

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Religious Nightmare

IN a religious newspaper, I once saw an advertisement of someone who had 59 volumes of the "Christian World Pulpit" for sale. It has been in my mind's eye ever since. Fifty-nine volumes of sermons, and not of the time when the Church did have some good intellectual men, but of ordinary preachers, who—we will be merciful—belonged to the late quarter of the last century. Allow an average of five sermons to each issue of the C.W.P. with fifty-two issues per year and we reach a grand total of three thousand and sixty-eight sermons. And they are advertised for sale! Therefore the advertiser expects to find someone desirous of becoming the owner of 3,068 sermons in one consignment. One's imagination staggers at the sight of such colossal confidence in the mental capacity of one's fellow creatures.

I have often wondered whether anyone would ever really desire to possess 3,000 sermons at once. If so what would he do with them? Paper-makers buy their material by weight. Shopkeepers could, in normal times, buy their paper at a much lower figure than is being asked for these fifty-nine volumes. They are neither handy enough nor strong enough to be used as weapons against feline disturbers of sleep. No publisher would be brave enough to reprint the sermons as valuable literature. And it surely cannot be that any person would buy them to read. Fancy sitting down to read 3,000 sermons. No: that way lies madness.

Three thousand and sixty-eight sermons! Allow thirty minutes for the delivery of each sermon. This gives us 1,534 hours. Allow a working day of ten hours, and we have 153 days, or twenty-two weeks! Could human nature survive the strain? Juries have had to listen to speeches of several days' duration from a counsel; but they could ease their feelings by bringing in a verdict for the other side. In the present case no such redress is possible. If anyone began to read those sermons on New Year's Day the ordeal would hardly be finished in the time for the summer holidays.

Why on earth did anyone want to take in the "Christian World Pulpit" during fifty-nine years? Or, having read them all that time, why preserve them? Or, having preserved them, why announce his ill-deed by advertising them? And for sale, too. One could understand their being given to some public institution. This is a recognised way of getting rid of useless printed matter. If they had been lettered under various titles they might have been useful to decorate a library that was never used for reading. But these volumes were openly, brazenly lettered, "Christian World Pulpit," naked and unashamed. His friends and

casual acquaintances would see them. They will remain in the house like a family skeleton or some evil tradition that refuses to be smothered. Perhaps it is all a joke?

These fifty-nine volumes of sermons haunted me. The advertisement was a short one, but ever since I saw placarded on a wall two posters which ran as one, and so added to their interest: "The second coming of our Lord. . . The greatest clog-dance on earth." That advertisement lingered in my mind, and it threatened no mental disturbance. Also I might have reflected that large numbers of religious essays are constantly on sale, but the fact is not brought forward as did this announcement. All sorts of reflections occurred. I felt like an explorer who, for the first time, stood on an unknown territory.

For the beginning of these fifty-nine volumes covered what is now an almost vanished world. They carry us back to pre-Darwinian days. We could imagine living people giving us, say, the "argument from design in nature," or the innate wickedness of unbelievers. We can imagine orthodox teachers presenting the Bible as the word of God, with Heaven and Hell as real as Margate or Brighton. In these pages, we could see an almost dead world.

One thinks of the people who sat week after week listening to these sermons. . . Of how the thoughtful may have deluded themselves with the belief that they were getting information, history, sociology, science, and even religion. One also has a thought for those mentally somnolent ones who never laboured under any such delusion, but who valued the sermons that taught nothing but merely induced a comfortable, unreflecting and properly orthodox frame of mind. To some of both classes disappointment must have come. Some may have discovered that they were being taught nothing, and their place in Church would know them no more. Others would be startled by discovering that, in spite of all possible precautions, gleams of commonplace sense *would* creep into the sermon, and the peacefulness of mind that comes from feeling that one's preacher may be trusted not to say anything useful or truthfully new would be impossible.

I think also of the people who preached these sermons; of the young men of good average intelligence who entered the pulpit believing not merely what his pious teacher told him, but also that he was learning something that would mould the lives of his fellow creatures. And then of the discovery that the wisdom given them was so much wasted time, of the deacons who kept watchful eyes on them all like some unauthorised inquisitor ready to make them feel they might be the figurehead of a would-be *auto da fé* before his congregation.

Or of the preacher's gradual discovery that he had trained himself for preaching a lie, of the social ostracism that would be his lot, or the pain of self-inflicted dis-

honesty if he remained silent. How many unrecorded tragedies are covered by those 3,000 sermons no man knows or ever will know. Of the preachers whom nature had destined for the pulpit in an unbelieving age. Those who were weak-minded by nature had their congenital infirmity made incurable by their theological training. I do not neglect that to some of them the pulpit was a real home, a home that gave them the reputation and a feeling of wisdom without ever taking the trouble, or go through the pain of acquiring it.

The production of fifty-nine volumes of sermons did not seriously impress me. With rare exceptions one sermon is very much like another. The selection of a text is not a very arduous task since it may be anything or nothing, literal history or esoteric symbology. Three or four anecdotes cribbed from "Ten Thousand Anecdotes for Preachers" or some such production, but introduced from the preacher's own experience. Or generally, admitted evils may be vigorously denounced, and accepted qualities strongly commended. Everything must be labeled that is admittedly good, and everything that is objectionable must be called Pagan, or Materialism, or anything else objectionable. Above all, and this is one of the great secrets of sermon production—when it comes to purely religious matters there are no verifiable facts to limit the output. . . Lectures on science, history, even on politics have in various degrees to keep into touch with truth, they have in varying measures to keep in touch with facts. And facts have an awkward way of pulling a speaker up. These ideas of reality may arise in his memory uninvited, and so ruin a most delightful passage. They may even compel a speaker to confess his ignorance on this or that. The religious preacher has none of these limitations. He may preach on Heaven or Hell, on God, devils, angels, and the soul without anyone being able to offer contradiction. No one can prove he is wrong, and no good churchman would ask a preacher to prove he is right. There are none to check him; no living person knows more about these things than he does. . . The only limit to the preaching of sermons is the strength of the parson's lungs or the patience of those who "sit under him."

But these fifty-nine volumes of sermons remain—a solid, and almost unbelievable fact. Someone who disguises himself under the name of "Clericus" has, with malice aforethought, saved up this long drawn-out agony, and threatens to let it loose on the nation. What can be his object? What right has he to think that England holds a person desirous of becoming the owner of this nightmare in cloth binding? I am devoured with curiosity. Everything else ceases to interest me. Literature ceases to interest. The possibility of Russia declaring war on England leaves me untouched. Is the advertisement genuine or is it a hoax? Will some deluded person buy the lot under the impression that he is getting hold of an encyclopedia of general information, or that he is buying a copy of the "World's Masterpieces of Wit and Humour"? And if he does purchase, will he straight away hunt up "Clericus" with an axe by way of soothing his tortured brain? Hang it all, I feel inclined to purchase them myself at a price and decorate the walls of my house as a specimen of the toughness of British barbarism. But fifty—Oh horror!

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"THEY DESERVE HANGING"

IT is hoped by many men and women of goodwill that the Government's coming Criminal Justice Bill may contain a provision that hanging shall be abolished, or else suspended for an experimental period of five years. Freethinkers cannot lag behind the ethical standard of Christians such as the Archbishop of York, in supporting such a proposal.

If you speak to the ordinary person about abolishing hanging, the reply is nearly always ludicrously the same: "But murderers *deserve* to be hanged." "Deserve" is the emphasised word. How *naive* to think that desert rules, or should rule, the world! Shakespeare answered this base and unsophisticated cry of treating folk according to desert, in "Hamlet": "Use every man after his desert and who shall 'scape whipping. Use them after your own honour and dignity. The less they *deserve* the more merit is in your bounty." The mind that put those words into Hamlet's mouth was a noble mind; a very different mind from the mind of the ordinary vulgar. Besides, the idea of hanging as a punishment unscientifically begs the question of the individual's responsibility for his act.

For my part, like most folk, for years I cared nothing about this question. I regarded the whole subject as academic, fit for school debating societies. As to abolition: "Let messieurs the assassins commence," as the witty Frenchman said. But directly I had personal contact with hanging, in defending a young Czech at the request of the State, on a capital charge of espionage in a secret trial, I had it burned into me by personal experience that killing was wrong. This experience did for me what war service (in which I had led men to killing and was nearly killed myself) never did.

There is no right-to-kill. The taking of life is the *greatest* of wrongs, whether done by the State or the individual. In England you can be put to death not only for murder (as the vulgar imagine) but for treason, for espionage, for piracy, and even for destroying by fire or otherwise the King's property in one of his dockyards (but nowhere else!). Can these archaic survivals be justified?

Death is irrevocable; and no criminal punishment ought to be. For there is always the danger of innocence being unjustly condemned. It took 18 years to substitute justice for injustice in the case of Oscar Slater (who might have been hanged, as Lord Chancellor Buckmaster pointed out), and seven years in the case of Adolf Beck.

The State, as that great lawyer Jeremy Bentham said, affects conduct more by its own behaviour than by after-penalties. If the State sets the evil example by taking human life to suit its own interest, why should not the individual citizen take life to suit his? Hanging begets murder, as war does. Results in countries which have abolished State-murder, as shown to the Select Committee of the House of Commons, put this matter beyond argument.

Yet the one argument in favour of State-killing is that of deterrence. Unfortunately for this argument, about 150 murders yearly in England show that hanging has failed to deter. Also, when hanging was a punishment for petty thefts of a few shillings in England, it did not deter, either! Besides, people usually murder once and without weighing the consequences, because they are generally in such case moved by a violent temporary emotion.

It is better to prevent murder than to repeat it by State murder. Fortunately, modern science shows us how. Most murders are committed by psychopaths. Early in life the psychopath can be detected and subjected to medical scrutiny and legal restraint. If modern knowledge had been embodied in legislation and applied to that recent case of Heath, he would never have had the opportunity of committing his murders. Unfortunately our archaic legalism does not recognise moral defect, and its "Macnaghten Rules" are hopelessly out of date.

As to hanging as a mode of inflicting death, can anything be more barbarous and disgusting? If it were not veiled under Home Office secrecy could we tolerate the torture and litches which occur? It is on record that at Oxford, Robert Upton's head was nearly torn off, and at Liverpool, John Conway's hanging was similar, while at Norwich, Goodale's head was pulled right off! The case of John Lee, at Exeter, where the chop failed to act three times, was much publicised. Cases of "struggling and writhing" are recorded, and death sometimes takes, according to prison surgeons, from three to seven minutes. There is some horrifying reading in the report of Lord Aberdare's Committee on this subject.

Considering that death by modern methods can be painless and decent, can there be any case for perpetuating these traditional and gruesome horrors, even if one granted that the death penalty is necessary? Think of the lunatic fuss over "escaping the hangman" by poison if you would see how the primitive idea of retributive vengeance, and not the good of the community, is behind the exaction of death. Christ's teaching is the very antithesis of this, yet ironically enough, "good Christians" forget that hanging on a gibbet is equal to hanging on a Cross, and often are firm supporters of hanging today.

The State's alleged right to kill must be challenged utterly, or else not merely hanging but wars, will continue. There is no such right. It is a plain wrong. Human life should be regarded as sacred, both by the State and the citizen, and until it is so regarded the very foundations of human association are unsafe. Freedom to live is the first of freedoms, on which all others depend.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

AGNOSTICISM AND ATHEISM

J. STURGE-WHITING seems to invite comment on his "Rationalising." Perhaps I might oblige, as I appear to be a different kind of Atheist to those he is accustomed to meet. I am not "Coldly objective." Like Bradlaugh, when I think of the bloody roots of Vanini's tongue, I feel intensely. I do not believe in gods, I know they exist; millions of them. But I have no use for such things and I find them a nuisance.

I can appreciate that he has a "very real and persistent ghost." It is quite easy to understand how "powerful influences of suggestion and propaganda" and the "sufficiently subtle and convincing arguments" and "the more subtle and pervading influences inseparable from—a Christian country" should give rise to "a becoming humility." There really is no need for so much confession. As the Yank would say, forget it!

It might clear the way a little to commence with a definition which he appears not to have come across; it is Hegel's: God is a subjective reality that exists in the mind of the believer. But, not only does Sturge-Whiting appear to be obsessed with the idea that "existence" is objective, but, like Thomas Huxley, he seems unable to use logic. Huxley, in one connection asserted that anything is possible, yet in another he asserted the impossibility of denying the possibility of God. Logic calls for definition of terms. If it be realised that possibility is a negative term, the absurdity of denying a negative can be seen; as also, the assertion of impossibility is a double negative; i.e., a positive assertion. The position becomes clearer if we understand what Spinoza meant when he said that possibility is another word for ignorance. As the same philosopher also asserted that God is the asylum of ignorance, it would appear that possibility and God are synonymous terms. The question of the possibility of God's existence is a logical absurdity. It is merely a demonstration of ignorance. And, if possibility is considered as the opposite of certainty, the uncertainty concerning God is not to be wondered at.

But logic not only concerns the terms used, it is also a check on the reasoning. If an argument is logical, what is present in the conclusion is there in the predicate. If the answer is unsatisfactory we might consider the question put. How can anybody answer a question if they have no idea what it means? "Is there a God?" What can the question mean if the term is undefined? Without some idea of the meaning of the word there is no question. But, define the terms and the answer is necessarily the logical corollary of such definition. The question assumes the answer. Could anything "known or imaginable be thus described"? Is the word God a description? The question is completely meaningless; an undefined word is not a description. If the question is not intelligible how can we logically expect the answer to be? An unsatisfactory answer is the logical result of an unsatisfactory question. So long as one chases shadows, one must expect to get nowhere.

Sturge-Whiting appeared to suggest that he is willing to be introduced to God. But, seeing that he has no idea what such a thing is, how could he judge whether or not he was being led up the garden path? The introducer could only say, this is God; or give a verbal definition; and he, in his abysmal ignorance would have to accept. Or would he? Or would he discover that he is not quite so ignorant as he thinks he is? Perhaps, he might even discover the absurdity of believing that the more he knows, the more ignorant he is. And he might even discover that a question can only be answered in terms of knowledge; which might even lead to a realisation that an answer of such a character would be a contribution to understanding. For there is a question which can be put which does not involve such illogicality; it is, what do men mean, and what have men meant by the word God? In dealing with such a question, some acquaintance with the Gods is necessary.

It is not merely a case of Gods being "as numerous and as various as weeds" in a garden, for many of our weeds are still unclassified. There are no uncharted seas for God; and quite a general survey will suffice. Like the Church, God is all things to all men. Anything is possible, anything is God, everything is God. From fetishes and totems, talismans and lucky charms, from sticks and stones, on through the nature to the human, through the social to the universal, gods; the personal characteristics of feeling, sentiment, incentive, reason and aspiration, are there. Like the Devil, God has the remarkable ability to change his form, but remains the same in substance. There is nothing more intimate than God. Throughout the piece we are concerned with psychology, with the psyche, the soul, the self. The believer is conscious of his own feelings, emotions and desires. As man himself is so is his God. God is a magnified self. The need for magnification arises in the feeling of weakness, in frustration, in lack of confidence. We fortify ourselves in association, in identification, in personal projection.

The need is to appreciate that psychological or sociological experience is as much reality as the physical. The problem is not the existence of gods, but their character and function; it is not a theological but a psychological question. I can not say: "I do not know," for my own personal experience is evidence. I am an Atheist, not only because I see no sense in living in a fool's paradise; but also because I consider the exaggeration of personal idiosyncrasies to be socially dangerous.

H. H. PREECE.

WAR

With regard to war, the greatest and most pompous of human activities, I would fain know whether we shall regard it as arguing some prerogative or as a testimony of our imbecility and imperfection, the science of defeating and killing one another, of ruining and destroying our own race.—MONTAIGNE.

ACID DROPS

From that old-established religious journal, "The Guardian," comes an editorial lament that eighty-five per cent. that are brought to be baptised fail to become members of the Church. From one point of view that is very good, although it is scandalous that children should be brought to believe Christianity to be impeccable when the parents know well that the odds are in favour of their children, when they grow up, repudiating the teaching given them. Parents should give their children a *road* in life, not order them into a mire. The stupid saying, "I will bring my children up to believe as I believe, when they are old enough they can choose for themselves," is just nonsense. The parents lead their children to something that is first cousin to a trap, and children do not always forgive it. All that we can say of it now is that if parents handed their children with respect for themselves they would teach children to learn their own values in their own way, so far as that can be done.

The "Guardian" goes on to say that the State is greatly concerned about the future of the young. That is not true—that is in the sense that the paper reads. The welfare of the children with which the Government is concerned, or obviously ought to be concerned, is, broadly, educational training, and with a hope that as they grow up they will be fit to play their part in life. But we have surely gone too far to identify this with religion. Personally, we believe the Government should have kept itself as free from religion as possible. If children are turned out with a likelihood of being good citizens, that should be adequate. It must also be remembered that the new Education Bill was passed while the Tories were substantially in power, and a war was on. With a new Government the situation would have been different. We must remember the saying of Meredith: "Sir, politics is like climbing the greasy pole—mutton or no mutton, you get the grease." It is not easy to get free from the grease of politics.

From one point of the religious life we move to another—perhaps we ought to say religious nonsense. It comes from the "Nottingham Journal." The figure here is Prof. J. G. McKenzie, and he is described as a "Sociologist," a psychologist, and a philosopher, all of which might mean anything or nothing. The meeting was called by the "Methodist Laymen's Association," a title which does not, somehow, suggest abstract science, nor does it run counter to one's expectations when we learn from Mr. McKenzie that "religion must have something to give that nothing in the world can give." That is rather promising, particularly when the gift is to be better than anything that the world can offer. We should like to see a sample of that thing, but if it is not like anything that we know, in the name of all that is sensible how do we recognise it? For all recognitions must be in terms of likeness to something, and if it is like "nothing" the meeting will never know that it has ever seen, or felt, or smelt, anything. Still, Mr. McKenzie seems to have an audience that manages to see the unseeable, to hear the unheard, and so will tell by feeling that the untouchable has been caught at last.

Our next exhibit is the Rev. P. T. R. Kirk, Prebendary and Rural Dean of Westminster. Here is his glad tiding—for someone:—

"Five out of seven seen in the street believe that religion must not merely be ignored, but rigidly opposed if the age of true well-being is to be ushered in. Five out of seven British citizens never darken the floors of a church."

So much for the fact. Now for the fancy:—

"To-day, as education spreads abroad men see great evils in our midst. They turn to the Church for remedy as surely as the magnetic needle turns to the pole. . . There is a firmly held conviction that the ecclesiastical body is out of touch with life."

We think we may leave the Dean to harmonise the two statements. The upshot of it is that a larger part of the people are discovering that their future lies not with the Churches and their religion, but on the strength of men to "shape the world to their own desire." The slight alteration in the quotation will be forgiven.

What we fancy our religious leaders have forgotten, and which for political reasons a large number of the Socialist army has not pressed, is that ever since the beginning of the eighteenth century there has been a hard conflict between those who were fighting for a better life for the people, irrespective of religion, to educate and develop their outlook and those who were using religion to crush the just developing of the independence of "Man." One need only remember the manner in which Thomas Paine was treated in Britain to see this truth. One of the boldest and best of Englishmen was handed down for many years as a drunken, dissolute, and ignorant agitator. Those who wish to form an idea of the terrible state in which the working class were should read the five volumes by Mr. and Mrs. Hammond of the social life of the people from 1769 to 1832. They will give the reader an insight to what human nature is capable of; on the one side what villainies man will commit in the name of Christianity and national hope, and on the other side the risks men will run, the villainies they will defy to raise the level of human life. The work of these great men who worked for others is still either kept out of modern histories or are given but a few misleading words. It was the poverty of the people that led them to visit the churches in order to secure the charity that the rich provided to keep the poor silent. Today things have altered, and with that alteration the position has changed. The poor need no longer fawn to the priest, and the priest with his creed has sunk in significance.

Things are anything but smooth for the various chaplains now returning from the ranks or overseas service. They are beginning to find out that nobody—not even bishops—wants them. In the "Church Times" the other week one of them complains, in fact, that "one of the very few English bishops" who granted an interview, suggested "that it might be advisable to obtain some form of secular employment rather than starve." Yet at the same time, the Christian Workers Union is crying out for help from "competent priests" to enable them to "counter paganism where they find it." The truth is of course that never in its history has the Church sunk so low. It may be a bitter pill to swallow, but its authority as a power in the land has gone, and these returning priests are seeing the red light in all its brightness.

Cardinal Griffin, noted purveyor of Catholic wisdom, has just found out that "a false philosophy can destroy a nation." This should therefore be the object of "war-mongers" rather than atom bombs, for a war is soon won if the enemy nation is destroyed. It appears, however, that this is not exactly what the Cardinal was driving at, for what he really meant was that God was truth, and the Catholic Church was given this truth, and that therefore you can always rely on the Church in giving you the right philosophy as against the wrong. It is all so sweet and reasonable—yet somehow or other, there are so many people who are pigheaded enough not to believe the good Cardinal. What can we do with such fools?

According to an official notice, worship by non-Catholics is permitted in Spain, but there must be no propaganda as "Spain is overwhelmingly Catholic. Therefore propaganda would be offensive to the nation." Now we know where we are, where that fine Democrat, the Pope, rules men's opinions. Where the Papacy rules you may have whatever religion you please, but look out for squalls if one dares to suggest that a Protestant may be in the—Christian—street.

The Rev. D. L. E. Saberton of All Saints, Warwick, complains of women who only give a "porter's tip" for a Churching service, he thinks that when women come to Church to "thank God for the greatest gift in the world"—a baby—they should know that they are *expected* to make their thank offering a worthy gift, and one on a decent level on modern values. We suggest that the Rev. is adding injury to insult, as anyone will know who takes the trouble to ascertain the Christian attitude towards women, particularly in this case of the Churching of Women Service, when the women are commanded to appear "decently apparelled," etc.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, W.C. 1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- H. RILEY (Burnley).—Thanks for newspaper cuttings.
- A. HATTE.—Much obliged for the paper. It will be useful.
- E. M. and J. SHINE.—Will appear soon, but we are very crowded just now.
- For "The Freethinker."—J. Ship, 10s.; G. H. Holmes, 4s.
- T. WATERS.—We must never be too sanguine. Who, looking at the best days of Rome and Greece would have believed that in a few generations both would have been semi-buried in the brutal superstition of Christianity at its lowest. Hitlerism is another example of the same thing in different tones.
- G. B. (S.A.).—Thanks for paper. Will deal with it.
- A. ROBERTSON.—Too late this week. Will appear next week.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, and not to the Editor.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

From the South African "Daily Dispatch" we find that our "Freethinker" has seriously disturbed one of the Members of Parliament—Mr. F. E. Meuts, M.P. It has injured somewhere and somehow, and as a good Christian he raised the question of suppressing the "One and Only." We are afraid that we must plead guilty to having sent "The Freethinker" to the far-away and extra virtuous country of South Africa. We also are aware that "The Freethinker" stings many people and delights still more, and that the aforementioned good Christians would delight to see this paper suppressed. As Mr. Meuts says, "The Freethinker" runs counter to the tender nature of many South African Christians. But on the other hand there are many people in that part of the world who do take pleasure in our journal and would not miss it on any account. Also there are some people in South Africa who do really appreciate freedom of thought and publication. So we expect we shall go on sending copies of "The Freethinker" and hope to see a much larger number read what we have to say.

This South African incident reminds us of a curious experience soon after the death of G. W. Foote. We were visited by two men—unknown—who desired, after some conversation, to buy "The Freethinker." A good price was offered, and we were a bit staggered. We inquired if they were known to any Freethinkers. They were not, but they were backed with plenty of money and they thought the paper could be made to "go"; after purchasing they would turn the paper into a limited company. We listened to all they had to say and then gravely said we would never dream of accepting less than a million. We then parted, and we were left wondering whether we really looked as foolish as these people—probably Christians—thought we were. We could imagine G. W. Foote in hell laughing at our handling of those who wished to buy "The Freethinker."

Whether parsons really know what a "parsonic" voice sounds like is difficult to say, but one parson in particular has solved the problem, and he is courageous enough to say so. He is the

Rev. H. Hocking and he had the misfortune—or was it luck?—to hear a B.B.C. repeat broadcast of one of his sermons. And this is his comment:—

"I listened to an awful parsonical voice and was horrified when I realised it was my own. The unctuous piety and the affected way in which I spoke were revolting. The precise and pedantic phrases and the pronunciation I gave to such honest words as 'church' sounded dreadful. . ."

According to the "Daily Mail," Mr. Hocking added that he had certainly learnt his lesson, and he thought every parson should be made to listen to a record of his voice at least once a year. So do we—but abolishing the "parsonic" voice will not save Christianity. Perhaps that is another lesson Mr. Hocking has yet to learn.

The Belfast Branch N.S.S. will hold a lecture in the Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North, Belfast, this evening at 7-30. The notice we received did not contain the name of the speaker or subject but the details given will enable those wishing to attend to do so, and the Branch deserves all the possible support that can be given.

Mr. J. Clayton will be the speaker for the Accrington Discussion Group in the King's Hall Cinema today at 6-30 p.m. His subject, "Christianity and Morals," is an important and useful one and should open the way for a good discussion. We might repeat here that the Executive of the N.S.S. is always ready to send speakers to outside organisations to put the Freethought case before their members.

The Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society has its usual attractive syllabus in which a variety of subjects are down for discussion. Today Mr. F. A. Corina, of Bradford, will speak on: "Political aspects of Roman Catholicism." The discussions are held in the Technical College, Shakespeare Street, they begin at 2-30 p.m. and admission is free.

After looking over four weekly religious papers, quite by accident we picked up a book dealing with that great Freethinker, Bentham, and our eyes fell upon the following:—

"What we are continually talking of, we imagine we understand, so close a union has habit connected between words and things, that we take one for the other; when we have rods in our ears we imagine we have ideas in our heads."

And that seems to cover all the preachers had said. . . There really is a difference between talking and understanding.

Here is something that is intended to correct something we have been saying. A reader says that we must not commit the mistake of confusing Christianity with the conduct of individuals, or communities professing to be Christians. As to wars, every murder, injustice, etc., many of these horrors have been perpetrated by so-called Christians, but they were not following Jesus.

It is something to get plain admissions that Christians have been parties with much that is brutal and evil. But we have to favour Christians as we find them, not as we would like to find them. Our friend really writes as though we must not make Christianity responsible for witch-killing, although the order to kill witches is in the Bible, we must not blame the Bible for slavery although that too is there, or we must hold Christianity blameless although the Church burnt and tortured for generations, and cases occur now of ill-using old women because of Bible influence. Our reader's reasoning seems to rest on the commercial cry: "The customer is always right."

The Editor of the "Schoolmaster" must be of a rather sanguine type, for he seems to think that the B.B.C. will be willing to permit criticisms of religion—on its own initiative. We think there is little likelihood the B.B.C. will drop its disgraceful infesting of the air with a number of sermons that we might call childish, were it not that we do not like to insult children. The editor ought to know quite well that if children were left alone, as they are with child-stories, they would get rid of them as they do fairies and the like. If only journals like the "Schoolmaster" stood up as they ought to stand, the preparations made by teachers for children to be fooled in the churches would cease.

VATICAN POLICY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

(By LEO H. LEHMANN)

I

THE sinister political and social activities of the Papacy throughout the most recent era of war and Fascism have provoked a considerable output of critical literature. Not only have such veteran controversialists participated—as the late Mr. H. G. Wells, in his "Crux Ansata," and the evergreen Joseph MacCabe (who has produced a vertiable library on the subject!)—but a number of lesser known but able and well-informed writers have also turned their critical searchlight upon the current formidable activities of the "Black International." Amongst such critical publicists is Leo H. Lehmann, himself an ex-Catholic priest, not previously known to the writer, and quite evidently a man of outstanding critical ability and "inside" knowledge of the inner ramifications and world-wide activities of that arch-enemy of progress in every sphere, the Church of Rome.

In his "Vatican Policy in the Second World War" (the Pioneer Press, 1s. 3d.), Dr. Lehmann tells the grim story of the recent epoch of "collaboration" with the Fascist Dictators, Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Salazar (of Portugal). (Today he could add Peron of the Argentine; after all, the Virgin Mary is now a commissioned general in the Argentinian Army at a salary of ten dollars a day—collected by the Church!)

It is a sinister story and Dr. Lehmann is not content with repeating merely the bald discreditable facts of this "collaboration." His searching critical interpretations of the recent trend of Papal policy throw a flood of light upon the motives that lie behind and co-ordinate aspects of Papal policy which, at first sight, seem unconnected and unco-ordinated. For, as our author aptly remarks in an introduction which is a little masterpiece of critical insight, the fundamental motive behind all the ever-changing activities and manœuvres of the Papal Curia remains, at all times and places, one and the same. Or, as one of the ablest Catholic Churchmen of modern times, Cardinal Newman, once observed: "She (i.e., the Church—F. A. R.) changes in order to remain the same."

What is this fundamental motive which runs like a golden thread throughout all the Machiavellian twists and turns of Papal policy? Our author expresses it tersely:—

"This unchanging goal of the Catholic Church is the restoration of its status as the only legally recognised Church in Christendom." And he pertinently adds: "To attain it, liberal democratic constitutions must be continuously opposed and a type of civil government eventually established in all countries that would extend protection only to the Roman Catholic Church." Or, as a well known contemporary Roman ecclesiastic (Mgr. Ronald Knox) has recently expressed it: "The Catholic Church will never consent to become merely one amongst the philosophies." Adding significantly that, "when we appeal for toleration we are appealing to our opponents' principles and not to ours." Frank, and most revealing!

Why did the Papacy support Fascism? Dr. Lehmann devotes a masterly passage to the solution of this fundamental problem:

"For the attainment of the Catholic Church's unchanging goal can be reached only by the aid of authoritarian government, never by the consent of democratic régimes. Furthermore, the Papacy must make it its business to extend this policy to all countries of Christendom, to all parts of the Protestant British Empire, the United States and the orthodox and Slavic and Russian countries, as well as the so-called Catholic countries of the world, including South America. For it claims as its right exclusive jurisdiction over all Christians—Protestants and Orthodox (i.e., eastern—F. A. R.) Catholics, as well as its own

Roman Catholic members throughout the world. It can truthfully protest that its interest is not this or that particular form of government, economics or social order, since its primary object is the universal re-establishment of its spiritual domain. In order to attain this, however, and in the process of attaining it, its *immediate* object is to see established political, economic and social régimes that, in the first place, will not destroy the freedom of the Catholic Church as at present established, and, in the second place, will aid eventually in the attainment of its real goal. With civil régimes not definitely socialistic or communistic, the Catholic Church can, for a time, manage to exist, for its ways are devious. Bishops, in politics, as in chess, move obliquely." (cp. p. 7.)

One can add that the most recent era of Catholic-Fascist mutual alliance illustrates the aforementioned remarks up to the hilt. For ever since it made its notorious "Lateran Treaty" with Mussolini in 1929, the Vatican has used Fascism as a "big stick" with which to beat down the antagonistic social and intellectual forces which embody modern progress and the modern secular spirit—Freemasonry, Liberalism, Socialism, Communism, Anarchism and Freethought—all of which, in their different ways, embody the effective protest of modern secular civilisation against the "dead hand" of the mediæval past and the totalitarian despotism which the Papacy, now as always, embodies. Hitler, Mussolini and Franco were "the men raised up by God" to discharge the holy role of crusaders, whom the Church no longer has the temporal power to raise directly from her own ranks. This Catholic-Fascist marriage was, no doubt, as the present writer pointed out as far back as 1937, a marriage of convenience rather than of perfect mutual love! And, no doubt, also, had the Third Reich lasted for its predestined millennium, the marriage would have been dissolved in the courts of history, if only on the invariable principle that there is no room in one and the same world for two totalitarian régimes. For there is much historical truth in the dictum of a modern Romanist historian, Canon William Barry, that, "the Pope is the pilgrim of eternity—the absolute state will always persecute him." And Dr. Lehmann could perhaps have elucidated this long-range aspect of the question more than he has done. (cp. our book—1937—"The Papacy and Fascism.")

However, Fascism, fortunately, did not endure. And, hence, the above criticism remains academic only. Whilst, during the decades of the rise and bid for world-power by Fascism (1922-45) Dr. Lehmann produces overwhelming evidence for the "collaboration" of Rome, not only with the specifically Catholic brand of Fascism in Austria under Dolfuss, and with Franco and Salazar in Spain and Portugal, but equally with the ex-atheist Mussolini, the semi-pagan Hitler, and even the Pagan Empire of Shinto Japan. To be sure, as our author does not fail to stress, the first example in modern European history of a permanent totalitarian dictatorship, based on the "Leader principle," was provided by the infallibility of the Pope, which was canonically proclaimed by the Vatican Council on July 18, 1870. (Writing in 1937, in our aforementioned book, we then drew attention to this significant fact.)

In a penetrating survey of modern trends of internal Catholic evolution, our author points out how, upon the admission of the eminent Catholic historian, Fr. Joseph Schmidling, the Roman Curia has witnessed a never-ceasing struggle between the ultramontane, ultra-reactionary, Jesuit-controlled party in the Church and the more liberal elements. And how decisive has been the Jesuit victory in recent times. It was, indeed, Jesuitism, which we have elsewhere termed "Ecclesiastica¹ Fascism," which allied itself with Fascism, "secular Jesuitism," as we have also styled it. It was no accident that all the European Fascist dictators were Catholics, without exception. And it still remains one of the major unsolved problems of our times how far the Jesuit Order itself was originally responsible for Fascism.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A MUSEUM PEACE

THE League of Nations has been re-born. It will be a difficult child to rear. If preserving the peace involved nothing more than wrapping it safely in cotton wool, we shouldn't have to worry much about whether the Museum's Council of Curators was elected or nominated, and by whom; and about their rules of voting and whether they actually had the power, authority and money they needed to do their job without bungling it.

But the new world of technical efficiency is heading fast for disaster if it is built on the criminal political inadequacies of the past. The machinery of international collaboration just won't work if it is constructed on unsound lines. To argue that the old sixty horse-power League was all right, but that the Members would not allow the contraption to work, is like saying that as long as the engine is in working order it doesn't matter if it is connected to the wheels with paper-chains inscribed co-operation.

Our new five-cylinder 50 h.p. "United Nations" League is the old chassis with brand new Dumbarton Hoax coachwork. It will run on gas, generated from Bretton wood fuel and hot air, ignited by a Spaak. The engine will not fire unless the five big cylinders synchronise, and they are designed to function independently. The horsepower is so harnessed that the horses can, at a moment's notice, all pull in different directions.

That this description of the San Francisco Charter is not unfair can be seen from a study of its text, and the way it is functioning. Extraordinary care was taken in drafting to deprive the Organisation of the ability to perform its main duty: "to maintain international peace and security." The General Assembly hasn't even got the right, let alone the power, to do anything else except "discuss" matters and "make recommendations," either to the States Members or to the so-called "Security" Council.

PARALYSED FALSE TEETH

The Security Council cannot even arrive at a decision, let alone take any action, on any matter affecting international law and order unless the Big Five are all agreed, and two of their stooges vote with them, in which case of course there would be no need for an organisation to prevent world war anyway. If they disagree, the United Nations Organisation is paralysed. The new World League may have teeth, but they look like false ones that will drop out the moment the jaws are opened.

With some exceptions, States Members have the right to please themselves whether they shall refer their disputes to the International Court. In other words, the criminal is left to decide whether to stand trial. Chapter II., Article 34, paragraph 1 of the Statute of the Court states that "only States may be parties in cases before the Court," thus violating the principle that international law will never mean what it says unless and until it acts on individuals; then disputes can be settled by police action instead of by "Ordeal by Fire and Sword." San Francisco is an attempt to prevent war by making war. As the Dutch Foreign Minister remarked, it can cope only with "the non-causes of war."

RAT-IFICATION

In "A Serviceman Looks at the Peace" (Atlantic Monthly, Boston, U.S.A.), Cord Meyer, Jr., wrote:—

"The record of the hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are a tragi-comic commentary on what was achieved at San Francisco. To allay the fears of even the most unregenerate isolationist, every impotent inadequacy of the Charter was stressed as a positive assurance that in ratifying it we were committing ourselves to nothing."

In an emergency the Un-tied Nations Organisation would find itself left with duties, and blame for failure to perform those duties, whilst the power required to carry them out remained in other hands, at the disposal of its separate members, who would already be taking sides and cancelling each other out.

The Charter might read better set to music. The general effect makes a pretty picture, but it has been framed in a guilt frame. Those who study it closely will discover that they have hopefully opened a beautifully bound tome, only to find that it consists of acres and acres of the most exquisite scribble.

"WHAT! NO MORE SOVEREIGNTY? WHAT! NO MORE WAR?"

It is no wonder that the British Foreign Minister, Mr. Ernest Bevin, said in the House of Commons on November 23:—

"I am asked to re-study San Francisco. I have not only re-studied it but, when it was being developed I was gravely concerned whether we were really finding the right solution. . . We are driven relentlessly along this road: the necessity for a new study for the purpose of creating a world assembly, elected directly from the people of the world as a whole—a world assembly with a limited objective; the objective of peace."

Let us not reject San Francisco until we have something better. But let us make it quite clear to the statesmen that we want something nicer for Christmas than a ten-year Diary inscribed, "Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All Men."

We should like to see some move towards the establishment of a United Commonwealth of Nations in which international law is made by the directly elected representatives of the people, and acts directly upon *people*, laws which do not have to be O.K.'d by fifty different parliaments before they are anything better than pious recommendations.

Now is none too soon to plant the acorn from which may spring the oak that will one day shelter the earth. So might our children live to see the realisation of Tennyson's vision. "when the war drums throb no longer and the battle flags are furled, in the Parliament of Man, the federation of the world"

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—12 noon: Mr. L. EBRURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, November 26, 7 p.m.: "The Irrational in Human Affairs," Mr. JOHN COHEN, M.A. Ph.D.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Great Newport Street).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "God or Man," Mr. E. C. SAPHIN.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Accrington Discussion Group (King's Hall Cinema).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Christianity and Morals," Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Belfast Branch N.S.S. (Old Museum Buildings, 7, College Square North).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., a lecture.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room B).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: "Prison Reform," Mr. E. RAVENHILL.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Idealism Today," Mr. K. CAMPBELL.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Atheism and Society," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Political Aspects of Roman Catholicism," Mr. F. J. COURNA (Bradford).

MY GARDEN

A garden is a "lovesome thing, God wot!
 Rose plot,
 Fringed pool,
 Ferned grot—
 The veriest school
 Of peace; and yet the fool
 Contends that God is not—
 Not God! in gardens! when the eve is cool?
 Nay, but I have a sign;
 'Tis very sure God walks in mine.

I.

A THOROUGHLY English nineteenth century poem. God alone knows how Victorian poets would have produced verse without calling upon their Deity. I purposely use the possessive pronoun because each of these poets had his own conception of God, a magnified projection of himself, then proceeded to endow him with attributes in his own favour. Thus T. E. Brown's God loves walking in gardens at the cool of evening; especially in T. E. Brown's garden.

This intimacy with his own God enabled the poet to be superior to godless people, patronising them and believers in other gods. Inevitably he quotes the Psalmist's sneer, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God," disregarding the implications that he was a fool who said it, a greater fool who reiterates it, and the greatest fool who uses it as an argument for believing in God.

Hardly necessary is it to add these "my God" poets were second-raters or less. To read widely in minor Victorian poets is to discover Godliness as the mark of limping poet-tasters. God is their crutch; their helper over many a metrical stile.

As God walked in T. E. Brown's garden I will walk in mine and notice his handiwork; as the Psalmist puts it, "When I consider the work of Thy fingers."

II.

A flower bed under a rough wall I have left in a rough state, hoping for a picturesque confusion of annuals, sown by broadcasting. The garden lacks blue, so seeds for plants bearing blue blossoms are scattered generously here. Clarkias do well, though showing too much rose and pink in their mingling of hues and not enough shades of blue. Nemophila are a success except that cats stupidly roll in them and despoil their spreading freedom of growth with starry blooms.

But cornflowers! What should be a beautiful background is a ruin. Some minute pest attacks the cornflowers, curling and discolouring the leaves, twisting the stems and making the flowers a dirty parody of cornflower's heavenly blue. I have to uproot and burn them. Also that nuisance vulgarly known as cuckoo-spit has established itself, filthy and harmful.

In the drive and paths as everywhere else annual grass finds anchorage for its wind-blown seeds and takes root, necessitating constant warfare with hoe and fork. So swift and persistent is this weed that it can never be entirely eradicated. In the lawn daisies are too plentiful, so are dandelions. They will have to be grubbed one at a time, and can thus be eliminated, but it is tedious, back-aching labour.

With plenty of food otherwise available sparrows choose to tear off heads of crocuses, especially yellow ones. As variant young sparrows fight each other like fury, one of a struggling pair sometimes getting killed. Under the trees we find eggs ejected from nests for no apparent reason, or dropped when being carried off by other birds, also naked nestlings dead of exposure and starvation.

Sparrows will feed eagerly on the super-abundant greenfly, and hawk after fat dirty-brown moths which come out of beech

trees where they fed as caterpillars. The sparrows bear them to earth and snip off their wings, swallowing the plump bodies with gusto. Yowling dogs and squalling cats make night hideous, the latter animals taking toll of birds by day. Visiting owls prey at night. Apart from avid sex and monstrous multiplicity of reproduction most living things appear to be either parasitic upon or devouring of others.

Nasturtiums were a useful cover for odd corners and bare patches in a tree-studded garden like this. For several years I have had to omit them, showy and singular of leaf as they are, because those leaves were attacked by caterpillars which were as numerous as voracious, only to be destroyed by abolishing their host plant.

Nicely placed to fill a gap in the vista from a window an elm of good shape showed scantiness of foliage and that deficient in growth. Examination revealed damaged bark at the foot of the bole, possibly from the activities of stray and scratching cats and dogs or other routing or gnawing creatures. Presumably borne by wind spores of fungus had lodged in the scarred bark.

The result was a nauseous sight. A mass of repulsive load-stools, brownish to blackness above, dingy greyish yellow underneath had sprouted on long stalks all round the base of the trunk, crowding in hundreds, packed as densely as was possible to get. Knocking them all off, spraying with chemicals, tarring, liming or cementing the wounds may save the tree, but it is doubtful. Another season will reveal the chances.

That was the sort of thing which prompted a gnomie friend to say, "The worst of nature is that it's so unnatural."

III.

So one could go on. Lawn and garden are beautiful, but only as a result of constant warfare against pests vegetable, animal, insect and bacterial, with much labour needed to cherish and nourish and preserve what is good. Against the weather and few safeguards. One has to endure all its many vagaries and trust to the hardiness and survival power of what is cultivated.

T. E. Brown says he has a sign God walks in his garden. The innumerable adverse and deleterious growths may each be adduced as a sign. In which case God walking in the garden should be asked why he created these noxious things. For assumedly the baleful and ugly, the injurious and morbid growths are as natural as the beautiful and colourful, the scented and shapely, the pleasing and tasteful. All are part of nature, which the Deist says is God's creation.

On balance maybe the gardener finds more to contend against than he does favourable and helpful to him. Does God consider this when he walks in the garden at the cool of evening?

A. R. WILLIAMS.

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