

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Progress of Man

IT was not without reason that Edgar Saltus, a very brilliant writer, placed Jesus among the pessimists. It was not the intellectual pessimism of a Schopenhauer or a Leopardi, but it was pessimism, nevertheless. For Christianity has always built upon a profound distrust of human nature, as such, and has dwelt without imagination upon the weakness of man. It has resisted every endeavour to establish the truth that man's salvation depends upon his own efforts, or that a helpful scheme of Ethics could be framed which looked upon this life as an end to itself. Every Christian advocate adopts the same plea, in some form or other. The burden of their cry is that this life alone is not enough, better never to have lived at all than to end it in the grave. The Universe is a colossal mockery if there be no future life. The criticisms of opponents move on the same lines. The complaint is not usual that anti-Christian teaching is bad in itself, so much that we must not expect ordinary human nature to live up to it. If men are convinced that this life is all, that there is no heaven and no hell, no reward in another world for good, no punishment in another world for evil, there is nothing left to us but, in the words of Paul, to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. If this attitude of mind does not betoken pessimism of the most unreflective character, then one needs to revise one's philosophical vocabulary.

The essential pessimism of the Christian outlook, came out in an address given before a Church Congress held some time ago at Durham. The Bishop was faced with two undeniable facts. One is the clear drift of men and women away from Christianity. The other—it is really only the reverse side of the first, is the determination in both theory and practice to guide life by considerations which Christianity has nothing to do. Naturally, the Bishop does not like this state of things. For one thing it means the elimination of the parson. Consider the following passage:—

"The structure of civilisation has become more complex, the activities of the State have developed amazingly, and the function of the clergy has become greatly narrowed. Where the clergyman seemed the inevitable leader in social and philanthropic work, there is now little need, and sometimes little desire for his assistance."

I am not sure that the clergy are the inevitable leaders on social work. It is true that so far as the latter is concerned the clergy strove then, as they strive now, to keep, so far as possible, the direction of philanthropy in their hands, but that was not because they were so much interested in the work of philanthropy as because it gave them a certain control over the masses of the people. It requires little insight

to see that so long as charity filtered through clergymen and their Churches, they have those dependent upon charity under their control. Attendance at church or chapel could be made, and was made, the condition of help. The poor were bribed to profess religion. To use a phrase much beloved by the Churchmen, it kept them in order.

A charity that did not come through the Church, carried with it no profession of religion. It robbed them of the deference of the poor. If the poor were not being "kept in order" by the clergy there was no reason why the wealthy should pay for a work they were plainly unable to do.

Here is another passage, which we may take before considering the other implications:—

"Civilisation seemed . . . in 1868 to be stricken with two maladies for which Christianity alone could provide the remedy—a materialism in denying the spirituality of man destroyed his individuality and left unchecked the empire of sensual passion . . . Civilisation in parting company with Christianity is restoring the features—its essential cruelty, its prevalence of suicide, its squalid superstition, and its unbridled sensuality."

The Bishop, it must be remembered, was addressing an audience of clergymen and so was quite safe in making the wildest statements provided they were made in defence of Christianity. But when we bear in mind that the period which was singled out by the Bishop as his starting point for the destruction of individuality marked almost the crest of Victorian culture in art, science, and literature and philosophy, one feels that, to use a vulgarity, he was simply talking through his hat. All that emerges is the fact that the Bishop is noting the beginning of a period during which the clergy had lost heavily in power and in intellectual status. What he had in mind when he talked of the influence of materialism in destroying the individuality of man is not quite clear.

If it refers to scientific materialism he was talking rubbish. And if an ethical materialism is meant, then, surely, none could be lower than that of the Christian creed which saw no reason for good conduct save that supplied by a whip or a bribe.

After all, Society has its habits as well as the individual, and the habits that are developed by successive generations of social life are not so easily disposed of. One of two things seem clear. Either the influence of Christianity in moulding the nature of a people for good is not very strong, or the world has become better in proportion to its throwing off the Christian rule. If I were a Christian priest I would try and handle this kind of subject a little more carefully.

And for the present, I would suggest to those who wish to form an idea of the real influence of Christianity—before "Materialism" grew strong, when the Church was very, very strong, and then compare the pre-Materialism development, and see what we may find.

We will take the early part of the nineteenth century, and see what we may call of the rule of money and Church, and we must bear in mind that it was an offence openly and plainly to attack the Christian religion. We must also remember that men and women were being sent to prison for daring to attack the Christian religion and there was the terrible legal offence of two men meeting together to ask for an advance of their starvation wages. It was called a conspiracy. Men were transported for that offence. It was also the period when the nonconformist religious bodies were approaching their full strength. What then was the situation?

Capital in England assumed its most arrogant and most intolerant form. Children were sold by Guardians into substantial slavery all over the country. They were poisoned in their work as chimney sweepers, stunted, starved and murdered in factories for the sake of mere gain. Children were sent from the "Poor Houses," and were set to work twelve or fourteen hours a day. I remember when I first went into the Yorkshire and Lancashire areas—about 1890—I was struck by the number of people with stunted and deformed bodies. I was told it was the last of the children who lived in the factories working twelve hours a day, badly fed and clothed.

Women were working mines, nearly nude, with chains round their waists hauling trucks of coal—*under ground*. Education, so far as the mass of people were concerned, was practically non-existent. The *people* were without political power and, in any case, lacked education to handle it. The great victory of Waterloo was followed by another victory at home and attempts to secure better modes of living brought down on those who fought for it the shooting down in open streets. One after another men were imprisoned for publishing and selling attacks on Christianity and for selling their advanced books and pamphlets. Thomas Paine's "Age of Reason" and "Rights of Man," were specially obnoxious. Men and women were hanged for stealing pocket handkerchiefs, and English prisons were sinks of vice, lice and disease.

We suggest that those who can find it in public libraries, read "The Black Book" showing the greed and essential cruelty by the Churches and the ruling classes, as well as Mayhew's volumes dealing with London life.

Housing conditions were unbelievably vile, food was poor and scanty, education for the people was practically non-existent. And above all stood the established Church, rapacious to the highest extent, with a bench of Bishops in the House of Lords steadily opposing reform, and hanging on to vast sums of money which were gained by a species of dishonesty that runs back for centuries.

I have just enough space to point out one or two things by way of close. The first thing to bear in mind is that for the last century and a half there has been going a steady attack on the power of established religious ideas. That has been accompanied with social reforms, that indeed was the aim of the Freethinking campaigns which began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and Freethinking has been steadily carrying on its work until today; not for the mere pleasure of destroying religion, but because it was recognised that until the people—the common people—can think clearly and demand sensibly, our aims will fall short of their target. We Freethinkers are not fighting for

victory over this or that religious theory. As such, religious beliefs and theories would arouse no more than a passing interest. We recognise quite clearly, and recognised before the direct attack on social matters was made, that the religious ideas must be put in their proper place. With equal clarity the religious leaders have always recognised that the power of religion must be maintained if unfair privilege is to continue. I do not agree with our bishop that the structure of civilisation has become more complex. On the contrary, I believe it has become simpler. In the case of the Great French Revolution, which will always count for that, the matter was put, "What are people?" The answer was, "Nothing." Again came the question, "What would the people be?" and there came the answer, "Everything." We are fighting to gain *real* freedom of movement and thought. Perhaps we shall never get it. But it is a fine thing to be trying.

CHAPMAN COHEN

## POLITICAL CATHOLICISM

### 3—Rome Faces the Future

"FOR the fact which gives us most cause for thought, and which I have endeavoured to bring out in these lectures, is that the Papacy, based as it is on mediæval ideas, has maintained and in many ways increased its moral power and influence, in an atmosphere which is repugnant to it, in the midst of social and political institutions, tendencies, and ideas to which it is fundamentally opposed."

With these words, the great rationalist historian, John Bagnall Bury, closed a lifetime of historical survey and research. (For they form the closing words of his last book, "The History of the Papacy in the 19th Century.")

The year 1947 sees the above words of the great historian strikingly confirmed. For the political situation in contemporary Europe and America on the morrow of the Second World War witnesses the Papacy occupying a political situation far stronger than in Bury's day, and probably stronger than at any time since the Reformation. Nor is objective testimony to this growth in Papal power lacking. Quite recently, our exceptionally well-informed contemporary, the "Economist"—a Liberal economic publication without, as far as we know, any special interest in religion as such—denominated the Vatican as the strongest *political* conservative force in Europe. Nor is similar testimony lacking upon the other side of the Atlantic. Only the other day an American professor of the fine arts writing in the "Call" (national organ of the Socialist Party in the U.S.A.), referred to the enormous growth of the cultural influence of the Catholic Church in the U.S.A. His particular reference was to the growing conventional orthodoxy of the film industry, that powerful arbiter of mass-opinion, which, according to the learned author, is largely under Catholic influence. Whilst, in the straight political sphere, it is hardly necessary to point out how pro-Catholic is both the American "State-Department," until recently directed by Catholic Secretary of State, Byrnes, and the British Foreign Office, that traditional stronghold of Tory reaction—even under a Labour Government! Europe's last Fascist dictator, General Franco, has only too much cause to bless his Anglo-Saxon Catholic allies, who, in the past and still today, alone save him from going the way of Hitler!

A mere list of the European lands which are ruled either wholly or in coalition by the political agents of the Vatican, makes an alarming reading: Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Ireland (Eire), Austria—all fall within this category.

In the Russian "zone," behind the "iron curtain," the Catholic Church is the unofficial but formidable opposition and potential "Fifth Column"—for it was the Jesuits who, long before Fascism, first invented this last device!—for any Western invader. In "occupied" Germany the Church is still an active political force encouraged by Anglo-American reactionaries. Whilst, in the New World, French Canada is a Roman "Gibraltar," and, at the other end of the Continent, in the near-Fascist régime of Colonel Peron in the Argentine, the Virgin Mary is a commissioned general in the Argentinian Army—with a salary of 10 dollars a day collected by the Church!—and, as Mr. Avro Manhattan has recently demonstrated with an arsenal of factual data, Latin America, with its 130 million inhabitants, and incalculable riches, constitutes a formidable reservoir of Papal power. To the U.S.A. we have already referred: in Australasia the power of the Church is immense, and here in Britain it is not, unfortunately, necessary to insist upon the growth of Catholic influence: the programmes of the B.B.C. constitute sufficient evidence; not to mention the recent "Education Act"!

Thus, it is scarcely possible to deny that on the morrow of the Second World War "to make the world safe for democracy" (again!), the autocratic Church of Rome, the oldest enemy of democracy in the world, is enjoying a second Spring—or should it be an Indian Summer?—and is, today, one of the most powerful forces in contemporary world-politics.

What is the reason for this sudden and startling revival of the Vatican? No doubt, the Church, traditionally founded by a fisherman, is an expert in fishing, particularly in troubled waters! But such an explanation, like the "explanation" of racial superiority, fails to explain. To grasp at all adequately the formidable role of Rome in the contemporary political world, it is first of all necessary to direct a glance at the political world in Europe and America, or, at least, at the current world of social and political reaction. For here, and here alone, we shall find the "open sesame" to the new Roman "Counter-Reformation."

In the eyes of European and American reactionaries today the Papacy is the successor of Fascism. It represents the last hope for the political reactionaries of Europe and America of finding an appropriate ideology, a mass-basis for the continuation, in face of the growing Socialist and democratic attack, of their outmoded system of power, profits and obsolete privileges. It was these self-same people, American Big Business, when politically directed by the Catholic Byrnes; British Toryism, whose first plank is now the defence of Christianity (and whose leader has recently gone out of his way to praise the Vatican for its defence of human liberty!); the military classes of France and Spain; and a combination of German Big Business and military Junkerdom: it was these people who put Fascism in power; and who, now that Fascism has gone, have transferred their political as well as spiritual allegiance to the Vatican. (Was the startling acquittal of the arch-intriguer, Von Papen, at Nuremberg, the first-fruits of this unholy Alliance: will the Catholic Von Papen, who handed over Europe to Hitler, end by handing it over to the Pope?) Be that as it may, it is at least certain that the present dominant political role of the Papacy is due to its key position as the successor of Fascism and as the leader of the contemporary reaction in both the Old World and the New. Naturally its phraseology has changed to suit existing circumstances! But behind it, are the same people and interests who formerly supported Fascism plus its own already not negligible power, its magnificent organisation, and its unrivalled political experience, the fruit of 19 centuries of ceaseless exploitation of human passions, human prejudices, and human psychology. (So called "Left" Catholics who opposed Fascism merely serve as a "Left" screen.)

The Vatican, for its own part, is busily engaged in reorganising its administrative machine in order to face what it now knows to be the coming life-and-death struggle with "Communism." The

recent Papal conclave created, for the first time since the Reformation, a non-Italian majority in the College of Cardinals: the "Universal" ("Catholic") Church is to be really "Universal" at last. Already at Rome it is predicted that the next Pope will be the first non-Italian Pope since the Reformation. (The last one, Adrian 6th, died in 1522.) It is probable that he will be an American Pope: "He who pays the piper calls the tune"; and 80 per cent. of the Papal revenue is said to derive from U.S.A. The most probable cosmopolitan choice would appear to be Cardinal Villeneuve, Archbishop of Quebec, that clerical hero of Canadian reaction and of the infamous "Padlock Law," who is French in language and culture, a British subject, and an American by geography. At any rate, the former Italian monopoly is "going West"!

What are the present political aims of the Papal successor of the Fascist dictators of yesterday? One immediately stands out the proverbial mile: a "crusade" against Russia! For "Communism" (in the broad sense in which we defined it above) is now the primary enemy of the Church, just as Calvinism was in the age of the Reformation, and Liberalism in that of the French Revolution. The perusal of almost any Catholic newspaper would be sufficient to prove the above contention! If and when American Big Business and its European satellites—for secular reasons of their own—succeed in duping public opinion into support for such a war, no one can doubt that every Catholic Church in the world will become a recruiting platform for the "holy" war. The Papacy will again raise its old crusading battle-cry: "Deus vult" ("God wills it"). And, should the Kremlin succumb to the Atomic bombs of Hitler's successors in the "Holy" war—science prostituted in the service of religion—then the bonfires lit by the Papacy in honour of the massacre of the French Protestants on "St. Bartholomew's Eve" (1572) will be far surpassed on the seven hills of Rome!

But, if war against Russia represents the first immediate stage in the current Papal programme, it is still only a means towards its ultimate end. And Dr. Lehmann in his masterly survey has hit the nail right on the head when he reminds us—and his reminder was never more timely than today—that the final aim of the Papacy remains unchanged: the restoration, first over the world of European civilisation, and eventually over our entire planet, of the former monopolistic rule of mediæval Catholicism, her golden age of totalitarian rule "over all persons and causes supreme." The entire age of unexampled progress and science which stretches from the Reformation to our own day, must become "a day that has gone," or rather, which has never existed, "full of sound and fury signifying nothing"; a faded memory; a blank sheet! Only so can Papal Rome come into her own.

Is such a grandiose project realisable in this Age? Hardly, for even in the event of the successful outcome of her present anti-Russian "crusade," a scientific age, such as is ours, could hardly tolerate such a mediæval yoke. However, there yet remains one more sinister possibility, which can hardly have escaped the attention of such experienced students of world-history as, obviously, are the men of the Vatican. It is now becoming painfully obvious that present-day civilisation, like all its historic predecessors "contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction." And in the atomic bomb—socially misused science—it has a unique instrument for committing collective suicide and for swiftly inducing "the ruins of empires" and a new Dark Age. Is this Rome's hope for a way out? Her historic record shows her to be totally unscrupulous: does not "the end justify the means"? The last Dark Age in European history, after the fall of secular Rome made the secular fortunes of ecclesiastical Rome. "What can be done once, can be done twice": will history repeat itself? Are we destined for a new "Age of Faith," in which the scientific works of Chapman Cohen and his rationalist predecessors will be as completely obliterated

## ACID DROPS

What the "Church Times" calls a "remarkable meeting" consisted in an effort to get all the different Christian sects to come together, believing and teaching the same creed in spirit and word. Now that is rather interesting, and there is more in it that one may see at first glance. For nearly two thousand years Christianity has been in existence. (Under other names it has existed longer than that, but the official number may pass.) The Bishop of St. Albans said that Jesus prayed in Jerusalem in words that could be heard by his disciples—and we may note that at once the disciples began to have a row as to what Jesus meant. The game went on until there were hundreds of different sects, each believing in Christianity, but not agreeing as to what Christianity meant. The creed must, as a lawyer would say, be "badly drawn," and in any court the Judge would say that such a mess prevented a decision as to what the creed means.

It must not be assumed that these different bodies of Christians held that meeting because of their love of one another. They try to work together because they wish to avoid hanging together. But can one really and honestly imagine the Papacy getting together with the Nonconformists? The idea is as impossible as it can be. Of course some of these people will argue that the divisions are really not concerned with vital matters. But that only makes it worse. If the differences were important they might be looked over. But there is not a single feature of the debated points of faith that Christians will not consider of great importance. The truth is that Christianity is steadily declining, even though its representatives may make a stand here and there. The most that can be done is to delay the end. Once more we may quote Heine on the decay of the Christian God:—

"We have seen him in Egypt where he was brought up among sacred calves and crocodiles. . . We have seen him as a small god-king in Palestine. . . We saw him emigrate to Rome where he renounced all national prejudices. . . We saw how he spiritualised more and more. . . He became a loving father, a universal friend of humanity—it all availed him naught. Hear ye the bell ring. . . They bring the sacrament to a dying God."

Gods may die slowly—but they die!

Dr. T. Wilkinson Riddle in the current issue of the "Christian Herald" complains that our very familiarity with the *privilege* of prayer breeds neglect. He says that prayer is superior to the telephone (to which it has been likened). "We are never kept waiting, the line is never out of order, the heavenly number is never engaged." Someone ought to remind Dr. Wilkinson Riddle that during the late war we had a number of National Days of Prayer with results that most of us will remember. Perhaps on these occasions, the "line was out of order" or the "heavenly number was engaged"; either that, or Dr. Wilkinson Riddle knows exactly the intellectual level of the readers of the "Christian Herald."

In the same issue, "T.W.R." suggests that when Ministers read from the Bible they should state clearly from which version they are reading, whether from the Authorised, Revised, Dr. Moffat's Translation or Weymouth's Greek Testament. "T.W.R." is very daring, and is introducing a dangerous practice. Think what will happen if congregations come to a realisation that the inspired word of God can be read in *different versions*. We warn "T.W.R." that if the inspired word of God can differ in so much as a comma, and preachers were to announce it, the congregations may start thinking . . .

Dr. F. A. Cockin evidently fears competition from the Astrologists. He said at a special service in Bristol Cathedral that the "widespread growth of astrology and commercialised wizardry" is tending to depose the authority of Christian sanctions. At least the Astrologers promise something in *this world*, and these promises can be checked up. Dr. Cockin's particular brand of commercialised wizardry can only make promises for the "Next" world, with no fear of being checked up. We would say with Shakespeare: "A plague on both your houses."

But there is one man, a Roman Catholic, too, who appears to be on such close terms that he can tell us: "God is a never-ending rapture of boundless happiness." Well, that seems all right—for him. But what of us? There is a recognised Roman Catholic priest who has told us that one of the pleasures of the "saved" is their ability to see the damned roasting in hell. Altogether, we rather think that God, his preachers, and those who worship him are getting mixed.

One of the contributors to a pamphlet entitled: "Is the Roman Catholic Church a Secret Society?" Mr. R. F. Winch, confesses that while he himself opposes the notion that the Catholic Church has no right to allow another religion "to practise, teach, or propagate," he, a Roman Catholic himself, could not find a single authority "to support his case. This is only surprising to a Catholic, but to those outside the fold it has been known for centuries that the Roman Catholic Church simply dare not practise tolerance. Of course, Anglo-Catholics are now putting themselves on the back for, as the "Church Times" says, "Tolerance has been a basic principle of the teaching of nearly every great Churchman." Yes, but has it been the teaching of the English Church?

Congratulations to the Rev. C. T. Kirkland for announcing at a recent meeting that "the Christian Church faced its greatest difficulty at the present time. Never before had they had to face a world which had outgrown the very idea of the need of a God. There was appalling ignorance even in so-called Christian countries . . ." and so on. Mr. Kirkland should have a chat with Prof. Foster who is constantly broadcasting "What the Churches are Doing"—and generally talks as if the Churches hadn't a problem in the world, and such things as "infidelity" were unknown. For the Rev. H. J. Fynes-Clinton, at the same meeting, the only remedy was reunion with Rome; and he proudly asserted that "over 1,400 priests" would support that reunion. We shall yet see the Churches hanging together rather than hanging separately.

Once upon a time man took his gods as he found them. He had to. There were so many gods, they did so much—not all in a very pleasant way—that they had to take what was and make the best out of a doubtful bargain. Then, as man grew stronger, as he realised his own nature and power, he began to question whether the gods were quite so good and so powerful as they were thought to be. And with that question there was laid the ultimate fate of the gods. They flourished so long as man was unacquainted with their history. Man found out quite a number of things without the help of the gods; he also discovered that men with strength and knowledge could do what the gods promised. Instead of man justifying himself to God, it was the gods who had to justify themselves to man. It is a long, long story, not yet complete, but it is one which any capable man can plan out while smoking a cigarette.

Once again we emphasise the fact that the gods are being found out; and that is the one thing they cannot withstand. Their pretended power is seen to owe its existence to the sheer weakness of humans, their wisdom runs side by side with complete ignorance, and their alleged care for man is bedded in human fear and yet, because old beliefs and habits die hard, the gods shrink but slowly. After all, fear is only completely killed by knowledge and clear thinking, and both are acquired by understanding. You may enlighten the folly of the fool, but the gods are that he will be found in full enjoyment of his old follies expressed in other terms.

There is nothing that can equal first-hand information. We poor unsaved mortals can only guess what is waiting for us in the next world, and what God is like. That last item is of all the most important. It is all important that we should know God when we see him. We cannot be sure that it is a "him," it might turn out to be a "she," and in that case we may get into trouble. Or God may be unlike anything we have ever seen, and as we can only recognise by having seen things or persons, we look like getting into a nice mess when we leave this world.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

An item comes from that very lively paper, all the way from Auckland, in a copy of "John O'Lees' Weekly." Here is an interesting passage:—

"Roman Catholic hokum on birth control is sometimes mixed up with blather about Jews, Masons, Protestants, etc. I have in front of me a Goebbelism from the Australian Catholic Truth Society, written by the Rev. Cahill, S.J., and approved by F. Moynihan, Censor Deputus Inprimatur, Melbourne. On page 28 this fantastic document attacks Freemasonry because it believes in the separation, in the secularising of marriage, in the establishment of a State education, in complete free worship, unrestrained liberty of the Press, in the equality of sexes in public life, which it calls the encouragement of radical feminines. Listen to the voice of Goebhels. In 1936, Goebhels was speaking in a similar strain, but the Catholics are still circulating his pamphlets."

We are not surprised. There were Goebhels before the Germans were dominated by Goebhels and Hitler, and we have plenty of that type—in a milder form in this country. For example. A little while ago one man who considers himself a "Freethinker" warned me that one man who writes occasionally in these columns is not an Atheist, in fact, he was not certain whether he was not a believer in the existence of God, etc. We had to plead guilty. But then we never asked a man or woman what their position with regard to religion was. So long as the writing was good, and was likely to be of interest to readers, we are quite content. We are Freethinkers, and if the Archbishop of Canterbury sent us an article of an interesting character he will be welcome. We are afraid there are many people knocking around who have only exchanged one form of intolerance for another.

For some time we were compelled to refuse new applications for copies of this journal. All we could do was to suggest that some people should take one copy of the "Freethinker" and share it between two. Many loyally adopted the suggestion, and we made many new friends. Today there is some further allowance of paper—newspaper, and the result was more new customers, and new customers mean, where "The Freethinker" is in question, new friends for ourselves and the Cause. So we suggest that our friends interested in our work will do well to try and fix new readers. "The Freethinker" stands where it always stood, after nearly seventy years of existence. We are proud that we have been with it nearly sixty years.

## BROADCASTING ATHEISM IN THE U.S.A.

(A Summary of an address by Robert Harold Scott over the Radio, San Francisco, November 17, 1946)

(Concluded from page 49)

NOT the least of natural evils that discredit the belief in a just and almighty God, an evil that is commonly ignored or overlooked, is the fact that lower animals suffer undeservedly. The trials and tribulations of human beings are generally regarded as one of the best reasons for believing that there is for man a future life; but if there is to be no recompense for the antelope that is slain and eaten by a lion, why should it be thought that there is to be reparation in an after life for any human being?

Thirty centuries ago there lived a man, Zoroaster by name, who believed that there is a God, who is the author of all that is good but whose power is not unlimited, and who, moreover, is engaged in constant struggle with another supernatural being, also of limited power, who is the source of all that is bad.

If believers in a God were to ascribe a limited power to the deity they say exists, they would not have to call any natural evil an "act of God," or any man-made evil a thing that a God permitted. Why, then, do they so seldom do so?

The answer to this question lies partly, I think, in a reluctance to admit imperfection in what one prefers to look upon as perfect; but mainly, no doubt, it is rooted in the realisation that a deity who could not have made a much better world and far better human beings, would have too little power to justify the undertaking. How could the future of so weak a God be made to atone for what this world has been and what it is to-day?

Truly, the belief in a God that is not all powerful is no more tenable than the belief in a God with power unlimited. Nor, in view of what this world has been and what it is to-day, is there any reasonableness in the pantheistic idea that everything in the universe is part and parcel of a deity.

It has been said that there are no atheists in foxholes. But Howard W. Williams, who, as an Army Signal Corps photographer, was several times in battle, "felt the breath of death many times," and he did so "without any religious feeling." He says: "I was a foxhole atheist."

It was written more than twenty-five centuries ago that "the fool has said, There is no God." The man who wrote those words lived in an age devoid of science and in a country in which ignorance and superstition were prevalent. It was but natural, therefore, that he should write as he did. To-day, however, there is no excuse for repeating those words by way of scorn or rebuke.

The fact that no deity of any kind has ever, in any way, made himself unmistakably known to everybody in every generation amounts, I submit, to positive proof that there is no such being. Life and the world being what they are, what sensible reason could any God have for making his existence controversial? Assuredly, life and the world being what they are, no God could reasonably expect any rational person to take his existence "on faith," for that would be expecting one not only to believe without evidence but actually to believe against evidence.

To say that there is no God is also to say, of course, that there is no life beyond the grave; for it goes without saying that only a God could make post-mortem survival possible. Certainly, there is no scientific evidence for a life hereafter. Of the many American scientists who, in 1933, answered Prof. James Leuba's questionnaire, an overwhelming majority of the more eminent did not believe in a life after death.

Atheism, supported by science, does take away the hope of an after life. On the other hand, atheism gives one the great consolation that comes from the knowledge that an everlasting extinction of one's personal self would be equivalent to a dream-

less sleep with no awakening. And though it be true that in a death of endless personal annihilation there could be for one no happiness of any kind, we know, with the certainty of those who were once unborn, that it is no evil not to have that which cannot be missed.

It is but natural for one to desire to meet again some loved one who has died; but only as a conscious, remembering being can we feel the heartache that is caused by the death of someone we have loved. A death of obliteration would remove the heartache and even the knowledge that one and one's dead loved one had ever lived.

It need not be feared, as Jefferson gave his young nephew clearly to understand, that mankind would sink into a morass of immorality if atheism should become universal. Ethics, as Darwin said, has its basis in social needs and feelings, not in any supernatural beliefs.

The Marquis de Sade was undeniably wicked, and de Sade was avowedly an atheist. Nathan Leopold participated in a cold-blooded murder, and, at the time, Leopold was avowedly an atheist. Alfred Rosenberg, official philosopher for the Nazi Party, was hanged for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and Rosenberg was avowedly an atheist. But Adolf Hitler believed in a God, as his writings and speeches testify. Hermann Goering prayed with a clergyman on the Sunday before he swallowed potassium cyanide; and all the other men (with the exception of Rosenberg) who were sentenced with Goering to die on the gallows made professions of religious faith. And Josef Kramer, "The Beast of Belsen," said at his trial that he believed in God.

Steinmetz and Burroughs were atheists. So were Mark Twain and Robert Ingersoll. So were Sarah Bernhardt and Olive Schreiner. So were Simon Bolivar, Pierre Curie, Jeremy Bentham, and "Lawrence of Arabia." And, certainly, each of these persons lived an exemplary life.

The truly good man or woman is good without thought of recompense or penalties, either here or hereafter. He or she knows that right conduct brings its own ample reward. There are for him or for her, as there were for Jefferson, incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness one feels in its exercise, and in the love which it procures us from others.

ROBERT HAROLD SCOTT.

## THE SOCIAL GOD

WE do not desire to retract from the valuable work of our old friend F. A. Ridley nor that excellent pamphlet "Vatican Policy"; but rather to point out logical inconsistency and show another aspect of the case. In arguing that Christianity must be understood in terms of politics, Ridley seems to under-rate the subtlety of what he terms Jesuitical casuistry. Really, one needs religion to explain Fascism. In adopting a similar position Lehmann, as an ex-priest, should know better and be more careful.

The question is not whether the church worked hand-in-glove with Fascism, for with the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini the church is still there, apparently running successfully on a democratic socialist ticket. How does the church, at the same time, work within each and every political framework? As Joseph McCabe has so often pointed out, the church is different in Belgium or Ireland to what it is in England or the U.S.A. The church, like St. Paul, is all things to all men. The church might argue that it is the very spirit of democracy, and find much in its tradition to confirm the claim. How, in Acts, the early Christian communities elected their deacons and bishops. There is a form of election through the church, and *vox populi, vox Dei* is traditional. The idea of modern democracy is clouded by this tradition. The question then would be, what is democracy and what is meant by election; and it might come to be realised

that election was originally a theological term; that the ecclesia was the original democratic mystery; and that ecclesiasticism has developed from it. But the church is too astute to raise questions; it prefers to give the answers; and, from its own point of view, it is not necessary. As long as democracy is considered as majority rule, it suits the church.

The church has not had nearly two thousand years' political experience for nothing. The church is alive to the logical inconsistencies of professed democracy; and of the many interpretations of it; the different modes of it, ranging from the U.S.A. on the one hand to Moscow on the other, and it is quick to see the logical absurdity of its opponents' case; such as Lehmann's remarks on the infallibility of the Pope. For, if the Pope is supreme, how comes it that the doctrine was passed by an Ecumenical council? And, if this was engineered by the Jesuits through the college of cardinals and the Jesuits are the power behind the throne, then the Pope is a puppet and his authority null; and, in any case, how was it that the church had existed for 1,800 years without such a doctrine? It is the church that needs to be explained. Just as it was the church that produced the Bible and not the Bible, the church; and Catholicism rests upon the authority of the church and not the Pope.

In considering this question, a book that appeared in the same country and at about the same time as "Mein Kampf," is of interest. "The Spirit of Catholicism," by Karl Adam of Tubingen appeared in 1924. Mussolini's idea was the restoration of the Glory of the Empire, but Hitler's *Volkstätt* was somewhat different. In "Mein Kampf" Hitler said that Marxism materialism was devoid of the religious spirit. The Nazis developed a doctrine of Hitler as an incarnation of the Fuehrer was the heaven-sent saviour of the German people. And it is interesting to note the similarity of these ideas and those of Father Adam.

It is "naive, childish," says Father Adam, to consider Catholicism as "lust of power, saint worship and 'Jesuitry.'" Philosophic objectivism has given us "the autonomous man who 'has become a solitary man, an individual—the As if philosophy here, solipsism there" has "corroded" him with "the spirit of 'criticism.'" Catholicism is "the positive religion *par excellence*" and all non-Catholic creeds are essentially "anti-thesis, conflict, contradiction and negation." To the assertion that Catholicism is a "complex of opposites," he says that the diversity is not a source of weakness but a sign of vitality. "But contraries are not contradictories." Even the Pagan elements enrich but do not obscure what Paul, in his epistles, expresses "the deepest mystery" said when he called the "Church the Body of Christ"; and the "Seer of the Apocalypse" refers to as "the marriage of the Lamb." The Church is "not democratic, her authority coming from above, from Christ and not from below, from the community." It is "precisely because it is not the human element," the "heart of Christianity" is the "Body of Christ, the church." Christ is "all in all." The "pastoral authority is—a delegated authority."

"Because the church is the Body of Christ, she is essentially an organism, with its members purposively inter-related and visible organism—the divine is objectively incarnated in the community." The "Spirit of Jesus is objectivised—as a community that transcends the individual personalities," in the mystery of the Incarnation, established as an organic community. Mankind must not be regarded "as a mass of homogeneous beings—so profoundly are they interlocked in thinking, willing, feeling and acting—that they are considered in the divine plan—as a unity, only as one man." Thus "the purpose of Christ is realised in the community." But there is "distribution and co-ordination of functions—members and organs with special tasks." The Catholic never "regards the Pope as separated from this unity—the Pope is for him the visible embodiment of this unity." Therefore "no misuse of Papal

authority and no human failings can—rob him of his veneration—for the Papacy."

"Is not all human exercise of authority tantamount to usurpation" of power or force? says Father Adam, whether it be the "tyranny of an individual or the despotism of a community." The church has always "resisted the domination of leading personalities" of schools or movements. Inasmuch as the Pope is "at the same time, bishop of Rome," he is concerned with "his immediate Roman flock." But "all the organic inter-relation of parts—becomes manifest" in him as Pope; "when he speaks as Pope—he speaks as the visible basis and pledge of unity." But "he cannot give dogmatic decisions purely at his own discretion." He is bound by Councils, by scripture and tradition, and is "infallible only when he speaks *Ex Cathedra*." The "pastoral authority" is analogous throughout the church, with many observancies, obligations and duties.

"So all egotism, all domination, all special privilege is foreign to the church. And therefore, and in that measure the church fulfils the noblest dreams of democratic equality." Whatever one thinks of all this, and however much one dis- countenances of it, it is as well to have some idea of one's opponent's case, and of his adaptability. One might dismiss the divinity and deride the superstitions, yet realise that the mystical element arises in the fact of social life. The church is both a social organism and an organic growth. And it can not be explained in terms of personalities. It is interesting to note that "these are thoughts that may seem strange to the modern man," and that they arose "under the influence of early Christian ideas, of socialism and of the Great War." With social, moral and political questions obscured in a maze of projection and personification one can see how a social god can be adapted to a socialist credo. Perhaps one day we might see holy communion used to sanctify communism. Who knows?

H. H. PREECE.

CORRESPONDENCE

A DEAD HORSE.

Sir.—Mr. Whitfield purports to find fallacies in my article, "A Dead Horse?" and to do so he misrepresents my case. Explain to people that the religious opinions they hold are "rational," etc., "and—hey presto!—the light of Freethought appears." Did I write that? No! Did I infer it? I think not. True, I defined the job of the Freethought propagandist as "striving to induce the people to think for themselves instead of accepting the words of parsons, priests—and politicians on a faith," but I did not underestimate the immensity of the task. This is very different from saying "the light of Freethought appears" when god-arguments are shown to be unsound. I want to make Atheists, but more importantly I want to make Freethinkers—the two are not necessarily synonymous. Credulity, it should be remembered, is not confined to the religious realm.

My "clear and definite aim" is not likely to satisfy Mr. Whitfield, for, like my heckler, he is politically inclined. I consider Freethought work to be the more valuable, but that does not mean I am "contemptuous of democracy." I merely point out that democracy in itself "offers no solution, for the vote of a fool nullifies that of an intelligent person, and the mass of the electorate can be easily swayed." This seems undeniable.

I am also accused of holding "no brief for political parties." I confess that there is some truth in this remark. But really, Mr. Whitfield, is it so very surprising?

C. McCall.

THE DEFENCE OF HATRED

Sir.—We may now I think fairly conclude that Mr. Robertson is inclined to soften his asperities upon capitalists and allow of their grouping into two classes. It is a safer classification. There are dubious people in all grades of society, and it is of the nature of blague to hold to the contrary.

We all of us, more or less, are apt to err in our misinterpretations of what the other man's views may be, as for instance what would happen to me if I proposed to abolish or cut down educational facilities. Apart from the interest of professional people, I would like to think that the working men would kick up a row but it is futile to anticipate that such a thing would happen. I have no such illusion. In my own County of Northumberland I pledge my knowledge that there is not 2 per cent. of adults, or adolescents, who are truly concerned about the issue. I know the subject too well to have any such conception.

Did I say Mr. Robertson's opinions were Moscow made? I think not. But I now glean he has adopted them, together with their stereotyped pattern, i.e., the cliché. Marxism was first made known to me in the 80—90's of last century by Prince Kropotkin and Stepania, when they lectured in Newcastle and were the guests of Dr. Spence Watson. I remember that they were designated Anarchists, and were refugees from Russia.

Mr. Robertson makes me "fear that the drift from the churches may lead to Atheistic Communism." On the contrary, I wrote that the drift to Atheism might be frustrated by Communism. Finally, Atheism is not a mere negation. It is a wholesome way of life, clear of the swamp of religion, and enabling men and women to enjoy freedom and to work for the benefit of their fellows. Have we to believe that Bradlaugh, the great pioneer, and a host of others failed in that conception? In that respect, there is a long chapter, and Mr. Robertson should study it.

As to Mr. Bayard Simmons; he isn't a very convincing apostle of hatred. He seems to me to be the very apotheosis of benignity. W. Rouson.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 11, 7 p.m.: "Education and the World Order," Mr. W. B. CURRY, M.A.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Prestige of Britain," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Gt. Newport Street, W.C.1).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Bachelor Motherhood of Woman," Mr. D. A. WILSON.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Anti-Semitism," Rev. DUDLEY RICHARDS.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Maxim Gorky," Prof. J. LAVRIN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: "The Value of Atheism," Mr. J. V. SHORTT.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Colour Bar," Dr. M. J. MITCHELL.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Fitzwilliam Room, Grand Hotel).—Monday, February 10, 7-30 p.m.: "Did Jesus Christ Ever Exist?" Mr. G. L. GREAVES.

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## THE MAKERS OF HEAVENLY TROUSERS

(With apologies to Daniele Vare, whose title I parody)

HOW hard it is for us to realise in 1947 that the world once believed that goodness could only be achieved by the wearing of yellow trousers! Yet it is only two thousand years ago since a small band of men, who realised that the wearing of blue trousers was the only true way to salvation, were persecuted for this belief by those in primrose pantaloons.

Little by little, however, these undaunted pioneers began to persuade people that blue trousers alone could save them and the demand grew so rapidly that in time a large factory was built on rock foundations at Rome. The whole plant was devoted to the making of the specified blue canvas and it was exported all over Europe. Technicians suggested that the colour might be varied and the fabric lightened in weight but the Rome factory, having a monopoly, resisted all suggestions for improvement.

Not everyone liked this particular shade of blue and competitors began to arise in other countries. The Rome firm fought tooth and nail to keep all the trade in its own hands but even bloodshed failed to stifle the enterprises in other lands and by the end of the 16th century many different shades of blue trousers were to be seen. In England, where progressive ideas are so readily welcomed, the production of blue cloth was nationalised.

If any doubts of the spiritual benefits conferred by blue trousers still existed they vanished as soon as colonial expansion began. Who could disbelieve when it was seen that proud and warlike savages became amenable and inexpensive servants the moment that they could be persuaded to exchange the loincloth for trousers of cheap blue canvas? Indeed the effect upon the savage tribes was so remarkable that vast sums of money were collected in all the civilised countries to subsidise the sale of blue trousers in less enlightened lands.

It is true that here and there, even in England, people sometimes wore trousers which were scarcely blue but the manufacturers pretended that it did not happen. The great outcry came however when a man was seen walking about without any trousers at all. What made this all the more striking was that the man said that he felt better without trousers. Laws were passed to make blue trousers compulsory but to no avail; the numbers who did not wear them steadily grew. Worse still; it became obvious that these flouters of the fashion led lives just as blameless and decent as those who disported blue-covered limbs. Then manufacturers, who hitherto had fought only each other, began to form loose combines to combat the new mode. One manufacturer even went so far as to say of a notably good-living, but trouserless, man that his goodness was derived from wearing blue trousers which neither the wearer nor anyone else could perceive. Some people thought this line of argument difficult to refute, and even the man who had caused it found it no easy matter to disclaim that he wore invisible blue pants.

One clear thing emerged; it was the cloth manufacturers and not the trouserless who were feeling the draught. This brings us up to the present day and, at the time of writing this, a City rumour suggests that there may soon be an amalgamation of all the leading textile producers. This follows from a fall-off in the demand and the difficulty experienced in attracting first-class technicians into the industry. Some people believe that the Rome firm hopes to control the group.

When people say that the blue canvas has not brought about a state of universal goodness the salesmen of the manufacturers now state that the reason for this is that blue trousers have never really been worn. How this can be, when millions of people for two thousand years have worn nothing else, it is difficult to see.

A final word: since 1939 the world's advertisement columns have carried over three million separate advertisements similar to the following: "Owner, having no further use for them, is willing to exchange pair of blue trousers for adequate supply of

decency, reason and security." Is there any reader of this column, by any chance, who still keeps a pair of blue trousers by him "just to be on the safe side"? There are still a large number who wear them on Sundays but they don't really feel comfortable in them.

LYNDON IRVING

## THE WEDDING RING

Pitman (returning to photographer with proof of group, himself and wife): "I say mistor, luik at this yer photograph. Ye can't see the wife's wedding ring." Photographer: "Oh, that is not of much consequence." Pitman: "Isn't it begot! Folks'll think we're livin' a debauched life!"

## POLITICAL CATHOLICISM

(Concluded from page 55)

as were those of Epicurus and his scientific forerunners: in which the memory of Marx and Lenin will have sunk into complete oblivion as those of the leaders of a hundred last classical servile insurrections; in which the life-line of our scientific culture will be irrevocably cut?

In view of so many and such dire contemporary symptoms ought not to say that this debacle *cannot* happen: rather should we say, it *shall* not happen!

A new Dark Age is, indeed, probably, Rome's last card. Roman fanaticism may not shrink from bringing it about. But if she fails, and we must see to it that she does fail, then she has played her last card: her bolt is shot. In a really democratic and scientific civilisation Rome cannot survive; and all her present actions show that she knows it. "The ghost of the Roman Empire" will have been laid at last! Today, the Pope fights a last rear-guard action with History. She fights it with a skill and tenacity to which the annals of Pagan priesthood can supply no parallel. But History, as always, will have the last word. The Cross will follow the Swastika, beneath the horizon of History.

F. A. RIDLEY

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