confess that people, many people, find it impossible to think of God as a person; and we would like very much to hear what kind of a thing God is if he is not a person. Is it a mere whiff of air or just a term? We can hardly picture any god as a mere phrase. The Bishop should be plain; but this might lead to his being quite plain to his congregation, and that might end on his not having a church. Things are indeed hard for the clergy. They are getting ashamed of looking back, and they are afraid of looking into the future.

The Catholics are getting into trouble also. Cardinal Griffin, of Westminster, says religion cannot survive without dogma. But it cannot live for ever with it. He and Bishop Heywood ought to meet and discuss the situation. To us it seems that both are getting into a hell of a mess.

Banbury is one of the latest places to have Sunday cinemas. We wonder how long it will take the Government to pass an Act permitting cinemas to be opened without each one "walloping" a small minority tax by voting. We are afraid that this Government will turn out like others; they are brave for everything but facing the Churches. But as England is *not* a Christian country, so neither should religion be counted as one of the duties of the legislating Chambers.

The Sheffield Diocesan Conference has decided that no money shall be accepted that has been raised by raffles. That money is described as obtained by "the devil's methods." Really, to carry this out they should not receive money that has been raised by tradesmen who have overcharged for goods, or from landlords who have overcharged rent, or from money raised by betting, etc. If money is too damned that has been obtained by any crooked methods, the Churches who examine any money offered will soon have to shut up.

The Rev. F. H. Ballard told an audience the other day that Nazism is not yet dead. Of course it is not, a great many men and women honestly threw over their loyalty to it when its real nature was displayed. But others waited for a more favourable time. But for a complete exhibition of Nazism the Roman Catholic Church provides the historic form of what we now call Nazism. There is the chief in the shape of the Pope, whose election, formally brought about by the choice of a small group of men, and everything after, so far as religion is concerned, is just an order. And behind the order is—to the Catholic—the terrible punishment of Excommunication. The elaborate tortures of the German Nazis were not possible in the earlier ages of the Catholic Church, but it did its best; and the best of us can do no more.

There is a very common saying that we must respect other people's religions. We must do nothing of the kind. It means in practice offering praise to humbug. There is no reasonable ground to pretend homage to what we believe a lie. Why should a Freethinker offer an insincere homage to what he believes to be a lie? Bigotry is by nature cowardly. There is no reason whatever to pay an exaggerated respect to what we know is not true. A lie is not transformed to truth because it is old. The right to freedom for the Freethinker will come when he has strength and the admitted right to call a lie a lie.

There is, after all, plenty of thought in the world. Our real need is thought with a back to it. We have scores of scientists, politicians and men of letters who are certainly Freethinkers and yet keep their Freethought to themselves, or voice it only with a guarded tone. We believe with Kingdon Clifford that if a thing is true it should be shouted from the housetops, and if it is a lie let it be shouted as it should be shouted also.

We have often said that we raise no particular objection to a Christian preacher telling a lie; but it should be an artistic lie; one that bears some likeness to the truth. But here is a yarn that is the most clumsy that we have ever heard or read. It appears in the "Christian World Pulpit," by an unnamed chaplain, and is reported by the Rev. Reginald Baker, of the Baptist Church, Nottingham. It runs thus:—

A factory chaplain, addressing a large crowd of workers, invited questions, and a man stood up and said bluntly: "We don't want religion; we have everything we want. We have plenty of money; the firm provides recreations; food is put before us, and we don't even have to wash up the crockery. What have we got out of religion?"

Does anyone believe that in any part of the civilised world any man, speaking for his fellows, ever said that all the men want is food to be given them, to be provided with games, and were not even expected to clear away the utensils? It is about as clumsy a lie as we have come across. For that reason it should be remembered.

There is one more thing that was said. The preacher replied to this remarkable working man by saying that "some canteens had lost through stealing twelve hundred forks and knives during the past month"; and the poor apology for a man—if he exists—had not the sense to see that he was giving the world a sample of the influence of the Christian religion on the working classes. All we need say further is that if the condition of the "common man" is such as this unnamed one—if he is a fair sample of the people of England with Christianity—they could not well be worse in any circumstances. The foolish parson had not intelligence enough to realise that he was fouling his own nest.

Some preachers are wide awake when their own interests are at stake. This preacher discovers that the value of a Church school is the definite religious teaching that pupils get, as much as the definite association with the Church and the atmosphere that surrounds their daily life. The clergyman can visit the school frequently, he can show interest in the children, and they in turn become familiar with the Christian life. We agree, but put in another way it means that the Churches do not cherish the school for the education it gives, but because it leads direct to the Church. The argument has another aspect to the impartial onlooker. It is pressed in the story that begins with "Will you walk into my parlour . . ." the reader will know the rest.

A Sunday school journal informs the world that things—religious things—are not as good as they used, and ought, to be. The explanation given is that the teachers are not properly equipped. But the teacher is doing God's work, and the teacher finds fault with the dullness of the place, the quality of the teacher, the carelessness of the home life, etc., etc. What we should like to know is what is God doing in the matter? After all, these training grounds for Christians are of greater importance to the deity than to the child. He should be reminded that he is not pulling his weight.

There is not the slightest doubt that if teachers and headmasters would develop their fighting qualities, and give an intellectual quality to their pupils as among their chief interests, there would soon be an end to the clergy in the schools, and with it the monopoly of the Christian creed. Certainly there would be a sharp end to clergymen marching into the schools. Quito recently the Galashire Church Campaign asked the authorities for permission to visit the children in the schools. The headmaster objected to the intrusion, and his objection carried the day. There was no intrusion of the clergy. We should like to see all teachers act in the same way. If they did there would soon be a collapse of Church religion in the schools.

Dr. Welch, the director of religion under the B.B.C.—or the B.B.C. under Dr. Welch—is retiring. We do know that Dr. Welch has been dissatisfied under the religious influence of Sir John (now Lord) Reith, who was in the habit of asking candidates for a job whether they believed in Jesus Christ. It is well known that he was not very pleased with having to father some of the worn-out teachings that the B.B.C. forced upon listeners.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

- H. HEILER.—Thanks for cuttings. They are always useful, even though they are not immediately used.
- W. J. FREEMAN.—Pleased to know that your fractured arm is getting even; hope that you will soon be completely recovered. It must have been a very irritating time.
- J. WALLACE.—Very good indeed. Shall hope to hear from you again.
- J. C. ROSSOUW (Natal).—Pleased to hear from you. We shall hope to hear from you again.
- W. FREEMAN.—We are not very sanguine about the matter, but to keep on pegging away is the best policy at the moment. It is best not to say too much for the present.
- C. N. DAWNES.—Thanks for paper. It will be useful.
- G. TACCHU.—Thanks. Will appear soon.
- BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: A. J. Ashby, 13s. 8d.; Michael Malone, 5s. For "The Freethinker."—Mr. E. Drabble, 3s.

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

The Special Meeting of the N.S.S. will take place to-day, October 27, in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1. The year will be taken at 3 o'clock. Admission will be on production of the current membership card. Members who have mislaid or lost their card should ask to see the Secretary, who will straighten matters. All members may speak and vote. As the meeting is of importance, it is hoped that all who can will be present.

We deal elsewhere with the fantastic appeal of Churchill to the Christians of England to rally round the Conservatives in order to prevent the death of God. We use that language for Mr. Churchill means what he says, that is the significance of his appeal to resist all attacks on Christianity. And so far he has an historic background to support his pleading. For, after all, there must have been millions of gods, and they have all died because men ceased to gather them. The only risk Mr. Churchill runs is that some of his opponents are also running about trying to protect God from dropping out of the minds of men. If God listens to both of them he will be getting troubled as to which lot he ought to favour.

Yet very solemnly one of our leading Provincial newspapers remarked that the need of to-day is independent thinking. We agree; and we have for many, many years tried to encourage it. But can anyone say truthfully that independent thinking receives much encouragement? It is not encouraged in politics, which more and more demands that each group shall receive orders as to what ideas the rank and file shall entertain instead

of their personal ideas. A candidate for election who chose his own opinions, and acted on them, or was not a "good Party man," would stand small chance of election. To succeed he must take orders from headquarters. He would be treated as a nuisance of the first water.

And in religion? What amount of independent thinking is possible there? The average Englishman *thinks* little enough on politics, less on ethics, and least of all on religion. It took over two hundred years for freedom of thought to be permitted clear of imprisonment and worse for those who dared to tell the truth. Even now our Press does what it can to prevent people knowing the truth with regard to religion. The facts concerning the origin, development and decay of religion are plain enough, but our Press remain silent, the Churches preach largely as though Christianity cannot be questioned, and Members of Parliament pay religion compliments it doesn't deserve. There is not a church or chapel in the country where independent thinking is allowed. If "Thou shalt not think" is not set forth in so many words it is expressed in attitude.

We are quite certain that if the Government used its influence to induce the B.B.C. to act with fairness with regard to its religious broadcasts there would soon be a change for the better on its one-sided method. Thousands of protests have been made, and are still being made, against the plan adopted, which is to give full play to the most out-of-date Christian doctrines and to slimy and stupid pleading for Christianity. Fair play on religion might offend Mr. Churchill, now that he has taken Christianity under his wing, but the public would be the better for it.

The more liberal-minded among the religious bodies have expressed their discontent at the present arrangement. Here is one protest from the Unitarian Church in Brighton, which appears in the "Evening Argus." The writer is the Rev. F. M. Ryde. He says: "The religious policy of the B.B.C. is dominated, and indeed monopolised, by the orthodox Christian Churches to the exclusion of all those differing from them. . . . In my opinion, it should go further and invite rationalists, humanists, materialists, etc., to present their case against religion and the Churches." Many thousands of similar letters have reached the B.B.C., but they are just ignored. With the air full of praise for liberty, the B.B.C. takes care that one of the chief fights for freedom, so far as the B.B.C. is concerned, simply does not exist.

But the one certain thing is that there will be no fair play on religious questions where Members such as W. Teeling, M.P. for Brighton, are concerned. He calmly told a meeting of "The European Moral and Rearmament Assembly" in Switzerland that "No religion, or little, has been taught in any of the State schools, a large number of Members of Parliament have no religion of any sort, and no beliefs in anything but the present world." And getting more ferociously untruthful, he added that "Unless you have something like a Christian religion behind it all, and on both sides, it will not be possible to carry on parliamentary government without great hatred and almost fighting." After that we must give up all attempts to shine as a first-class —!

The following passage belongs to "George Eliot." It is well worth remembering. "Given a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of power or money, he may easily attain power and reputation in English Society? Where is that Goshen of mediocrity in which, with a smattering of science and learning, will pass for profound instruction, where platitude will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egotism as God-given piety? Let such a man become an evangelical speaker, he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, a middling *morale* with a high reputation for sanctity." Not many alterations would be needed to apply this to the preachers of to-day.

## PAGAN APOLOGETICS AGAINST CHRISTIANITY

## II.

THE first of these works, which has already been mentioned as coming down to us largely verbatim, thanks to Origen's later reply, was written in Greek (like the "Meditations" of its author's imperial contemporary, Marcus Aurelius) in four books. Its fame as a "Pagan Evidence" textbook was evidently considerable and lasting, since long after its author's death, Ambrosius, a convert of the famous Christian theologian, Origen, was so worried by the formidable arguments of Celsus, that he sent the book to his master to reply, as he himself was quite unable to do so. Origen, also, as he states in his preface, was very reluctant to undertake the task, but, fortunately, Ambrose was his financial backer and he could not refuse his request. The result was his "Contra Celsum" ("against Celsus") in eight books (248 A.D.).

We may add that Origen, who was one of the best of the early Christian writers, a real scholar and a "broad Churchman," whose liberal views got him into posthumous trouble with the Church, replied quite fairly, if not very effectively to the arguments of Celsus, and his voluminous treatise includes, in the opinion of M. Louis Rougier, the French historian of Celsus, some nine-tenths of Celsus arguments, and perhaps as much as seven-tenths of the *ipsissima verba* of the "True Word."

Indeed, the learned commentator professes to be able to reproduce verbatim, or practically so, the actual text of "The True Word," and includes this later verbatim reconstruction as an appendix to his literary and historical analysis of the antecedents and arguments of the great Pagan critic. (cp. M. Louis Rougier—"Celse—ou le Conflit dans la Civilisation Antique et du Christianisme Primitif," Paris, 1925). It only remains to add that Celsus is plausibly identified with the friend of Lucian, to whom the famous satirist dedicated one of his essays, and it would probably be correct to surmise that his ultimate motive in writing against Christianity was political rather than purely intellectual in character. Or so, at least, we should gather from his closing remarks (cp. infra). Lucian ascribes a book against magic to him, and Origen refers to another ethical treatise against Christianity which he was supposed to have written.

The fame of "The True Word" seems, however, to have been virtually obliterated in Pagan circles by its formidable successor, "Against the Christians," by Porphyry, nearly a century later, in 15 books. This gigantic work, according to its American historian, Mr. Amos B. Hulén, became, so to speak, the "Bible" of the last generations of Paganism before Constantine "established" Christianity as the State Religion of the Roman Empire (c. 325 A.D.). At least, Mr. Hulén assures us that the lost work of Porphyry (c. 233-304 A.D.) furnished the model for all subsequent Pagan anti-Christian literature, such as the (also lost—i.e., suppressed) works of the Emperor Julian and the Imperial governor, Hierocles. The fathers of the Church attempted innumerable replies to Porphyry, but by this time Christianity was in a position to use other arguments than reason. So, in 449 A.D., a century after Constantine, an Imperial decree, which mentioned Porphyry, along with the Christian heresiarch, Arius, by name, legally suppressed the last anti-Christian literary polemics "in order to avert the wrath of God. Henceforth, "the oracles were dumb" until modern Europe rediscovered the secular spirit.

From the fact that "The True Word" is not mentioned in the decree of 449 A.D., we must assume that the work of Celsus had already fallen into oblivion. The survival of the later work of Porphyry, apart from its much greater length, was, no doubt, largely due to the much greater personal fame of its author. For Porphyry, the neo-Platonist, the disciple and biographer of the famous mystical philosopher, Plotinus, and himself a voluminous author and a man of encyclopaedic knowledge, was one of the

most celebrated men of later antiquity. Unfortunately, he found no "Origen" among his Christian posthumous opponents, who has given us any opportunity to follow his arguments in detail. For his work has been entirely lost. And even his American historian is forced to allow that any reconstruction of the arguments of his 15 books must now be only arbitrary and provisional. His actual text is, of course, entirely "lost"—by "Act of God," or, rather of the victorious Church. (cp. "Porphyry's Work against the Christians—an Interpretation," by Amos B. Hulén—Yale Studies in Religion.)

Thus, students of the great literary debate which raged from Celsus to Julian (the Apostate) (178-363 A.D.), are very much handicapped by the, except for Origen and Celsus, virtually complete obliteration of the anti-Christian side of the argument. A modern parallel would be an "argument" in contemporary Franco Spain on Socialism! However, from Celsus, fragments of Porphyry (as reconstituted precariously by Mr. Hulén), and from the copious "refutations" provided by the voluminous—if not always luminous!—writings of the Christian Apologists, most of whom have been carefully preserved by a grateful Church, it is, accordingly, possible to reconstitute the "general line," at least, of the Pagan anti-Christian school of writers.

Before, however, devoting two further articles to this question, there is one further point that the student of the period under discussion should ever bear in mind. It is this. The ultimate victory of Christianity was not gained in the intellectual, but in the political, in the sociological field. To be sure, even Origen, one of the ablest of all the Christian Fathers of the Church, was a rather poor figure in reply to the devastating intellectual attack of Celsus. The modern historian, J. A. Froude, thus sums up the controversy from the intellectual angle:—

"On questions of fact, on science, on history, on statesmanship, Origen is like a child trying to answer a giant."

But the Roman Empire was just then going to pieces. Gibbon dates the beginning of its "Decline and Fall" from the death of Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180, almost exactly contemporary with "The True Word," the first great Pagan literary attack on rising Christianity.

(In our opinion, the "Decline" began at least two centuries earlier than Gibbon allowed: For example, Caligula and Nero were not exactly products of a healthy society!) And the decaying Empire required "moral cement" to bolster up its cracking social structure. The Church, with its unity, its ubiquity ("in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek"), and its intolerance of opposition, provided this "moral cement" better than did the loose assortment of local cults, themselves survivals of an earlier state of society, which made up Paganism.

So much was this the case that we may, in fact, say confidently that, whilst another cosmopolitan religion, such as Mithraism or Manicheism, could, and actually nearly did defeat Christianity, in the then social state, the kind of Greek and Roman Paganism which Celsus and Porphyry defended was doomed in advance. And, hence, that it was this over-riding political consideration which proved the ultimately decisive factor in the struggle between Paganism and early Christianity.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## "THEORETICAL CHRISTIANS."

SIR,—I am Mr. Du Cann's horse (deceased). I have read your correspondent, Mr. Yates's, stricture on my obituary notice, "The Best of Christians." I think analogies should not be pressed too far and that Mr. Yates should cultivate a sense of humour!

I may be only a dead horse, but why does Mr. Yates flag me? I had enough of that when alive in France. A few words "straight from the horse's mouth" are plainly required, for Mr. Yates denies that I am a Christian horse because, he says,

I "did nothing that I was not forced and which was not the natural consequence of being a horse." It is true that I suffered what I was forced to suffer, like many—perhaps most—of the Christian martyrs, and like Christ himself. But Mr. Yates's view that there is no virtue in compulsory martyrdom, uncomplainingly endured, is not that of the Christian Church, or most people. As to the "natural consequence of being a horse," is that to endure beating, ill-usage, overwork, painful death, and cookery by a French chef in the fraudulent guise of beef? If these things are not the natural consequence of being a man, why should they be regarded as the natural consequence of being a horse?

What would my human-brother Yates say if horses did to him as men did to me?

St. Francis d'Assisi recognised a poor donkey as his Christian "Brother Ass." Dean Swift, in Gulliver, pointed out the superiority of horses to Christian men. So Mr. Du Cann, if he errs (which I doubt), at least errs in excellent company, and may comfort himself with the classic saying, "Better to err with Pope than shine with Pye."

Let me conclude by reminding your censorious correspondent that horse and man had a common ancestor, and that man may yet, by heroic efforts, in about a million years or so, attain to the decent spiritual level of his superior, the horse.—Yours, etc.,

#### THE POOR OLD CHRISTIAN HORSE (late of Dunkirk).

The Elysian Fields,  
Kingdom of Heaven.

Sir,—In answer to Mr. Yates, I should have thought my phrase "theoretical Christian" meant precisely what it says. Isn't it clear? Most Western individuals and nations profess and call themselves Christians, but they seldom, and then only in trifles, act according to the teaching they profess.

This is exactly the same as Mr. Yates's "Christian in thought, not in action," but not quite the same as his "in other words." For in these other words he assumes that the theoretician does not believe in practising his theory. But one may believe in practising and yet not in fact practise, for action does not necessarily square with belief. Plenty of Britons and Germans believed in the war and prudently abstained from fighting in it, just as others disbelieved in war and yet fought.

I believe in a great deal of Christianity. Much of it, like the Golden Rule, is common to most religions—and to much irreligion, too. Because I cannot swallow the whole bottle of medicine, Mr. Yates will not allow me to drink a teaspoonful.

He sets out all the Christ-legends, credible and incredible, as "fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith," and insists on my accepting them all. Here he is, of course, in harmony with the Creeds and the Roman, Anglican, and Greek Catholics, but he parts company with modernists and many distinguished clerics of the Church of England, as well as Unitarians, who, according to his definition, cannot be Christians at all! Even St. Mark the Evangelist, since he does not seem to accept Christ's Divinity, is non-Christian on Mr. Yates's showing.

Because I believe in Christ crucified must I believe in a crucified Christ, or a judicial Christ? Because I believe there was a man-Christ must I believe there is a God-Christ? Mr. Yates will have it that all Christians must. But they don't. (The Malvern Conference made it clear that even all Anglicans don't.)

Nor do I follow Mr. Yates when he says that if I believe in Jesus I must believe in prayer because Jesus enjoined it. Surely I may believe in a man, and even in his genius, and yet believe him wrong on this point or that. Why must I believe in a miracle or a devil because I believe in a man?

Mr. Yates's reasoning is faulty. I believe in Martin Luther, but shall I believe in the Devil because Martin threw an inkpot at him? Certainly I may—in spite of Mr. Yates—believe in Martin and his inkpot, and the ink in it, and his throwing it; and yet, quite sensibly, not believe in the Devil at whom it was said to be thrown.

There are degrees in credulity after all. There are degrees of Christianity, both in faith and practice. Mr. Yates is a son of Saint Athanasius, who also, in his celebrated Credo, over-amplifies the complex, over-emphasises faith at the expense

of works, and insists on our swallowing the whole bottle of medicine—and even the bottle as well.

Finally, when Mr. Yates cannot conceive how there can be such a person as a "theoretical Christian" (his Christian in thought, not action), although the world is full of such folk, I give him up. Surely this is exactly the position with most Christians: they profess one thing (namely, love) and act another (namely, enmity), as modern war, politics, economics and other human relationships show us.

If I had called myself a practising Christian, Mr. Yates might well take exception. Certainly I am entitled, however, to call myself a "theoretical Christian" on many grounds, including the fact that at the mature age of a few weeks my kindly, motherly Church of England made me at my baptism "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven" without even my knowledge or consent, and has never excommunicated me. As a member of Christ, I am, by that fact, a Christian. Also, if "theoretical" is not the *mot juste*, it is at any rate a reasonable, if a somewhat condemnatory, self-description calculated to prevent readers thinking that I do when, like all the rest, I don't.—Yours, etc.,

C. G. L. DU CANN.

## OBITUARY

### MR. HENRY STOVIN.

The funeral of Henry Stovin, of Chester, who died at his home, Monday, September 30, 1946, took place at Landicann Crematorium, Birkenhead, Thursday, October 3, 1946. Mr. Stovin, who was 78 years of age was a member of the Chester Branch of the National Secular Society and often spoke of hearing Mr. Foot at Chester. He had suffered ill health for a number of years but was always cheerful and tranquil in spite of his suffering. He expressed his wish for a non-religious funeral a few days before he passed peacefully away. One of the oldest members of the Shop Assistants' Union he held office in the Chester Branch for a great number of years. A supporter of the Socialist Party in its early days, and although of a retiring nature, he was fearless in his propagation of Freethought. His wishes were adhered to: a short Secular Service was conducted by Mr. A. D. Hodgkinson, of Chester Branch National Secular Society.

A. D. H.

## 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.

### LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 29, 7 p.m.: "The Present Relations Between Science and Religion," Mr. MARTIN DAVIDSON, D.Sc., F.R.A.S.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square W.C.1).—11 a.m.: "The Middle Class Woman," Mr. H. L. BEALES, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Gt. Newport St., W.C.1).—6-30 p.m.: "A Universal Error," Mr. H. J. ADAMS.

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—3-30 p.m.: "Mark Twain," Mr. LENNARD.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—6-30 p.m.: "Brains Trust." Bring your questions.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—6-30 p.m.: "Religious Education in the Schools," Mr. W. C. CLEMENTS.

## CRACKING THE CREATION NUTSHELL

WE have just been reading what is described on the cover as Number One of the Nutshell Series: "Creation in a Nutshell," by A. Kernel. We presume "Mr. Kernel" must be quite a big nut in the British Israel world because his book is published by The Society for Proclaiming that Britain is Israel. Being myself a member of The Society for Proclaiming that When it's Night-time in Italy it's Wednesday over here—Mr. Kernel will forgive me, I hope, for taking a crack at his particular pet chestnut—the Creation.

The purpose of British Israel, of course, is not only to assure all good Britishers that they are God's chosen people but also to prove once and for all that Science has nothing on the Bible. In fact all the evidence of modern scientific knowledge and discovery merely proves that the ancient Bibliographers had it all taped and must have known far more than Einstein is ever likely to know! So B.I. goes to an awful lot of trouble to convince us that no matter how conclusively science proves the Bible to be *wrong* it is really proving it to be *right*. But, in order to believe what the Bible says is true you must first believe that it doesn't really mean what it says at all! In other words you must believe it means just what B.I. wants it to mean. Then, of course, it's all quite simple.

The little book commences with the startling pronouncement that the account of Creation in Chapter 1 of Genesis is not the *original* Creation at all but merely one of many *re-newals*. In fact B.I. says there were quite a number of previous Creations. This decision is made necessary in order to explain away the scientific evidence that *Adam could not have been the First Man*. According to the Bible Adam was created 6,000 years ago, but fossil remains have been found which are vastly older than 6,000 years. So B.I. can only square the Bible with Science by assuming that numerous Creations and Destructions took place prior to the Biblical one. A very neat wangle, you will agree, but in order to swallow it you must *not* ask yourself why all these previous Creations are not mentioned in a straightforward way in the first verse nor must you accuse the Church of deliberately withholding this important information in their Sunday schools and teaching small children to believe a lie. The children are always taught that Adam *was* the First Man and that there was only *one* Creation. Surely then *someone* is a liar!

I'm sorry, Mr. Kernel, but it seems to us that merely substituting one fabrication for another doesn't really get us very far. Also you have forgotten to tell us *where* God lived before he created *Heaven*. Surely B.I. can think up something for that one.

We will not bother our friend with the old chestnut—"If God created the world then who created God?"—because his answer would be that God did not have to be created. But if that is a logical assumption then it is also logical to assume that the world did not have to be *created* either; it could have "*grown*"—by the natural process of evolution. But Christians, who cannot be logical, will never admit that because it is merely the evidence of Science, not of the Bible.

Mr. Kernel then goes on to say that the *perfect* creation has not yet appeared. Is God then such a bungler that he has to make and destroy things over and over again before getting them right? Surely, if he is all-everything he could have made a perfect creation in the first place.

Job xxxviii. ch. 7. tells us that when the work of creation (it does not say *which* creation) was under way "all the sons of God shouted for joy." But it does not explain *when* these sons of God were *created*. They are not mentioned in Genesis i. And *who* are they? Mr. Kernel tells us they are the Angels: host—but the Bible tells us that *we* are the sons of God. Do we believe *him* or the *Bible*? If our friend is correct then God

evidently had assistance with his Creation yet he gives no credit for that help in Genesis i. and leads us to suppose he did it all single-handed.

In order to explain away God's mania for dabbling in Creations Mr. Kernel compares him with the human builder or engineer who has to experiment first and test all his products before being satisfied. Yet we have always been told that God is infallible—so how can he make mistakes like the human builder? Again *someone* must be a liar!

Dipping further into our little mine of information we learn that Satan is perhaps the most powerful of all created beings—But we are not told why an all-good God *created an evil being*—and *gave him the most power*. So we must conclude that God *intended* the world to be evil—so that he could have an excuse for destroying it. In the matter of destruction Mr. Kernel tells us that God is a God of *honour* and so cannot break his promise not to destroy Mankind by flood. Is that why he is going to do it by *fire* next time? And if such a God can be called honourable—then *all* mass-murderers are honourable!

Says Mr. Kernel: "Decent people are unable to understand how human beings can commit the acts of cruelty which from time to time shock them, the kind of acts which have been all too common in the last war and the present war; such acts are instinctively described as 'fiendish,' 'inhuman,' 'devilish.'" But a few paragraphs further on he quotes God's instructions to the Israelites: "But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth. But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee."

For sheer fiendish, inhuman and devilish cruelty that warrants a bit of beating! However, Mr. Kernel glosses this over by explaining: "There must have been something fundamentally wrong with these people for God to order the killing of man, woman, child and infant."

It seems to us there must have been something fundamentally wrong with a God who could indulge in such an orgy of sadism simply because people didn't choose to fall down and worship him!

No, Mr. Kernel, I'm afraid it won't do. You can always invent excuses and apologies *ad nauseam*—but the more you try to whitewash the Bible the better you succeed in exposing its bestialities; and you will never succeed in proving it to be the *Book of Truth*.

Why cannot Christians be *honest* and *truthful* and admit that the Old Testament is merely a collection of primitive myths and fables invented by ignorant and superstitious men of the early ages? How can you expect civilised people to revert to the childish mentality of savages?

As for your version of the Creation, it will not fool any *thinking* person. You say that between Verses 1 and 2 of the First chapter of Genesis there was a period lasting some millions of years during part of which time Man existed on the Earth although Light (and heat) had not been created. How, in the name of common sense do you suppose Man could have lived in such conditions? There is no Biblical authority whatever to justify your statement nor for your assertion that the seven days of Creation were not really seven days at all. You are trying to prove the Bible is true by telling people it is untrue. You are trying to square it with Science by inventing a new version of your own. If your version is right then the Bible is wrong; if Science is right the Bible is still wrong!

B.I. teaching may impress a few ignorant people who like to flatter themselves they are God's elite, but anyone of normal intelligence will only be amused and mildly entertained by the acrobatic twistings of its paid contortionists.

W. H. WOOD.