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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Christian Love

LOOKING at the matter as mere theory, there is nothing with which a Christian is so much concerned as love and brotherhood. Studied from the point of practice there is hardly anything he does so little to promote. In theory, every Christian is ready to spend himself in the service of every other Christian, if not in the service of every human being.

In practice, the Christian pays no more regard to the welfare of others than do non-Christians. In a business deal Christians watch each other very carefully. In a corporate capacity Christians treat each other in the same way that others do. They are quite frank that self-interest is the chief motive operating, and they laugh at the idea of trusting people without keeping their eyes open. Christian England cries out against putting blind trust in Christian U.S.A., and Christian U.S.A. acts in the same way with Christian England. But the cant of love and brotherhood goes on, and the power of Christian trust on Christian brotherhood continues.

Now I should be the last to argue that the ideals of love and brotherhood are bad things. As a mere fact, no one does so argue. I believe, on the contrary, that they are fundamental to human welfare, and that their practical realisation is a measure of social development. All I am desirous of doing at present is to take the display of these qualities in connection with religious—and particularly Christian belief. For Christians write and talk of human brotherhood as though it were in some way a Christian product. They have done this until the very words, love and brotherhood, have acquired a cant significance. They have gained the aroma of the pulpit, and the time-honoured power of an evil association has not lost the capacity for corrupting a thing otherwise quite good. For when all is said and done, the fact remains that of all the failures that may be placed to the credit of religion, there is none more marked than its complete inability to foster a genuine brotherhood or good fellowship. This is not a matter of opinion. It is a statement of demonstrable fact. Look at the relations existing between Catholics and Protestants in social or business matters, so long as religion is not introduced, people seem to be able to get along with each other with no greater friction than is usual. But when religion enters into the question each begins to treat the other with some measure of distrust or unkindness. Each says, and sometimes says, that being what the other is he cannot be treated as he would be if he were a brother in Christ. Each one remembers that he is a brother in Christ, and each holds that the other is not that, and therefore he cannot be treated as a brother.

Turn from business to social facts, and mere associations. It is generally admitted that in social and political associa-

tions the most decisive factor is religion. In most social gatherings religious discussions are not welcomed, and sometimes notice to that fact decorates the walls. "No religious discussions" is the rule. Each of the members may be a Christian of some sort, but the firmer their faith, the greater the need to prevent discussions. The explanation is plain. It is because religious discussions usually end in a quarrel. They will all agree upon the fact that religion makes for brotherhood and good feeling, but they will also agree that if they desire to associate on friendly terms they must leave religion outside. The cant of religion bites deep. It is said, by way of apology, that men take their religious beliefs as the most serious things they possess. The statement evades the issue, it does not meet it. The issue here is not that religious beliefs are not taken seriously, but that they serve to divide people rather than to unite them. And side by side with the fact named there is the complementary one that there are many other aspects of life about which men and women disagree but yet are content to live harmoniously together. One can see members of all religious bodies, and of none, joining together for all sorts of social ends. They will remain friendly in their diversities of opinions so long as religion is excluded. It is when religion is introduced that co-operation becomes impossible. It is even paraded as a great triumph when members of different religious bodies can meet and part in amiable mood. Anglican, Catholic, Non-conformist and Jew, may meet together on the ground of a common humanity, a common sense of justice, a common appeal to social needs, but never on that of religion.

There is only one cause that will bring people into some kind of unity. This is where something is imminent that threatens their vested interests—as such. In the case of Sabbatarianism, for instance, an effort may be made in the name of Christian bodies as a whole. And the reason for this unity is as plain as it is discreditable. They are all faced with a common danger. The "deseccation" of the Sabbath affects them all alike. It involves the secularisation of life, and in sheer self-defence the religious world would forget its divisions and close its ranks for the moment against its common enemies. Historically, this is the only condition in which Christianity has ever developed a sense of solidarity. In the earlier centuries it held together in the face of persecution. So soon as persecution relaxed the decisive consequences of religious belief showed themselves. Then some kind of unity was re-established by the creation of the most brutal and the most intolerant tyranny the world has ever known. Later, when social and intellectual progress began to weaken the power of religion, its evil influence again showed itself. Existing causes of friction were intensified by religious belief. Men hated each other for national feeling, for class or political reasons. But these expressions of malevolence were comparatively mild. Religious malevolence knew no bounds. Its limits

might be marked by death, but not always that. Political hatred may be stopped by death, but it has seldom called a halt to the hatred that was born of the Christian religion.

In strict truth the brotherhood of man has never formed a genuine home in historic Christianity. What has been aimed at is a brotherhood of believers. A human being became a brother so long as he did not believe that he was outside the pale. It may be questioned whether even the propaganda of Christianity was not mainly inspired by the lust of conquest. It gave vent to the intolerance of the fanatic, and may be taken as the religious equivalent of the spirit that has sent whole nations into the world on piratical enterprises. It is not without significance that the Church enterprises have so often assumed military forms, aping the more avowed militarism of the secular conqueror in grades, badges and terms. But the main reason why religion has failed to furnish the conditions of a genuine brotherhood of humanity is that there is nothing fundamental in religious beliefs. All men have not religious opinions, and among those that have, there are endless diversities. Let the religious appeal be as wide as may be, it still remains a sectarian body. And sectarianism depends quite as much on the feeling of dislike for the outsider as it does upon affection for those inside the accepted circle. On the other hand, the non-religious appeal to brotherhood does base itself upon qualities that are common to all men, and which are, indeed, fundamental to the associated state. For this reason there is no man without some sense of justice, however rudimentary. There is no man without feeling for his fellows, however imperfect the expression may be. Beneath the differences of class, sect or colour, there are qualities—mental and moral—that all have in common. A rational doctrine of brotherhood seizes upon these as the elements upon which it may work, and which it may utilise in order to be successful. And as a mere matter of fact, it is in proportion as these non-religious qualities have been developed that the sense of brotherhood has become to some extent realisable in practice. It may be true that these qualities are not irreconcilable with some kind of a religion, but it is quite certain that they are independent of it.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE FIFTH MONARCHY MEN AND THE ENGLISH (17th Century) REFORMATION (An episode in English Social and Religious History)

WHATEVER view may be taken of its origin, of its nature, and of its ultimate effects, it cannot be disputed that the 16th century Reformation represents a decisive turning-point, a fundamental watershed, so to speak, in the annals of world history. Its incidence and historic effects, which started from a religious Reformation, extended far beyond the specifically ecclesiastical sphere, and produced results that were profoundly revolutionary in the parallel spheres of politics and economics; of morals and culture. In this last and historically ultimate sense, the Reformation qualifies as, not only or chiefly, what it consciously set out to be, a religious reformation, but as one of the major social and intellectual revolutions in the evolution of mankind. Indeed, in this last connection, the movement begun by Luther and Calvin ranks with the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 as one of the three greatest revolutions in human history.

Like all major social revolutions, the Reformation had its own sub-divisions: its Lutheran "Right" and its Calvinistic "Left," and away beyond its "Left Wing" it had what contemporary "common sense"—that is the average opinion of the current majority—regarded as its "lunatic fringe," a comprehensive term which embraces equally those whose political, religious and economic opinions were either too far below or too far after their time. For the statement later made by a great revolutionary leader of our own times (Lenin), that "justice can never be in advance of the economic conditions," supplies an effective barometer by which to measure what is practicable and successful, and what is not, in any given historical movement.

This historic measuring-rod applies to the Reformation also. It had its practical men who succeeded, and whose reward is a lasting place in history, and its visionaries who failed, and who were swallowed up in resulting oblivion. For example, Luther has entered History as one of its "Heroes"; whilst Thomas Munzer, a tragic figure worthy of the pen of Aeschylus, a far greater man than Luther, is now known only to a few historical specialists. "Sunt lachrymae rerum"!

In the following paragraphs we glance at the fortunes of a sect; at the men "of the Fifth Monarchy"; which formed part of the "lunatic fringe" of the Reformation and of its resulting sequel, the 17th century English Revolution. When judged by philistine standards of contemporary success, it was not a sect that achieved much. Its "programme," in so far as it had a conscious programme, was not a practicable one in the given stage of social evolution. The contemporaries of Cromwell had it is true, the words of the Bible constantly on their lips. None the less, the Apocalyptic visions of "Daniel" and "John" were not "practical politics" in 17th century England. The English Revolution might conceivably have ended in the reign of "King Cromwell," but not in that of "King Christ," a particular tenet of the "Fifth Monarchy" men.

It is, accordingly, one of the failures, not one of the successful off-shoots of the Reformation at which we are about to glance. The failures of History, however, are frequently more interesting than its officially consecrated successes. Whilst to swim with the stream is more profitable, to swim against it is more difficult, and often more heroic. And this applies to the stream of History. The English Revolutionary era, with whatever faults, was a strong age, it breathed strong air, and it produced strong types; the strongest, indeed, that have ever walked beneath an English sky. The men of that age were in an heroic mould: not least the men of the "Fifth Monarchy of King Christ."

THE LEFT-WING SECTS OF THE REFORMATION

The Reformation, which began as a German, and ended as a European event, had, as already mentioned, its own sub-divisions which themselves corresponded with the social forces inherent in its age. In itself, the Reformation began as a result of the contemporary confluence of two originally quite separate forces: of the religious revolt against the Papacy, the Roman hierarchy and their ecclesiastical and doctrinal system; and of the political and economic revolt against the Feudal system and medieval civilisation in general, which resulted from the contemporary opening-up of the world-market and the consequent growth of a powerful commercial (capitalist) class.

Without the combination of this age-old movement for religious reform, which can itself be traced back to the earliest days of Christianity, and of the simultaneous growth of Capitalism as a result of the Voyages of Discovery of Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Magellan, and their contemporaries, which "put the world—and the world-market—on the map," the Reformation might, indeed, have occurred, but could not have met with lasting success. Those mechanically-minded Marxists who ignore the religious aspect of the Reformation go as far astray as do the traditionally ecclesiastical historians, to whom its contemporary secular history represents merely an irrelevant blank.

As remarked above, the Reformers soon formed separate "wings." Luther allied his movement with the monarchical power. Lutheranism rose and fell along with the fortunes of the German and Scandinavian princes. But it was essentially a "Nordic" philosophy and, as such, was confined to the northern races of Teutonic racial origin and culture. There is much to be said for the view that regards Luther as "the first national socialist" and as the forerunner of Hitler.

Meanwhile, the French bourgeois Calvin, historically the most important of the Reformers, allied his movement with the then revolutionary middle-class, rapidly growing in contemporary wealth and influence, and already in full revolt against medieval restrictions on "usury," and casting greedy eyes on the vast accumulated wealth of the Roman Church.

To be sure, when Calvin declared commercial "profit" to be as "legitimate" as feudal rent, he made the fortune of his movement! God and Mammon joined forces in the Calvinist Church, which, for such was its potent revolutionary role, may be styled with substantial accuracy as "the first international" of the middle-class (bourgeois) revolution. In Holland, Scotland, and (less successfully) in England and France, Calvinism represented the driving-force behind the anti-Catholic, anti-feudal revolutions in the 16th and 17th centuries. The famous aphorism of their deadly enemy, James the First: "No bishop, no King"; accurately indicates the actual contemporary revolutionary role of the Calvinist Churches.

The above movements of Luther and Calvin constitute what may be styled the official, successful, and, as such, "respectable" Reformation: that is, the Reformation of which the academic historians and their popularisers take cognisance. But it was not, by any means, the whole Reformation movement that was enrolled under the respective banners of the Reformers of Wittenberg and Geneva. To the "left" of Luther and Calvin were ranged a host of "ultra-left" sects, often loosely described as "Anabaptists," from the name of the sect which staged the most sensational insurrection of the 16th century, the Anabaptist "Kingdom" of Munster in 1534-5.

To be sure, these "left-wing" sects, who were regarded by the "respectable"—i.e., wealthy and influential classes—with loathing and dread, had also their prototypes, such as the Hussites and the Lollards, in the preceding Middle Ages. But the Reformation, with its theological motto: "The Bible, and the Bible only": had given an enormous impetus to every kind of errant fancy and fantastic belief. For what cannot be plausibly deduced from that vast corpus of Hebrew literature, itself the product of so many and such various cultural levels? And if modern scholars, historically and linguistically equipped to understand the often figurative narratives of the Old and New Testaments, yet frequently arrive at the most various and opposed conclusions, what may we not expect from ignorant and often illiterate enthusiasts, who drew a bewildering assortment of religious, political, and social doctrines from the "inspired word of God"?

And these doctrines, we may add, were social in character almost as much as theological. Themselves the product of an age of economic and social, no less than of theological revolution, the "primitive communism" and literal equalitarianism which the ultra-Protestant sects drew from the Bible, corresponded with the often desperate social situation in which the poorer classes but too often found themselves in that ruthless age of (what Marx was later to term as) "the primary accumulation of Capital." Readers of "Capital" will not need to be reminded of the ferocious exploitation, in the Old World no less than in the New, by means of which the newly-arisen Capitalism of the era of the Reformation laid the economic foundations of the competitive age that was just then dawning.

Upon their social side the Anabaptists and their kind represent the protest of the ruined handicraftsmen and the peasants subjected to the new horrors of capitalist exploitation. In short, it is among the "ultra left" sects of the Reformation that we

find the revolutionary protest of the dispossessed and uprooted social classes of the epoch. But too often, the Apocalyptic Millenniumian Reign of "King Christ" derived its appeal by contrast with the current grim realities of the actual reign of "King Capital."

In Germany the power of the sects was violently broken by the failure of the agrarian revolution inspired by Thomas Munzer in the "Peasants War" of 1525, and by the bloody suppression of the equalitarian "Kingdom" of the Anabaptists in Munster in 1534-5. Where, for a brief space, Europe, Protestant and Catholic equally, stood aghast at the carnival of grotesque heroism and fantastic topsy-turvidom of "the reign of the Saints." The "New Jerusalem" of the Apocalypse for a moment literally realised in the capitalist world of Renaissance finance: the "Paris Commune" of the 16th century.

In the exodus that followed the horrible end of Jan of Leyden, the Anabaptist "King" of Munster, numerous sectarians fled to England, where their influence was soon apparent. For example, in the agrarian revolt of the East Anglian peasants under Ket (1549), the reforms demanded by the English peasants were almost verbally identical with those of the German peasants in 1525.

The following (17th) century saw the Reformation in England reach its peak in the English Revolution of 1640-60. Here, as upon the Continent, the rising middle-class made joint cause with the Calvinist "Puritan" Churches. And, here also, there arose a "lunatic fringe" of "ultra-left" sects, who deduced from a literal reading of the Bible those precise political, religious, and communistic doctrines which actually coincided with the hopes and secular interests of the English poor who made up the bulk of their following.

Of these "left wing" sects, which occupy so to speak, the margin of history in the era of the English Revolution, the millenniumian sects, who announced the proximate Return of Christ and his Universal Reign, formed a kind of extreme "Left." And these millenniumian beliefs themselves crystallised into the doctrines of the "Fifth Monarchy" of the coming Messiah Christ.

Accordingly, before glancing at the brief and stormy career of the sect which derived its name from this millenniumian doctrine, it will be desirable to indicate what was this doctrine of the "Fifth Monarchy," which, like the Anabaptist "Kingdom," if on a smaller scale, was to erupt the doctrines of the social and religious underworld on to the broad highways of history; and in so doing, to become, for a short while, a name of terror to the contemporary rulers of Church and State, and, in general, to the current social order.

F. A. RIDLEY.

(To be continued)

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ACID DROPS

Cardinal Griffin informs us that the only way to make the world better is to bring Jesus into the workshop. But the only account we have of his ability in the workshop is when he was there with his Mother's husband, who found a plank of wood that was not long enough for the work he was doing. Whereupon Jesus took hold of one end of the plank and Joseph the other and stretched the plank to the desired length. If that could be managed nowadays he would be a decided help in the rebuilding that is now taking place. But these gods, and semi-gods, seldom do what is most needed.

Sir H. Spencer Jones recently told some Australians that it is "unfortunate some scientists have taken up an atheistic attitude." What we should like to know is what other attitude could any scientists take? Atheism is a frame of mind that leaves gods and devils out of calculation, and whatever opinions any scientist has about gods and devils they play no part in his calculations. So far as we know anything concerning Sir Spencer Jones, his religion is not in the least connected with his skill as a scientist. Of course, Sir S. J. may have a belief in gods and devils, in heaven and hell, but these have nothing to do with his quality as a scientist, and it is a pity he should mix up his religious beliefs with his scientific knowledge. Religion plays no part in his science, and his science has nothing to do with his religion. It is a pity he does not keep the distinction before him.

Historically, in nearly every scientific discovery for at least the last nearly two thousands years, there has not been one of first-rate quality that has not been opposed by the Christian Churches; and this was done not because the new idea was wrong, but because it ran across the teachings of this or that Christian doctrine. We would suggest to Sir Spencer that he takes his mind through the work of great scientific discoveries and see if he can find one that the Christian Churches have not damned. He could take his search, say, beginning with Copernicus and end with Darwin, and he will find there is not a single instance where the Christian Churches have not condemned them. And, let it be marked, it was not because the new scientific teaching was untrue, but simply that it differed with Christian teaching. The working scientist has often pursued his work with the threat of prison or death for his labours. Science has never met with opposition from Atheism.

The "Church Times" has come to the conclusion that Sunday cinemas are not bad enough to be forcibly suppressed. An editorial note says that, after all, religious services only last a few hours, and there are "far worse places than the cinema for young people." The surrender is neither graceful nor completely honest. There is still the belief that the Churches have some kind of established right to force on the community a course of behaviour that is not believed by them. That is the essential thing to bear in mind. A body of men—the number is not of importance—wish to use the law to prevent people having their own way to spend their spare time as they please. After all, England is not, and never was, a Christian country. The Churches have lived on that lie long enough. The rules that determine conduct should rest on a far better base than a mass of stupid superstitions.

According to Archbishop Downey, it was Materialism that brought about our two world wars. This seems rather odd in view of the fact that the first world war was headed by the German Emperor, who was a very staunch believer in Christianity, and he had the backing of his religious advisers. And if there is one quality of the leader of the second war—and which was worked with a cruelty never before experienced—it was Hitler who had a very definitely strong religious quality. Scores of times he told the world that he was an instrument of God. He was, moreover, a Roman Catholic, and remained such to the end. Another great supporter of the German leader was the Italian ruler. We should imagine that even the Roman Catholics in this country will not readily swallow such an

obviously nonsensical statement as that made by Archbishop Downey. It would be foolish of anyone to attribute the world wars to Christianity only, but it is quite plain that it was quite unable, or disinclined, to prevent them. And it is quite clear that Christianity is not a power that makes for peace and brotherhood. As a peacemaker Christianity is a very decided failure. Hitherto the Churches of all kinds have given their blessings to war. They cannot escape a share of the responsibility for what wars have occurred.

One of the hymns lustily sung throughout almost the whole of the 19th century, and even with appropriate religious fervour in this century, is Hymn 573 in "Hymns Ancient and Modern." Verse 3 is particularly well known:—

"The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And order'd their estate."

That was a very well-known teaching which good Christian leaders of the time took care was rubbed into the "common" people. The Church had a set reminder that it was a religious duty of the poor to be content with the position into which God had placed them—even with little children being sent up chimneys to pull down the soot; and the Methodists, being a strongly knitted body, insisted that its members should not take any part in politics. The authoritative works written by the Hammonds, a little over twenty years ago, will give a good picture of what the world was like in the opening of the last century. We need only add now the Act of Parliament which made two men asking together for an increase of wages to be guilty of "conspiracy," and were often transported for life for so great an offence. We are not surprised that the Rev. C. H. S. Buckley, of Gulval, Cornwall, wants the verse we have just quoted to be completely omitted from the hymn book. But to us these religious hymns are valuable documents with which all should be acquainted.

The Editor of the Roman Catholic "Universe" says that "if the world is not run as God intends it will not run at all." Well, we can understand the world running in a way we do not like, but how can the world stop "running" altogether? Actually, the world did exist for a very long while before Christian God was heard of, and it is fairly certain that the world will "run" long after he is forgotten. The "Universe" should remember that the Christian God was a really late-comer on the scene.

If some good Christians had their way! Here is the Rev. of Barningham, Richmond, who writes expressing his shocked feelings when he finds that the B.B.C. permits "such attractive items" as that which desecrate the sabbath. First, he finds that these things are not all religious. That we believe in, though some of the religious listeners cannot help making people laugh. He winds up his complaints by saying that preachers cannot "hope to compete with Handley." We agree, although clowning and wit are distinct, although there are many who mistake one for the other. But wit and clowning should never be taken as identicals.

Bishop Godfrey Warder, of Lewes, calls on everyone to stand up and support the National Church. Evidently the House of God is in troubled water. It is scandalous that "He knows when a bird falls to the ground" seems quite unaware of the danger threatening His Church. It is just negligence.

The troubles of the godly increase. Here is the Bishop of Southwell who finds that no less than five hundred millions of money is every year spent on betting. But those who go to the racecourse do at least see something for their money, occasionally pull off a prize. But when a man gives his money to the church, he has no surety that God receives it. The Bishop may be mistaken, the people may be mistaken. It is true that the money is meant for God, but who can supply evidence that he gets it? In England, in other matters than religion, getting money as do the priesthood may land a man in prison,

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SUGAR PLUMS

There is no question that the Roman Church is remaining true to its reputation for underhand working. It allows nothing and no one to stand in its way. It also exhibits its skill in placing its followers in "key" positions; whether the position is great or small matters little. We hasten to say that we are not an advocate for brushing aside all attempts to prevent freedom of speech or situation to R.C.s. But that should not prevent all understanding how and where Roman Catholicism works, and the docility with which the followers of the Papacy take orders. There has been quite a number of interesting criticisms of the Papacy published recently, and we now call attention to the pamphlet which bears the title, "Is the Roman Catholic Church a Secret Society?" Well, amongst its writers is Dr. G. G. Coulton, who may be taken as one of our most prominent writers on the history of religion. His major books should be read by all. The pamphlet should also be read. The price is 2s. 6d.

Our Crown Princess is unmarried; she is not, so far as we know, engaged. Quite honestly, although we are not on speaking terms with the young lady, we wish her a happy marriage and healthy children. But it is not the heir that settles whom she may marry. That is a question for the King, and if the princess married unknown to the King, he could set it on one side. The rule is had one. Advice may be given concerning marriage—although that is very often worthless—even dangerous.

Naturally the Roman Church does not like this rule. It was originally created to prevent a Roman Catholic mounting the throne. Catholics have protested against this "insult" to them and now the "Universe" quietly suggests that the situation should be changed. On principle we agree that this snuffing out of certain people from marrying a R.C. is insulting, but to others it is a striking illustration of the truth that a people who rely on Roman Catholic rules are likely to pay dearly for their carelessness.

Sir Richard Acland—since he turned himself into a champion of religion—appears to be trying to see how many foolish things he can say or do. For example, with all the certainty that he does not know what he is talking about, informs the world that "God gave us freedom to do good or bad, free to be careful or careless." Now, how the deuce does he know that? He does know that man is sometimes good and sometimes bad, etc. Clearly if God made a man it was his duty to see that the man knew what he was doing, and why he was doing it. Why even

in our poor fumbling way we try to put a man straight when we find he is turning crooked. More, when a man persuades another to commit an offence he may be punished as one who has taken part in evil. Really Sir Richard's friends ought to induce him to go away to some place where the atmosphere—both scientific and human—is healthier than this country appears to be.

The North London Branch N.S.S. will be holding their Annual General Meeting in the Maison Rose, 23, Junction Road, Highgate, near Archway Tube Station, at 3-30 p.m. on Sunday, March 23rd. The Branch has a fine record of work, and it is hoped that members will attend the meeting to discuss future propaganda.

Leamington Spa Freethinkers willing to help to form a Discussion Circle in that area are invited to communicate with Mr. Robert Williamson at 62, Wathen Road, Leamington Spa.

The impudence of the godly knows no bounds. Gods are, or have been, the most numerous things in existence. There are black gods and white ones, and gods of many other colours. Yet in spite of this enormous mass of gods one here and there has the "face" to say that "I am the only God," or "Thou shalt have no other God but me." We have seen this kind of thing in politics as illustrated by Hitler. He looked round his own nation and decided that he should rule it. Then he moved from country to country until he nearly reached the point of saying that "I am the only ruler, and thou shalt obey my decree, for there is no other ruler but me." And so he went the way that history shows us the gods have gone. Yesterday they ruled the world, then one by one they shrunk into next to nothingness, and today we have just a faint echo of gods who were once everything and today are rapidly becoming just nothing.

HE NOTHING OF RELIGION KNOWS WHO ONLY KNOWS HIS OWN

Some of the older Faiths, very briefly examined

I

BUDDHISM

ABOUT one-third of the human race actually are (as compared with merely being supposed to be) Buddhists, of some sect or other. Buddhism, whose foundations lie, almost hidden, deep in prehistoric Brahmanism, was initiated by Gautama, the last and greatest of all the Buddhas or Wise Men. Gautama Buddha was definitely historic, his time being around 550 B.C.

He persuaded his disciples and early followers to give up their inherited concern with the supernatural, with gods and all their attendant superstitions, prophets, priests and ritual and concentrate on right, i.e., pro-social conduct. He taught that religion was not fear and propitiation of gods or futile worryings about a possible future life, but Karma, or "Doing." "Let us seek after attainable truths, such as the cause of suffering among men and animals, and the path to the cessation of suffering, and avoid assertions about supernatural things of which we can have no knowledge," he said.

Buddha's original teaching makes no mention of gods, spirits, souls, heaven or hell, being purely ethical, but in course of time these superstitions inevitably found their way in from the surrounding Brahmanism.

The famous "Buddhist Beatitudes" reappear in the Christian gospels, very little changed, 500 years later. Buddhism was the first great missionary religion, and it is known that there were Buddhist monasteries in Egypt and Palestine at least 400 years before the first Christian gospels were compiled.

The student of religions very soon comes to realise that the ethics and legends of all religions (including his own) are largely or even entirely borrowings from older faiths, right back to the earliest recorded code of ethics, the Babylonian king Hammurabi's "Book of the Dead," 2140 B.C., and sculptures and inscriptions

right back to 7000 B.C., from which the ancient religious practices can be pieced together.

Gautama taught that what we and animals are, is the result of good or evil actions in this and previous lives. Prayers are useless, it is only our actions that can acquire merit and bring us nearer to Nirvana, the final peace, cessation from all disturbing emotions, a sort of restful oblivion, which Gautama expressly explained was unrelated to any idea of future life or immortality. The meaning of Nirvana is, however, debatable. Buddha was agnostic rather than atheistic, according to most scholars, except that in Ceylon the most ancient Scriptures are definitely atheistic.

"The wise man will avoid women," as being the antithesis of emotionless peace, appears again, more strongly emphasised, in the teaching of the Christian Saint, Paul, who urged even men who already had wives "to be as if they had none" (1 Cor. vii., et alibi), and praises eunuchs.

Gautama preached a kindly tolerance—be persuasive, not dogmatic, urges he to his disciples. Revile not the gods of other men but be gentle in persuasion (cf. Exod. xxii. 28). He recommended "The Middle Way" of life; not one of strenuous seeking after happiness, nor that of mortification and misery, but it will be appreciated that to really understand the inner meanings of a cult, specially a very old one, prolonged studies and much thought are required, the result of which cannot possibly be set out in a few clear cut sentences. Also in Buddhism, as in Christianity, there are very many more or less conflicting sects, so that it would be impossible to give any definition that would be accepted by all Buddhists or all scholars of Buddhism.

On the whole, and disregarding all the priestly locus-poets so dearly loved of the foolish and ignorant, it is a very beautiful, Be-good-and-you-will-be-happy religion, in which there is no caste, all members being equal, although an arch-priest's words are respected on account of his superior religious knowledge. He neither needs nor wears the pompous robes which the Christian prelate finds necessary to his worldly pride. The Burmese version of Buddhism, as practiced today, has been described by eminent scholars as the happiest of all faiths. An Indian census has revealed that only one man in every 38,000 Buddhists is a criminal, compared with one in every 270 European Christians. (As the Buddha said: "The tree is judged by its fruits.")

In the Buddhist Holy Scriptures (much of which would have been strongly condemned by the Teacher himself) it is related that, in accordance with ancient prophesies of a Saviour of mankind, Gautama was born of a virgin called Maya, conceived by a Spirit which came down from heaven in the form of an elephant (sacred animal) and that at this, the final and perfect incarnation, earthquakes and all sorts of miracles took place, flowers bloomed out of season, celestial music was heard by reliable witnesses, etc. The Holy Babe was ushered in by the chief gods (of the older Brahmanism) and four Wise Men, Magi or Kings came to pay homage. As he was born he uttered a shout of victory over the Evil One and the sacred Bo tree under which he was to pass his years of meditation later on miraculously appeared. Years after, as a man, he was led up into a high mountain and tempted of the devil Mara, who offers him dominion over all the earth if he will only give up his mission, but he sits on unmoved.

It is significant that all the characteristic acts and incidents ascribed to the Christian Saviour (except the crucifixion) are recorded of the Buddha, many centuries B.C.

His disciples he bids go forth over all the world as "fishers of men" to spread the doctrine, though he himself confined his wanderings to his native Province.

Many scholars maintain that the missionaries must have reached America, in pre-Aztec times, as many signs have been found there of a mythology closely resembling our eastern legends. Without knowledge opinions are worthless.

M. C. BROTHERTON, Comm. R.N.

GOD IN HOSPITAL

WOULD you believe it? As soon as I arrived at the hospital for my "Op." and entered willingly into the usual formalities I was asked as an afterthought, what religion?

To me, this was asking too much, and under the circumstances of knowing I had already asked for a surgical blessing, I certainly had no intention of asking for a religious one. Had I described myself accurately as an Atheist, I should have been lacking in my psychological studies of Christian servants, to know that as a rule they have been effectively instructed that an Atheist is about the worst person to whom no forgiveness must be shown. In fact, a prayer that such "Enemies of inquiry" may speedily be dispensed with, could not be considered wicked in the eyes of God. But this bright and helpful young lady just passed then hesitated after I had advised her to "strike me out of religion," and briskly struck her pen across the space that would be sufficient for any parson to know that at least, it's most unusual for anyone entering a hospital for drastic attention, not to look to God or his ministers for help.

Then being conducted to the ward, which was not to be entirely a place of comfort or rest, the Sister who received me required an answer to the same question, which I respectfully did; but the "strike me out of religion" to a lady who had been trained according to Christian teaching could only be regarded as an apostasy of this nature to be religiously attended to.

And so once again a stroke with the pen was left on the record sheet, as well as in the safe custody of the innocent enough inquirers.

But when Christians have been ill-informed to the extent of remaining fast to absurd ideas on the one hand, and yet undeniably proficient in skill in their own calling or profession, it shows clearly enough what a pernicious threat is embodied in the whole paraphernalia of religion as a dowry for any bride of Christ.

But I too know the value of obedience and good manners, and with the Sister's stern orders to the bathroom then bed, I complied about the most pleasant way of her telling me to go to bed, which I did.

To be critical over religious matters implies unpleasant connections, just as sure as the Greek prefix "A" dispenses with the necessity of believing in God, in the forming of the word "Atheist."

Are you, stranger to this journal, under the impression that Christianity means all that is noble and good? Do you know that "Belief" has no connection whatever with "Knowledge" or even "Reason"? Therefore belief is quite excusable in people who cannot examine these subjects, and less excusable for those who declare with all the effrontery that they "know" God exists, yet are quite incapable of giving any sort of description or tangible evidence, except irritability through failure. We may just as well expect them to give us a reasonable description of "Nothing," or assist them by suggesting a barrel 'ole without the barrel!

The difficulty lies with all who support the idea of gods, which ever takes their fancy and whichever they may finally choose as the right one, whether physical or metaphysical.

You must not suppose that it is simple enough to be an Atheist for it is quite the reverse. Religious ideas are so indelibly impressed upon the human mind through the slow evolutionary process of millions of years, that it is more or less simply inherited from infancy, and the mental task required to examine let alone remove, is so portentous that it is disturbing to attempt to do so. It is like, as it were, when two rivals meet to debate upon such indelible subjects because beliefs are so commonly impressed that to expect a houseful of Christians to understand the scientific thoughts of an Atheist, sufficient to convince or remove such an indelibility of long standing is simply impossible. Any physician or surgeon will explain this much that to neglect those conditions that are troublesome because

of fear will ultimately become more difficult to deal with, if not impossible. Hence it can only be possible to those who are fortunate enough to understand in time, before the mischief takes permanent root.

When an Atheist meets Christians under the circumstances in which I found myself, it is tantamount to telling them that their ideas are wrong.

Had the Christian impertinence not been impressed upon that simple form to be filled in there would not have been any perplexing or antagonistic feeling set in motion. Therefore, the power of insinuation was lurking not in the minds of those two ladies who were to help bring me back to health and strength, but was the intrusion of religious authority placed in such an innocent way to gain on the affections by gentle and artful means. And so the intimidating intimation that I received—from blazes to bed—was strictly carried out. And on the evening of the first day of my reception, I had the humiliating feeling of being in disgrace.

How could I resent the attitude of these "Angels without wings" whose hard training, excellent manners and kindly assistance to crestfallen patients meant so much?

Their long and busy day about to close, a hymn book was placed upon my bed in common with others; and the Sisters gathered about the pianoed corner where, with due consideration, the hymn was chosen and the keys struck. Now, although a Lord Chief Justice had made it clear that to attack the Christian religion was not a crime in common law, and the House of Lords decision that Christianity is not part of the Law of England and never was, I felt that I was quite justified in at least complaining that if I was expected to join in singing I should also enjoy the right of pointing out that the revenue of the Church was not the beggarly sum it was commonly supposed to be, and therefore a small portion was as indispensable to have this piano surgically attended to, as it was for the right medicine to be administered to a patient. As no one complained, and I was undoubtedly in disgrace, I simply had to have it. It was: "All things bright and beautiful."

Now, there was a lie in music to begin with, and there was I in bed with piles of trouble that would only be too beautiful to be without, and—what's the good of talking?

TIMOTHY THOMAS.

BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

SURELY E. G. Gordon, in his "Don't be a Snowball Man," is approaching his subject from a false angle! How can he assert that "we interpret our future experiences in the language of past experience?" The past is reminiscent, the future, anticipation. We live in the eternal now. Both the past Golden Age and the future Heaven arise in present difficulties. The snowball is an accumulation of re-interpretations. Actually, we re-interpret our past experiences and so, fail to learn from them. Surely the ability to learn from the past is the function of memory. We are not blinded by the past but by the desire to avoid present difficulties.

But perhaps the most fatal error is the suggestion "To place yourself in the other person's position." For that is just what we do. In trying to see the other man's point of view; in placing ourselves in the other man's position; we are still seeing through our own eyes; reading our own feelings and desires into him. That is what the psychologist calls personal projection. To quote Chapman Cohen, we can no more get outside ourselves than we can lift ourselves up by our own brace-ends. Though we are faced with social problems, we see only from a personal standpoint. In the final analysis we come down to personal experience.

It is not a standard of truth that is required, we have had two thousand years search for that; but a method of self-analysis. Logic is a form of self-criticism; it is useful. But the cold logic

of the dismal science is too abstract; it needs to be related to our behaviour; and so far as our feelings and desires are concerned, it is interesting to apply to ourselves the method of hypnosis and suggestion of the alienist or psychoanalyst. It can be done.

Ask questions by all means, and let them be of a personal character; but let us be consistent, and try to understand our own position. There are many question which can be put from a personal angle. Am I a voice or an echo; is this my own opinion or someone else's; do I understand its meaning and implications; is it consistent with my experience; is it consistent with my behaviour; do I understand the social consequences either of my interests or my actions; do I comprehend the nature of the circumstances; do I appreciate the stimulus to which my reactions are a response; am I conscious of my responsibility; to what extent are my reactions unconscious?

To what extent belief is conditioned reflex or choice is an interesting question, but in either case, belief should be suspect. Axiomatic acceptance is no substitute for factual consciousness. In our liability to forget unpleasant experiences; and our future fears; is not the easy acceptance of belief an avoidance of conscious reason? The function of question is to stimulate memory; the need for questions arises in the case with which we forget.

H. H. PREECE.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held March 13, 1917

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair. Also present Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Griffiths, Seibert, Ebury, Lupton, Horowitz, Page, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Manchester, Birmingham, West London Branches and Parent Society.

The Annual Conference this year will be held at Newcastle by invitation from the local N.S.S. Branch. Details of Conference arrangements already made were examined and approved. Mrs. M. Quinton was re-elected as one of the Trustees of the N.S.S. A legacy of £1,000 under the will of the late Sir Julian Cahn was reported. Correspondence from Bradford, Manchester, Halifax and London districts was dealt with. An Agenda committee was formed consisting of Messrs. Griffiths, Lupton, Morris, Hornibrook and Seibert.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, April 17, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 25, 7 p.m.: "What is Poetry?" Mr. JOSEPH BRADDOCK, M.A.

North London Branch N.S.S. (Maison Rose, 23, Junction Road, Highgate, near Archway Tube Station). Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: Members' Annual General Meeting.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Patterns of Culture," Prof. J. C. FLUGEL.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, Great Newport Street, W.C.1).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Religion in the Soviet Union," Mr. J. BARKER.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Open Night.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Freethought and the Young," Mr. COLIN McCALL.

Nottingham Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "A Schoolmaster Looks at his Task," Mr. E. C. MARTIN (Sherwood).

IMPRESSIONS OF 1946

I.

'Tis a short life; at least it's *my* notion,
What's done for Christ is simply hand-loftion.

OLD NOBODADDY GAVE 'EM THE DOUBLE CROSS.—From the notes of Charles Fort, permission of Fortean Society. (P.O. Box 192, New York, N.Y.):—

"July 17, 1820, the people of Schwartz, Tyrol, Switzerland, in churches at annual Day of Thanksgiving for having been spared earthquakes since July 17, 1670, when a violent quake suddenly occurred with great damage." — *London Magazine*, Vol. 2, page 329.

One of the brief notes among the thousands Fort left, now being presented to readers of "Doubt" magazine (Fortean Society) by the secretary, Tiffany Thayer.

I claim it was a nice anniversary, praise the Lord! Since 1670, and for 150 years, mind you . . . until the Lord suddenly waxed wrathly and struck with a vengeance!

The whole town, evidently church and all, were shaken to pieces . . . hundreds buried alive . . . Death stalked . . . on their 150th Anniversary.

(Explanation: Same old bunk . . . they were "giving thanks," but *not hard enough!*), Amen.

THE DREISHER TOMBSTONE.—Theodore Dreisher's last and greatest "The Bulwark" made its appearance this past summer.

This is perhaps the old Battler's best . . . where Religion and Materialism clash. Readers will find this a tough book more or less, turgid in style and ponderous in its craftsmanship. Over all it is a beautiful but melancholy thing, and as per one noted critic, "is a rock-like unity of earnest intelligence; of slow, munching rhythm, but the work of an upright and enduring heart." Head would sound better.

Critics, by the way, ever watchful for our beloved Church, call him a Humanitarian. "The Bulwark" makes a nice tombstone no matter how considered.

VAN PAASSEN—HIGH-POWERED CLERGYMAN.—Under "Religious Book of the Month" banner, and huge puffs from various weeklies and Sunday blurb sections, our Unitarian Minister, Pierre Van Paassen's fifth or sixth book was launched last May. His other books have sold "more than a million copies!"

But Germany is whipped now, so you can save your money. The hero listens to the pastor describe a miserable picture of depraved humanity (the Germans of course), when suddenly hero rushes to organ—*pulls* out the stops—makes organ roar—shouts "Hallelujah!" and everybody's rollin' in the aisles.

Aimee McPherson, of Los Angeles, rolled 'em in the aisles too—and quite literally—and in such a way as to make baby-face Van Paassen look slightly wackier than somewhat.

This book, "Earth Could be Fair," may be nice for some Pollyannas . . . but to my and Cutner's notion, earth would be a lot fairer if there were *less* of such books cluttering up the book stores.

Which reminds me of a friend who recently returned from the war zone. At the time he mustered in (a volunteer, by the way), the Sarg. asked, "What religion?" My friend answered "Unitarian." Where upon Sarg. snapped "Unitarian! Hell, that's no religion!"

MORE MYSTERY!—Just throwing the harpoon, however, slightly into that scarecrow, Wm. Shakespeare, and affiliations of Stratford-on-Avon, Ltd., may I ask why respectable little Denmark tolerates two graves of Hamlet? and he a "Mythical" King!

Once this year (and once was enough) a B.B.C. speaker talking through his nose said, "God planned the Cross before he made the Atom." You should crown this person with a shining brass cuspidor and give Iron Cross . . . send bill to American Asso-

ciation for Advancement of Atheism. Of all "sayings" for 1946 this takes first place on our Special list of Moronic Dopesters.

For second place, that B.B.C. talk on "What are the Churches Doing?" with Little Sir Echo the only one who had the answer "Slipping, Yo Ho!" My friend, Luke McGlook, the Militant Atheist, who I have so much trouble restraining, says "Churches—Doing—can't they stick out the neck any Farther?"

BIBLE PUFF—AND SENSATIONAL NOVELS.—Report given much publicity, as a sort of a Double Threat—"the Bible will long remain the *most widely read book*"—and during the period of the survey (probably in somebody's office)—"the reading of the Bible was equalled, if not surpassed, by the reading of 'Forever Amber' and 'Tree Grows in Brooklyn.'"

What will an American outfit *not* do to puff third-rate trip you ask me? The only thing this survey didn't do was say "and book, *so and so*, has sold in greater numbers than the Holy Bible."

People are beginning to laugh whenever that old horse is dragged in. Every famous book for 2,000 years has been reported by its Champion at sometime or other as "more copies sold than the Holy Bible"—it is time for an alert book firm to change it—"More copies sold than Bibles *given away* by the Gideons Society!" That comparison might fool 'em for another 1,000 years!

AND O LORD, WERE WE HONOURED!—On May 8, your Smiling Cardinal Griffin paid us a visit . . . more properly speaking, called on President Truman, the present incumbent of the White House. Or, perhaps, I should say, the present *occupant*. (The isn't any question about him encumbering it!) Of course, your dear Cardinal called on *our* dear Cardinal, too. But what amazed us the most was the weird new business about the "Era of the Uncommon man" that your dear Cardinal sprang on us. "We were no common man—we, too, must be uncommon men if we are to lead the world." Russians, it would appear, are just common as dirt etc., etc.

Well, Brethren, there's something we like about the Russian—just the same. No high-powered wearer of the Stolen Robes of Rome is going to change things one damn bit.

But God, you're common, you Russians! After reading "The Freethinker" this past year, I'd think your Cardinal Griffin would have his hands full right there in England.

HOME-GROWS PRODUCTS.—Lemurian Fellowship, 118, N. Lombard, Los Angeles, California—some private residence or apartments—itching to send you their "Dynamic Energy Can Be Yours!" Read "Into the Sun"—Did you know Atomic Energy was known to Atlanteans who flew levitation airships with magnetic power? (you didn't!) That America is *Atlantis*—Lemuria returned and returning? (Why you big Dummy!)

If you don't like this one try Ding (as the boys call him) Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., 213, So. Hobart, Los Angeles, California—Inventor of Mental-Physics; the man who walked across the Grand Desert in answer to a strange call from but the silence of the cosmos. The man who sat at the feet of the Grand Canyon and saw Llana Land; who absorbed wisdom till he just couldn't hold any another drop. (That's right, Luke—now pour me one.)

And then there's dear Doctor Frank Robertson, Archbishop of Psychiana, of Moscow, Idaho, who *talks with God*. Try this sucker; let dear Dr. Robertson tell you about "Power in the air you breathe." But he doesn't tell you about what happens when you ain't got no more breath to breathe—or what happens when the Power House cuts off the air! No, sir. That would be *too* wouldn't it, Doctor? (Anyhow, Brethren, Doc will sure pour on for you a ha'penny post card.)

RICHARD ROE (U.S.A.)

(To be continued)

MATERIALISM RESTATED. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.