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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Politics and Piety

I MAY be mistaken, but I believe that Sir Richard Acland made his debut in public life by his entrance into politics. He was then full of determination to create a new political party that should be free from the drawbacks he saw in the standing political groups. But high and noble ideals are not easily realised, and in politics they really do not count where party interests are concerned. Sooner or later the purity of thought and action is dulled, high and noble ideals are stained, and the choice before the would-be reformer is silence or to drop into line with the tricks of party manœuvres and forget the noble ideals that once incited to action.

I recall a saying of one of our great novelists, George Meredith: "Politics are like climbing the greasy pole at Fair time; mutton or no mutton, you get the grease." I endorse that conclusion not because I believe that party politics should be abolished, but because I believe with a great French philosopher who laid it down that the teacher and the politician cannot live in the same person. Even when completely honest the politician must bow to the opinions of others in spite of his dissatisfaction with what is being done. At best he must support things with which he does not agree in order to get something with which he is in harmony. The teacher and the politician may be aiming at the same ends, but they do not tread the same roads. One need only remember the case of John Stuart Mill, a great teacher if he was anything, and who left behind him impressions and memories that no political person could ever forget. But he was laughed down by a number of mentally half-baked politicians who had no idea of the quality of the man before them.

I am not denying that both types are useful. I am simply stating facts. The thinker is the one who sees beyond the situations of the moment. The politician looks at and lives on the circumstances of the moment where ideas are sold or exchanged for worthless gains. The chief opinion of the politician is, by necessity, "Is it practical?" The thought of the philosopher is "Is it desirable?" Socrates must have been looked on by the politician of the day as just a verbal nuisance. The politicians of his day are known now mainly because the philosopher condescended to talk with them.

Now I think I am right in saying that Sir Richard Acland first attracted attention to the general public when he plunged into politics. Also, again if my memory is correct, he had dreams of bettering the House of Commons, and at the same time lead the way to a betterment of the people. But with the person we have in mind it is against the odds of his achieving *both* ambitions. One simply does not cut wood with a razor. It loses its value when it is so used.

It seems to me that Sir Richard was not a good politician, and there are reasons for thinking that he would not shine as a philosopher.

I have formed that opinion as a consequence of reading an article of his which appeared in a recent issue of the "Daily Mirror." Replying to a man who has written that he does not believe in the Churches, but he does believe in God, Sir Richard decides that we should have the "simple teaching of Jesus without all this Church business." That is quite plain, but where or what is the justification for this constant appeal to the teachings of Jesus in order to keep people leading, in either theory or practice, a decent life? In the first place it is not true that society is made up of blackguards. The overwhelming majority of people, male and female, already lead decent lives. If it were not so human society could not hold together. Sir Richard says that virtue cannot live unless someone organises it. In a certain way that may be granted, but the deeper and more valuable truth is that the impulse for men and women to lead a decent life does not depend for its existence upon a particular person, or conscious organisation. It is really lessons for children—and even then the advice may often do as much harm as good—to point out that being honest is better than being a thief, or to tell the truth is better than being a liar; and to preach the beauties of goodness to one's fellows is more likely to breed humbugs than to turn out self-respecting citizens.

Sir Richard sets the question, "Why need we bother over Plato and Aurelius when we do know the very words of Jesus?" and he answers, "Because Jesus gave what Plato and Aurelius did not give, the power and the spirit which inspires men to create and sustain an organisation." That seems to us just a fine sample of clotted bosh. Of course, if Jesus was the first one who taught humans to be honest, kind, etc., and if decency in life came to man through Jesus, something might be said in his favour. But unfortunately for Sir Richard's childish preaching, conduct exists in practice before it is taught in understanding and theory. There is nothing in the way of conduct that was not well known long before the Christian Church existed, or before Jesus Christ was planted before people as a veritable God. If Sir Richard Acland had paid attention to, say, Socrates, he would have been better acquainted with the fact that actions are good only as they indicate their usefulness for human beings, irrespective of gods, otherwise they are good for nothing. Really, in his zeal to re-establish the mythical God Jesus, he has substantially made morals of no consequence unless they are given to us by an impossible God.

We hardly think that even the hard days through which the Churches are passing will induce them to think of Sir Richard as a very useful advocate of Christianity. What he has done is to make historic Christianity more ridiculous than it is already in the light of modern scientific teachings.

There is one final point to be considered with this question of morals and Jesus. First of all the whole Christian—historic Christianity—belief was not planted on Ethics, save so far as commonplace repetitions of morals are concerned. To be honest, truthful, kind, etc., were teachings which are as wide as human nature. Morality in fact is not created in the form of something that a few people discover, and then pass on to others; as a discovery in science is made by a single person and then again passed on to others. It is practised first and understood afterwards.

Truth, kindness, consideration for others, loyalty to one's associations is as old as the human race, and those who are interested in natural history will find the germs of these and other ethical features in the animal world from which we know the human race to have derived.

But let us be considerate to our opponents and assume the impossible thing, that man was, before the appearance of Jesus, unacquainted with the nature and value of good behaviour. Let us grant that this was the state of things before Jesus Christ appeared upon the scene. We may also grant that without the teachings of Jesus the value of kindness, truthfulness, etc., would never have been valued. These are very stupid assumptions but we are dealing with very foolish pleadings, or we are dealing with people who believe that they are addressing a very foolish audience. But granting so much, what follows? Just this, that once a truth is discovered its adoption or its application is absolutely independent of the person who discovered it. The teaching of Jesus, even if completely good, becomes common property to all and is in no way dependent upon its author. And if a discovery is true only so long as one worships the discoverer, the discovery is scarcely worth bothering about, and the name of Jesus may be measured as a mere trick. It was true insight that led Schopenhauer to place Christianity among pessimistic systems. In historic Christianity one finds optimism only with God, not with Man. Distrust in human nature, as such, is the outstanding quality of historic Christianity. The official creeds are saturated with the conviction that human nature is saturated with "sin."

The real truth is, of course, that ethics are concerned with the influence of acts on conduct, and in this world alone. Our ideas of right and wrong depend upon a consideration of causes, and right and wrong is the question of consequences measured by human life as we have it. "Right" and "wrong" have their condemnation or approval so far as they better or lower the human character.

We frequently hear it said that if all individuals were "moral" society would be moral as a result. That is one of those empty-headed sayings that confuse in the pretence of instructing. If scientific sociology has made one thing clear, it is that the individual is part of a whole structure—passion, desires, actions, etc., are the concrete expression of past generations of social life co-operating with existing social developments. But far from that vital expression of ethical development, the aim of the Christian Churches was to weaken the scientific development of a social outlook. The salvation of the individual soul of each is the beginning and end of historic Christianity's aims.

Historic Christianity has, therefore, narrowed the scope of morals instead of widening the area. In spite of all the

Churches have said, and still say, concerning morals the Pagans gave a wider field for ethics. To the Pagan teachers, morality meant an all-round observation of duty to self, family and the community. To the Christian Church, for many centuries, when morality meant merely religious ceremonies, it meant little more than right sexual conduct. Indeed it means little more than that to most people to-day. The Christians love to save sinners, but thanks to their policies and their creeds there was never a shortage of sinners in every direction.

And now Sir Richard Acland has set forth in an attempt to revive the Christian religion. . . . It may kill time.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ALDOUS HUXLEY'S RELIGION

IN the world of letters, Mr. Aldous Huxley—one of the best than half-dozen living writers in English worth reading—commands a large, attentive, and deeply-interested audience. His latest book, "The Perennial Philosophy," is a compilation of brief extracts from the mystical writers in all the religions with sermons by himself upon their chief themes.

The book is deeply interesting to the religious and the irreligious alike for it is compact of serious thinking on the subjects of which it treats. Only indifferentists can pass it by. Moreover, Mr. Huxley relates his thought to the topicalities of our day and so makes what he desires to say as readable as a cheque payable to oneself.

What is this "perennial philosophy"? Many philosophies equally might deserve the adjective, such as Caesarianism or Epicureanism. But Mr. Huxley applies it to "the metaphysics that recognises a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being." In one word: mystical religion.

Now mysticism (which might be called inductive-religion) is a very dangerous thing. It may be mere fraud. It may be mere foolishness. It may be hallucination. Or, as this anthology of Mr. Huxley's shows clearly, it may be something that produces in its practitioners things worthy of respect: for instance, a penetrating insight into men and things, complete self-command, self-control, and self-abnegation; an abnormal and admirable sensitivity to nuances of feeling and thought beyond the reach of any but the finest minds. Freethinkers, like everyone else, must judge a tree by its fruits; and however materialistic, nationalistic and deterministic a man may be, he must be limited indeed if he cannot pay tribute to certain products of mysticism. For instance, one can imagine an atheist accepting as a fact that all his beloved dead have gone to the realms of darkness, yet being touched and uplifted by that strange piece of mysticism of Henry Vaughan, the Silurist, beginning: "They are all gone into the realms of Light." If Freethinkers "dismiss hell with costs," as the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council did, they will not lightly give up Dante's hell or Milton's. Why should they indeed?

Mr. Huxley finds that the purpose of human life is "the unitive knowledge of God?" Is it indeed? Why not the unitive knowledge of Man and the Universe? Can God be known? Does he exist? It is said that "no man hath known God at any time." But ourselves we can surely know, even if slowly and painfully by psychology, biology, anthropology, and the like, and the universe by astronomy, geology, chemistry, and other sciences. Mr. Huxley will have it that God can be known only by the pure in heart, the loving in mind, and the poor in spirit.

—but is this that *they* know “the ultimate Reality”? How do we know that it is? “By the self-validating certainty of direct awareness,” Mr. Huxley might reply. But the phrase might cover self-deceit and imposture.

In any event, this, for the majority of folk, leads nowhere. They are not saints nor sages and are capable neither of holiness nor wisdom. They are merely good and wise to a small extent and at long intervals between their usual follies and wickednesses. What for them? Since they are not the elect, the best for them, according to Mr. Huxley, is that they should “study the works of those who, because they had modified their merely human mode of being, were capable of a more than merely human kind, and amount, of knowledge.” But how can any knowledge—if known by a human being—be other than human; if not, it is not really known but only “known about,” as one knows about Julius Caesar without knowing him.

If one tries to see, hear or touch Mr. Huxley's God, one becomes aware that he is not person and no thing. Rather is he, she, it, or them, an Inwardness in mind and matter. Of course there is—in the present state of our knowledge—a Mystery at the heart of things, the Unknowable, the Quintessence, the Life—but if you call that “God” you merely confuse yourself and those to whom God is a Supernatural Big Man selling salvation like an Insurance Company.

Freethinkers—or some of them—are apt to think that a religionist is either a fraud or a fool. This, of course, is a stupid and superficial over-simplification. Certainly Mr. Huxley has one of the finest minds of our time, and that mind seeks to mirror with clear fidelity, the whole truth and nothing less. Alas! no mind can. The key to his religion—like the key to others—is perhaps to be found in his stimulating chapter on “Religion and Temperament.” Here, following Dr. Sheldon, he takes human classification further than Freud, Jung, and Adler. Like the traditional Jesus, Mr. Huxley is (as he would say) ectomorphic and therefore cerebrotonic. The viscerotonic and the somatonic will have other religions—or none!

But again, we must judge Mr. Huxley by his merits. He is an enemy of such diabolical religions as the belief in war; nationalism (a pseudo-religion stronger than Christianity), advertising, economic and political exploitation; state-worship (whether fascist, socialistic or communistic); radio-prostitution; and all the other lunatic idolatries of our age which are the products of institutionalised Christianity. At least his religion, though it is the product of wide reading, is original and his own, but one feels that it has been distilled from books, not from life. The distillate is, however, pure, and that in an age of adulterated religion is refreshing.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

STILL LOOKING BACKWARDS

The Methodists of Rothwell were, on occasion, not above altering a dwelling house or houses into a place of worship, and during the process of converting the preaching house into a large chapel persecution was rife, for it is recorded that “thrice the walls were thrown down by some malicious persons during the hours of darkness.” On another occasion, very soon after the completion of such a converted building a strange man, partly under the influence of intoxication, and evidently no friend to the Methodist sect, riding on horseback during a religious service entered at one door, rode round the place and retired out of the other, both entrances being open during summer time. This apparently was done in order to frighten the congregation. Such conduct, however, could not be tolerated and he was therefore seized that very day and lodged securely in the Rothwell gaol. During his confinement there news reached him that his wife was ill; shortly after she died. He also expired in this gaol. The people believed that it was a judgment upon him from heaven for so bold and profane an act.

E. H. S.

PHILOSOPHY OF DELUSION

IN his article, “A Dead Horse” (“The Freethinker,” December 15, 1946), Mr. C. McCall argues that the influence of religion can be most effectively countered by “striving to induce people to think for themselves.” In other words he bases his argument on the assumption that man can be persuaded to reject his religious beliefs by appeals to his reason. Explain to people that the religious opinions they hold are irrational, and show by straightforward explanation, backed by scientific evidence, that the arguments for the existence of God don't hold water, and—hey presto!—the light of Freethought appears, Chapman Cohen is elected Director of Atheistic Broadcasting, the King attends the Conway Discussion Circle on Armistice Day, and soon every home has its treasured copy of “A Grammar of Freethought” alongside “The Age of Reason.” It is a sanguine hope, but a little out of date. Even Seneca had his doubts when he wrote: “This is our chief bane, that we live not according to the light of reason, but after the fashion of others.” Appeals to reason alone have never caused anybody to reject religious beliefs. This may seem rather a sweeping statement, especially when we recollect the stories of people who profess to have had their lives changed by a book. Yet although a book, or perhaps the arguments of a lecturer, may appear to be responsible for a radical change of outlook, many other factors must be taken into consideration. Not least of these are social and economic circumstances. For example, not even a library of Freethought works, nor the combined efforts of a corps of lecturers would produce a change of mind in an archbishop, nor would they have much effect on starving people whose only means of sustenance were likely to come from a benevolent religious organisation. The Salvation Army gained many converts, not by proving the value of its emotional creed, but by filling empty stomachs. Psychological factors must also be taken into account, for these, as recent research has shown, play an important part in determining a man's attitude to life.

It is obvious, then, that Mr. McCall's conclusions are derived from a false premise and accordingly are invalid. But suppose Mr. McCall is correct, and that it is true and demonstrable that by Freethought propaganda alone people can be induced “to think for themselves instead of accepting the words of parsons, priests—and politicians—on faith.” Why does Mr. McCall desire such a transformation? He does not make it clear. Vaguely he implies that some “brave new world” is probable if the influences of “powers that be,” Christianity and nationalism are discarded. He is contemptuous of democracy and he holds no brief for political parties. Freethought, he says, is what the world needs to make it brave and new. This is the philosophy of delusion, it is scientifically on a par with the view that we ought to “leave it to the moon.” Mr. McCall's hypothetical heckler was right apart from his reference to the religious struggle. The struggle must go on, but not vainly by means of abstract intellectual arguments. It must be a positive struggle in which the true nature of class antagonisms and contradictions can be evaluated in the light of practical experience. It must have a clear and definite aim.

Mr. McCall agrees that the power of religious institutions has been broken down in many countries. In none has it occurred as a result of Freethought propaganda. The force which has undermined the hegemony of the Churches is the political and economic power wielded by the mass of the people determined to put an end to capitalist domination. Elsewhere so long as capitalism continues as the prevailing economic system it will use religion as part of this system, and appeals to reason will continue as effectively as the “still, small voice crying in the wilderness.”

S. B. WHITFIELD.

ACID DROPS

The Archbishop of Canterbury is deeply concerned at the falling off of monetary gifts to the established Church. He complains that bequests are fewer and smaller than they used to be, even the collecting plates show a steady decline. That is what we should expect. So far as large sums of money are concerned they came for two reasons. One was to save the souls of the donors. The other was to keep the "common people" in order by the threat of withdrawing the charities that the Church gave. The first class finds that the "poor" are less dependent on the Churches than they were, and the measure of the gifts by the bribe of church charities. A late Bishop of London, not noticeable for his intellectual qualities, told a fashionable gathering in the West of London that were it not for the Churches they would not rest so comfortable were it not for gifts to the poor in the East. And the other reason for the monetary decline may well be set down as due to the decline of religious belief. Add those two considerations together and the cause of the Archbishop's moaning is accounted for. We cannot fool all the people all the time.

The Rev. W. H. Elliott, who has been conducting an inquiry on behalf of the "Sunday Graphic" as to how people are spending Sundays—is a sadder and wiser man. He now realises that, at all events in our large cities, they prefer the cinema to the Church—for he has seen with his own eyes how they queue up to this place of entertainment, and how they do their best to avoid going to Church. He has been obliged to admit that the Church is "fighting hard but fighting a losing battle"—a very bitter pill to swallow—and so he is now "challenging" the cinemas. It would be difficult to beat the cool cheek of this challenge, but of course one must expect anything from a Church which is so rapidly now losing ground, and is being more and more discredited.

Mr. Elliott's challenge is a very simple one. He wants the cinemas to allow parsons every Sunday before the crowd gathered by this purely secular entertainment—a crowd, mark you, which the Churches could never get—to deliver a short "popular" service. He is quite certain that it would be enthusiastically received, and Mr. Elliott himself is prepared to give one of his own sermons in a London cinema. He goes further. He claims he could "grip" the audience with his first twenty words. Well, well. The pathetic whine of his article ought to make our hearts bleed, but actually it makes us wonder at the consummate impudence of this parson. If he has not learnt his lesson yet, he will. He must understand that the Church has been found out.

What surprises us—although we ought to know the tactics of the clergy well enough not to be surprised at any manifestation of impudence from them—is the attempt to force religion down the throats of people who have paid for a night's entertainment and simply do not wish to have their enjoyment damped by the introduction of a religion with which the majority of the attendants are uninterested. We wonder what Mr. Elliott would say if it were suggested that with every religious service there should be, say, a 15 minutes' criticism of religion from some competent unbeliever? For sheer impudence Mr. Elliott deserves a medal.

While Mr. Elliott thinks he could save the Christian Churches by mixing religion with the "movies," a Roman Catholic preacher, Fr. Brosnan, finds another explanation for the decline of Christianity in the fact that: "Mankind has deserted to the army of Satan." If that is true it is a compliment to the taste of the people. After all we do owe much to Satan, while his chief opponent seems to have been always making a mess of things. On the other hand it was Satan who set our first parent eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, which we now know to have been of good quality. It was Satan who taught us to know good from bad. It was God who deceived mankind as to the shape of the world, the age of the world, the evolution of man from the animal world, the way to prevent diseases, etc. Generally we owe everything to Satan that is good, and not much to his chief enemy. In fact it looks as though if Satan had been given full power from the outset the results would have been to the good. If we have to choose between Satan and his principal opponent we should plump for Satan.

We see that Admiral Layton, C.-in-C. Portsmouth, has been inquiring among his men from ages 18 to 19 where they stand with regard to Christianity. He took the Lord's prayer as a test. He found that 70 per cent. knew what Jesus was. That is good news, because millions have been trying to find that out, and there is no general agreement on that matter. The world is still disputing whether Jesus Christ was a real person, or was he only one of the large number of gods who have claimed to be real beings, but who have gradually died out. We should be very glad to get some really trustworthy statement on that point. We are afraid, however, that Admiral Layton is just pushing his nose into a subject on which he is badly informed. Perhaps, also, some of his recruits have been pulling his leg.

The Catholic "Universe" has a priest who answers questions—after a style. With regard to the birthday of Jesus as occurring at Christmas the information is given that "Christmas was introduced into the Christian Church in the fourth century" and that "the date December 25 was chosen because it was the date of a pagan festival to the Sun." Freethinkers have been saying this for centuries, and if the Church had possessed the power they would have been at least imprisoned or burnt at the stake. What the pious Catholic now will say about the story of the "Babe of Bethlehem" born on Christmas Day being altogether untrue, it would be interesting to know. But it is good to see the Catholic Church learning from Freethought.

The same priest rejects as "pious fictions" the Christian stories connected with Glastonbury and St. Joseph of Arimathea—and it may not be very long before the whole mass of balderdash connected with the early "saints" will be thrown overboard in the same way. After that, we may get the admission that even the Gospels are "pious fictions"—which, of course, they are.

The Catholic "Universe" is seriously upset by the Russians trying to convert Germans to the Russian outlook on life. Why not? Is that not what the Roman Church is doing all over the world? At least the Russian can say that in Russia each man may choose his own religion, and without risking his civic rights or suffering punishment. In Russia the Germans may select their religion, so long as their creed does not attack the social laws of the State. One may well ask what kind of liberty would be given in a State that was completely under Roman Catholic rule? Spain is a very good example of what would happen, and that is in the face of its relations to other countries, but we have not heard of the Vatican objecting to the restrictions placed on non-Catholic Christians in Spain. It would be well if people were made well acquainted with the kind and amount of freedom non-Catholics enjoy in this Catholic stronghold.

There is no doubt as to the fact that the Churches will be hit heavily by the nationalising of the railways. The clergy stood well when God showed his displeasure with someone or other with five or six years of war, but the question really becomes serious when the investments—which reach enormous incomes—threaten to be cut. In Scotland the Rev. Dr. J. T. Cox informed his Presbytery that the change of ownership of the railways was "the greatest financial blow to our generation." It is true he tried to cheer up his Scots listeners by telling them that the English Church will lose heavily every year. It is probable that Scotch Christians will cheerfully bear the losses of the English Churches, but when losses come to Scotland things look differently.

Still, where the Kirk is concerned with many it continues to stand in a "Scotland for ever" humour. For example. Recently 17 boys were brought before the magistrate charged with having played football on the Lord's Day. The Lord said nothing, and, as usual, did nothing. But the magistrate fined the 17 boys 2s. 6d. each. The matter should have been left in the hands of God, but he did nothing. The boys were harming no one, and they were playing a quite healthy game. They were doing no harm, in any case it was plainly God's business, and he did nothing. We were glad to learn that a Mr. Alexander paid the fines on the boys and remarked to the magistrate: "We play golf on Sunday, so I will pay for the boys."

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SUGAR PLUMS

The New York "Truth Seeker," the oldest Freethought paper in the world—our own paper comes next—contains a lengthy broadcast in the U.S.A., and we intend to print most of it in the next issue of "The Freethinker." But for the scarcity of the paper we should have been pleased to print the whole. Meanwhile our great lovers of freedom stand idly by and even help the B.B.C. by permitting their script to be cut down or remain silent on the matter. It is a disgrace to the country. We are not surprised that the B.B.C. persistently arrange for numerous addresses to be made for the advertising of the more primitive forms of religion, and decline to have anything said that would belittle religious belief. America is in this matter setting England a lesson. The printing of a large part of the speech we have mentioned suggests that those who would help might take an extra copy of "The Freethinker" for a likely reader. The quantity of paper allowed is greater than it was, although we are still on short rations, and an extra copy given to a friend may serve to help in the case for which we are all working. We are constantly making new friends, but we want more. We hope this suggestion will be taken.

It has always been a bit of a problem to us why the works of Gerald Massey, which dealt so massively with the origins of religion and also a striking amount of the Christian-like religion long before Christianity existed, have been ignored. Probably the reason for his being set on one side was due to his being one of the ardent workers in early social reform; and the powers that be took great care, as did most of our historians, that the heretics were buried as soon as possible. But his five volumes dealing with religion are still worthy of attention, even though they were written before the days of the understanding of the work of Tylor and his followers. That has, of course, scientifically reduced the question of religions to another field if we are to be counted as scientific. The origin of religions is rapidly taking its place with folk lore.

But Christianity is with us, and with multitudes who do not follow the scientific developments where religion is concerned, and those who know that their positions must alter with the real understanding of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, the old, worn out mythologies have yet to be dealt with. For that and other reasons we call attention to another reprint of Gerald Massey's: "The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ." The parallels and the figures between the Egyptian picture and Christian version are unmistakable. So far as known the analogies have never been questioned, and Christians have thought it best to keep silent.

The price of the booklet is 9d. postage 1d.

The first International Freethought organisation was very largely the work of Charles Bradlaugh. That organisation continued until—like so many international societies—it was broken down in the world war. We have to thank the nephew of Charles Bradlaugh that the organisation has been revived under the broad title of "World Union of Freethinkers"—thanks to the work of Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner. We expect that the new organisation will be even better than the last. Meanwhile we call attention to the publication of a useful outline of the speeches by men distinguished in the field of science and literature. The price of the booklet is 2s. 6d. In addition to the quality of the speeches it will be, we hope, a reminder of good work done and a promise of better to come.

POLITICAL CATHOLICISM

I—"The Ghost of the Roman Empire"

IN the year 1651 the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, in the course of his celebrated defence of the "totalitarian" State of the Tudors and Stuarts against the rival Papal claims of the Jesuit, Cardinal Bellarmine, propounded the classical definition of the social nature of the Roman Catholic Church: "The Papacy is the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof; for so did this great ecclesiastical dominion start up from the ruins of that heathen power." And in 1947, close upon three centuries later, "the ghost of the Roman Empire" has abated not one jot, tittle, or iota, of its imperial claims. Today, as in the days of Hobbes and Cromwell, the Papacy still confidently stakes its claim to nothing else or less than a "total" world-domination: in a political epoch marked pre-eminently by totalitarian régimes it remains the most totalitarian of all. For one should never forget that, in terms of its own logic which comprises eternity no less than time, Rome is still the *only* genuine totalitarian State in existence; the only one, that is, whose unqualified dominion is coequal with the *whole* of conscious existence, and whose "concentration camps" extend to the farther side of death.

What, then, is the Roman Catholic Church, which makes these enormous and all-embracing claims? Is it an empire, primarily, which uses with unequalled skill religious superstition as a cloak for its own secular political aims? Or is it a religion, which demands the terrestrial powers of a secular empire in order the better to safeguard its own "spiritual" claims? Either view is a plausible one, and can muster strong evidence in its favour: to be sure, in the great controversies in the 17th century upon the historic role of the Jesuit-controlled Papacy which succeeded the Reformation, Hobbes and Bellarmine fiercely disputed over the exact frontiers of the Roman prerogatives. For whereas, formerly, the mediæval Papacy had boldly claimed the right to set up and to depose kings, which it had exercised most notably at Canossa, where (1077) it had publicly humiliated the Holy Roman Empire, the modern post-Reformation Papacy has had to content itself with a more modest role in face of the aggressive secular spirit of the modern age. For whilst the vaunted motto of the Roman See still remains, "forever the same" ("semper eadem"), yet these students of the modern Papacy who are not

content with merely superficial explanations of historical institutions, know well that the modern Papacy, in fact, differs profoundly from its mediæval ancestor.

The mediæval Papacy, the classical exponent of totalitarian Catholicism, was the practical expression of the theories of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), the intellectual master, par excellence, of the whole mediæval era. In his "City of God" (413-26 A.D.) St. Augustine, under the guise of writing a religious philosophy of history, accomplished one of the most remarkable political feats in the history of the world. For he drew up in a book the blue-print of an empire; and one, at that, which lasted for a thousand years. It would be the merest historical Philistinism to deny that this was, all things considered, an outstanding historical achievement.

For St. Augustine, who lived precisely in the age that witnessed the final disintegration of the secular Roman Empire in the West, drew up the historic blue-print that transformed the Catholic Church into the Roman Empire. St. Augustine, the ex-Manichean Dualist, upon becoming a Catholic, transferred his former Dualism from Heaven to Earth; from theology to history; from the future life to this one. His "City of God," in the given historical milieu, was incarnated in the Roman Papacy which ruled Europe for a thousand years and which entangled Western culture in its totalitarian net. We recall the bon mot of the modernist theologian, Alfred Loisy: "Jesus expected the Kingdom of God, but it was the Church which arrived." Similarly, Augustine's "City of God" turned out, in actual history, to be the mediæval Papacy. For, as a modern historian of culture has aptly written: "Augustine, formerly a Manichean (i.e., Dualist—F. A. R.) pressed the Manichean principle of the two Kingdoms of Light and Darkness running together down the Ages in eternal opposition, into the service of Christianity." And if the "City of God" was, henceforth, to be identified with the Church, so, by an identical reasoning, "the earthly city"—the eternal rival of the city in the Heavens—must be construed as secular, civil society in this world of sin below. From this historical Dualism it was only a short logical step to the proposition that the Church must dominate the secular world for the latter's own benefit here and salvation hereafter. And from this last contention, as expressed in the famous ecclesiastical formula: "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus datur" ("Outside the Church there is no salvation"): the whole totalitarian régime of the mediæval Papacy, which held the reason of European man in an iron vice for a millennium, followed naturally, culminating with faultless logic—if faulty humanity!—in the Inquisition and its auto-da-fés.

St. Augustine was, accordingly, the theoretical founder of the mediæval Papacy, the golden age of Catholicism, to which, as that profound student of ecclesiastical history, Dr. Lehmann, has just pertinently reminded us, it is still the permanent ambition of the Church to return.

The modern post-Reformation Papacy is not the creation of St. Augustine, and is only identical in name with its mediæval predecessor. Actually, it is the creation, primarily, of the Jesuits, and is marked throughout by the flexible, opportunistic, and essentially demagogic spirit of the famous Spanish Order. The modern, as distinct from the mediæval Papacy was saved from destruction by the Jesuits amid the storms of the Reformation and, again, from the French Revolution; was reorganised and remoulded by the sons of St. Ignatius Loyola; and, finally (in 1870, July 18) was declared "infallible" by their agency. (The Popes themselves, at first, demonstrated no confidence in their own supernatural powers: one of them modestly remarked that "the Holy Ghost would never make such a mistake" as to entrust him with infallibility. The Jesuits have always been much more Papal than the Papacy itself!)

The modern Jesuitical Papacy—if we dare use the phrase of so exalted an institution?—is a horse of an entirely different colour from its mediæval predecessor. It has had to be, on account of its changed social milieu and its own relationship

to that milieu. For the essential difference between mediæval Catholicism and its modern successor is that the former was a confident aggressive Catholicism, which, without question, dominated its social and cultural milieu, and (in the epoch of the Crusades) took the offensive boldly against its religious rivals; whereas modern Catholicism is a defensive Catholicism, a relic of an older age marooned on an alien shore, and confronted with an increasingly hostile society and an alien secular culture. Modern, unlike mediæval Catholicism, is a defensive Catholicism, as we have elsewhere termed it; it is the Catholicism of a state of siege. It faces, and has faced increasingly ever since the Reformation, an alien world and a hostile culture. It is as though the Lamaist culture of Tibet—which much resembles mediæval Europe in its ecclesiastical civilisation—was suddenly dumped down amid the civilisation of the Industrial West.

It was in, and for this era of defensive Catholicism that Jesuitism made its mark on history. For the famous "Company" of Loyola, originally founded to fight Islam with its own weapons—for, as the Orientalist, Hermann Muller has convincingly demonstrated, the autocratic organisation of the Jesuits was borrowed from the Dervish Orders of Muslim Spain—became transformed into the formidable "Praetorian Guard" (as Harnack has aptly termed it) of the Papacy in its struggle against the Reformation and its modern revolutionary successors. And the nature of Jesuitism was, as we have shown, elsewhere at length, moulded by its era. It has been, first and foremost, the Catholicism of a state of siege, a defensive Catholicism apt at fighting rearguard actions, and at the subtle manoeuvres enforced upon a desperate cause. Jesuitism is, essentially, the spirit of modern as against mediæval Catholicism. It is no accident that all genuinely mediæval Catholics, from the great Pascal to the great Lamennais, have loathed and detested its equivocal and promising spirit. Whilst as for its relationship with the modern Papacy, this has been aptly characterised by a modern historian who compared the Papacy to the king in chess, who reigned majestically over the board, but is usually kept in reserve and rarely allowed to move!

The Jesuit Order has left its mark even on biology. For the great Lamarck, the proponent of "creative evolution," whose prehistoric giraffe "grew his long neck in order to survive," was himself a pupil of the Jesuits. And his biological theory may well have derived from his actual observations of his preceptors. For, in actual history, what has the Jesuit "Company" ever been except the giraffe that, by cunning and infinite adaptability "grew a long neck in order to survive," not in the primeval jungle, but upon the alien terrain of the modern secular age. The growth of that ecclesiastical "neck" is the history of political Catholicism!

F. A. RIDLEY.

(To be continued)

IN ROTHWELL

MARCH 1, 1660.—Jeremiah Milner of Rothwell, clerk, was brought up for trial at the Assizes for not reading the Book of Common Prayer, but seems to have managed to get allowed to go on bail. This Milner was a Puritan minister, officiating in the church during the period of the Commonwealth, but after the restoration of Charles II was brought up on the above charge.

The May Pole Hill was a part of the town that at one time would certainly be very lively and busy. The wooden stocks were necessary for the punishment of offences such as swearing, gambling, drunkenness and the like, especially during church hours, were attached at one time to the Market Cross. The churchwardens were generally on the look-out for offending parties on Sunday mornings. The last time they were put to use (according to an account of one Mr. John Smith) was on Sunday in the year 1801 "when three men were caught gambling in a field during church hours, and were placed in them until service was over."

E. H. S.

CORRESPONDENCE

A DEFENCE OF HATRED.

Sir,—Mr. Du Cann thinks that the first lesson of Freethought is toleration. He is wrong. The first lesson of Freethought is logical thinking. Toleration, if arbitrarily laid down without logical defence, is a dogma like any other. I am in favour of toleration at the proper time and place, and I am in favour of hatred at the proper time and place, as I tried to make clear in my articles. As Mr. Du Cann has failed to understand this, and supposes me to be an indiscriminating eulogist of hatred, it is not surprising that his criticisms are off the point.

Mr. Robson says that I impute lying and cheating to the generality of capitalists. I do not: I impute it to the generality of successful politicians, which is not the same thing. A capitalist as such is an exploiter, but not necessarily a liar or a cheat. But a capitalist who gets working men to elect him to Parliament cannot help lying and cheating. It is a trick of the trade.

If Mr. Robson thinks the working man in the mass is not interested in education, let him stand for Parliament and propose to abolish or cut down educational facilities. He will not get many votes.

Mr. Robson calls my opinions "Moscow-made." Not only did I state clearly in my third article that they were not Moscow-made, but I stated where I *did* get them. Yet Mr. Robson repeats the silly cliché. Apparently he thinks there were no Marxists before 1917!

Mr. Robson fears that the drift from the churches may lead to Atheistic Communism. I agree, except that for "fear" I substitute "hope." The older generation of Atheists, among whom I must now count myself, are dying off. The young must take our places, and they will not fight for a negation. The churches are not afraid of mere Atheism. They are afraid of Atheism plus Communism, and with reason.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

Sir.—Mr. Archibald Robertson is well able to take care of himself against the attacks of Messrs. Du Cann and Robson, and he is too skilful a controversialist to allow himself to be diverted from his argument to discuss Communism or the manners of the Parisian crowd outside the Madeleine on Christmas Eve. But one remark of our "learned friend," Mr. Du Cann, intrigued me. He writes: "Certainly it takes a humourless Scot or an over-solemn German to hymn the delights of hate." Well, I am neither Scot or German, but I have hymned in the columns of "The Freethinker," the praise of hate. (For those fortunate ones who have a bound copy and care to look it up, they will find my poem, "Love's Counterpoint," in the issue of July 22, 1934.) There is nothing that I would add to or retract from that hymn, but I would like publicly to thank Mr. Robertson for again bringing before Freethinkers the necessity of not too readily accepting Christian ethics when they cast out Christian dogmas. I would humbly suggest that there are cases where even the baby may be with advantage, emptied out with the bath water, and that Christ's teaching of loving your enemies should not be accepted as valid in all cases.—Yours, etc.,

BAYARD SIMMONS.

OBITUARY

ERNEST GEORGE BISHOP

With deep regret we announce the death of Ernest George Bishop in this 77th year. Schooled in the practical experience of life, living and human nature, he saw clearly the Secular basis of society, and the futility of looking for help from faiths, creeds or catechisms. He found nothing lacking in Secularism for the fulfilment of a well-planned life, and he remained in that belief until the end. His remains were cremated at the City of London Crematorium, Manor Park, London, E., on January 16 where, before an assembly of relatives, a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary N.S.S.

R. H. R.

WILLIAM McINTOSH

Freethinkers in the Regents Park, London, area will hear with sorrow of the death of William McIntosh in his 74th year. His membership in the N.S.S. covered many years and he deserves a place in the front rank for his loyalty to the Society and its work. He was one of the old school of Freethinkers, proud to work for, support, and pay to spread the story Freethought had to tell in the days when workers were few and the going heavy. A constant reader and admirer of "The Freethinker," and its present Editor, he never wavered in his devotion to the movement and its principles. His wish for cremation was duly honoured, and before relatives and friends a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary at the Golders Green Crematorium on January 18.

R. H. R.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive meeting held January 16, 1947

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A. C.), Seibert, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Horowitz, Page, Morris, Barker; Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Newcastle, Bradford and Birmingham Branches and to the parent Society. Report of business meeting of the London Committee work for the Union of Freethinkers was read. Matters concerning the Bradford Branch, and correspondence from Halifax and Blackburn Branches, were dealt with and instructions given. The first notice concerning the 1947 conference was ordered to be dispatched. A number of minor items were dealt with, the next meeting of the Executive fixed for February 20, and the meeting closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, January 28, 7 p.m.: "Rationalism, Humanism and Reaction," Professor J. C. FLUGEL, B.A., D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Forgotten People," MARJORIE BOWEN.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Great Newport Street, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Freethought and War," Mr. C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (48, John Bright Street, Birmingham).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Peace on Earth," Mr. P. MILLINGTON.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Secularism and Communism," Mr. HUGH GORDON, B.A., Ph.D.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Spain," LISA BAREA.

GOD'S HEAVEN

(After Ripley)

WHILE such words as *Heaven, Angels, Soul* are currently used with a definite meaning for the herd, we are not surprised to find such persons as Ripley, Collector of Odd Data, and such Mathematician-Scientists as Herbert Merrill indulging a bit of fancy (pantsey).

Mr. Ripley has no copyright on the knowledge of Heaven; likewise St. John's patent has long since reverted to the Public Domain.

"Heaven," or just heaven, of the Holy Bibliotheque, is a truly curious thing, if not *the* most important part of the Great Swindle.

St. John, in "Revelations" called attention to its size, which he shouldn't have done; which has caused suckers throughout the ages a lot of wondering. Thus, with the passing of years, the Clergy have soft-pedalled such talk of Heaven's *size* or *location*, and argue politics instead.

Embarrassing questions are found in all walks of life and in all businesses.

Generally, as far as we know, the faithful Elders refrain with tact born of disillusion; but should a child ask the very, *Very* Reverend Mucklehead, "How *big* is Heaven?" the usual answer is a pat with the pudgy, sanctimonious palm and "Have faith in Gawd, my child!" (That's how *big* it is.)

Let us now, brethren, mention Heaven in all seriousness, and in cubits; we hope not that we might offend some good hypocrite. "Heaven," says St. John, "is 12,000 furlongs of equal length, breadth and height." And, says Ripley, "7,920,000 feet when cubed; 1,500 miles in each direction."

No one knows if Ripley takes Heaven seriously or just as a bit of fancy (pantsey). He pretends to fit all the "Souls" within the pearly gates by using geometrical progression. Taking 25 years as a generation, there are 77 from the time of Christ. Counting your two parents, their four parents, their eight, and so on, back, the rough total is 302 sextillion.

The problem now is to fit these sextillions of souls into a rather small area of cubic miles, as written "by the hand of God Himself." I realise, and so did Ripley, that it is indeed a problem. So does the Church. That's why we don't see any section of the Sunday newspapers discussing it.

Next we have to decide on the *size* of a Soul. Here those wonderful chapters from Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe" would be most apropos; certainly the section on "The Soul" cleared my own mind of forty years' accumulation of cobwebs; but let us continue talking jargon with the Faithful. Patience, O my beloved. . . We will explain the size of everything shortly.

I beat my breast and moan, "Here, O My Soul!" Knowing the words merely describe a thought . . . but the congregation love it. They think their pastor is going to throw some dramatix . . . he is so adorable when he gets all jived up!

But no. I lean on the pulpit, one arm draped gracefully.

"After the brain dies," I ask, "is there a mere image of something left, as the Yogi's claim, a mere shadow? Size of a pin-point? Big as a house?"

That is the question.

The status of the "Soul" appears a question mark to various races. The Japanese disembowel themselves because they have felt the soul was in their abdomens. "Soul-sick" to them means indigestion to us. And to make matters worse, the people of Yennen, a region in China, have been taught they have *five* souls apiece. (According to John Hix, collector of Curiousae.) The Buddhist's *soul* is in his navel; else why contemplate it? And the Laplanders, I believe it is, who are quite positive theirs are on their feet.

The deeper we go, the more embarrassing. The crooked stick will never cast a straight shadow. As Voltaire once put it:

"The more one pontificates on questionable Things, the more air comes out the other end of him."

Comes next an article by Herbert Merrill, Research Engineer of General Electric:—

"At the time of the alleged birth of Jesus there were perhaps 500 million inhabitants on this planet . . . but 77 times the average world population, or the mean of one or two billions is only 115,500,000,000 (billions), not Ripley's 302 sextillions.

"Hence if all since the year one went to Heaven, and all before that date went to Hell, each would have plenty of room."

This leaves me in the usual quandary. For the *size* of the Soul hasn't been settled. St. John knew so damned much about Heaven, why didn't he also give his own Soul's size . . . 9, 10, largest size in boy's . . .? Why leave us to bicker about such things centuries later?

In my opinion a Soul is a sigh-of-nothing; or, it might be a mote in the eye of a camel, on a package of Camels.

If "Heaven" wasn't taken so seriously and so *literally* by certain of our weak-minded brethren and sisters, such meaningless words as "Soul" and "Heaven" would eventually pass into the subterranean channels of jargon and eventually disappear.

However, many pulpit pounders are pumping up the old Heaven, the "real, true Heaven," as witnessed in November's "Truth Seeker":—

"A Mr. Walter Kent, of St. Petersburg, Florida, criticised some Bible doctrine in a newspaper, 'The Independent.' The ever-watchful Pastor Walker, of the Church of Christ, tells the faithful—

"A place is prepared for those that are prepared to go there, whether it be for the good or the bad. The good choose the route that leads to Heaven, and by the same volition, man chooses to go the other route which leads to Hell."

But perhaps it were better to let our thoughts dwell on some thing tangible, something we can get our teeth into. For instance, how the old order is crumbling, and relentless time creeps on and on. . . Time, the mainspring of Evolution. "Where are you, O my Soul?"

That isn't a belch you hear in answer, Brethren. . . it's the echo of a hollow mockery.

California, U.S.A.

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