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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Religion

Of all the "blessed" words that have helped people to tell or act a lie, "Religion" stands first. Next to that comes "Agnostic." That word we owe to the first Huxley. He was a fine speaker, a clear thinker, a witty man, and a good working scientist. Of "Agnostic" all we can say is that it was one of those "blessed" words that helps one to appear to say something when it is really nothing. Agnostic is derived from "Gnostic," which meant much knowledge about God, and it gave Huxley much to play with. What Huxley did was to add the letter "A" to the Gnostic, which gave nothing to something, and some people felt they knew all about it. That "A" did, however, help to put "Atheist" aside. To-day the robe round the cloak of Agnosticism is getting very shabby. Pioneers have swept the main religious road clean, but here are many side roads that still need cleaning.

But for a good all-round empty word, take "Religion." It stands high, it means nothing definite—it may be good or bad, it fits either God or Satan. In order to disarm our religious friends, a man may claim to believe in the religion of Socialism, the religion of Ethics, or a religion of duty. I once even heard a confession of the religion of Free-thought. I cannot recall anyone embracing the religion of Atheism, but it may come. If we could get to that point, its very absurdity might lead to a more sensible use of words. For to believe in everything is to end in believing in nothing. The value of words depends upon definiteness of meaning.

In this matter, I would call for evidence from Locke, who, writing in the seventeenth century, said:—

"It is impossible that man should ever truly seek, or certainly discover, the agreement or disagreement of ideas whilst their thought flutters about, or stick only in sounds of doubtful and uncertain significance."

I am quite sure that if that lesson were taken to heart, quite a number of common terms and sayings in both religion and politics would soon begin to wither. In action they are just counterfeit coins which assume to be of value. The evil of these verbal counterfeits is that they deceive those who use them. While on this point, we suggest that while we have reform in mind, it would make for much that is good if, in our upper schools, a liberal use of such books as Ogden's "Meanings of Meanings," and "Tyranny of Words," by S. Chase was compulsory. A serious study of words in schools would, it is true, disturb our political and religious leaders, members of Parliament and editors of newspapers, but one cannot get reforms without sacrificing something.

What good, then, is possible in a common use of "religion" in writing or conversation? A marked func-

tion of words is to *exclude*. Thus, to say that a thing lives, tells us very little. To say it is a mammal gives us more definite information. To say that it is human, makes the information more definite, and so forth. The people who seem to spend most of their time lamenting that they cannot decide this or that, are of little use to anyone; they are harmless to themselves. How deep is the misuse of language is seen when we find so clear a brain as Tom Paine, saying "To do good is my religion." Religion has never made a man good, but it has often made men worse than they would have been without it. There is a very good passage in one of John Stuart Mill's books which is worth remembering:—

"A name not infrequently passes from one object to another, until it becomes applied to things that have nothing in common with the first to which the name was given. It becomes a confused bundle, the parts having nothing whatever in common. When words have fallen into this state, they have become unfit for the purpose of either thought or of the communication of thought."

The real truth is not that religion has developed morals, but that absurdities of religion have been cloaked by the common sense of decency. Morality is not something that Man has discovered and then uses it as he might a new form of food. A child does not require an understanding of food before taking its mother's milk. The value and practice of herd life is not something that is taught in its commencement. "Good" and "bad" were not invented by a teacher from either heaven or earth. The fundamental qualities of human life began with the existence of herd life, and a very long term must have passed before Man was inquisitive enough even to consider the significance of "right" and "wrong." At any rate, there was not any kind of a godly revelation which taught man to obey the lines that were followed by the primitive semi-human herd. The story of the Frenchman who discovered, to his great surprise, that he had been all his life talking prose without knowing it, has its value.

I think I may profitably depart somewhat from my theme. He must be a very ignorant man—but more likely a very cunning one—who argues that we must believe in Christianity because of the moral teachings of Jesus. Let us, then, assume that Jesus came telling Man what was right and what was wrong, and that until his coming there was no appreciation of right and wrong. But the advice once given is given for ever. It is independent of the author. Whether Jesus was the first man to teach right and wrong simply does not matter. It is one of those claims set down by the Christian Churches and to which one Christian lie more or less does not matter.

To get back to the historical association of religion. Matthew Arnold said religion was "Morality touched with emotion," and that amounted to nothing. The man who

breaks into a house for the purpose of theft is also moved by emotion. Emotion may be excited for either honesty or its opposite. In fact, one might well say that the emotion of a burglar as to whether he will "get away with it," will be as real as any emotion that may be excited. I have noted half a dozen well-known men—or more if they were wanted—who give us the same definition of religion. In fact, judging from common usage, anything that suits anybody will do. I think that if Freethinkers decided on giving the world a much-needed dose of mental clarity, "Morality" would give a very good starting point.

In fact, no real definition of religion can fit in with "Morality." And in sober truth, Christianity, along with primitive religious beliefs, was not primarily concerned with morals. The early stages of religion never are. So far as civilised language is used, religion is neither moral nor immoral. It is simply non-moral. Early religion—with which we may count Christianity—is not concerned with the moral quality of its gods. The primitive mind has no moral reverence for them. The gods are there and they must be obeyed. The essential feature in religions—it is so to-day—is *belief*. On the other hand, the essential thing about morality is *practice*. Human morality is a development of habits and instincts that began in the semi-animal world, and it is precisely because morality rests upon a deeper and sounder basis than religion, that it ultimately overcame all forms of religion.

If then, we are to use the term "religion" in its proper sense, we must object to it bearing the sign of "Morals." That means playing with loaded dice. Nothing is gained by calling morality a religion, except that it helps to keep alive ideas that are obviously false. People will understand us the better, and in the long run will treat us with respect. No decent man or woman really loves a liar. An honest man shrinks from him. The other class view him with jealous eyes.

The curious and instructive thing is that "religion" appears to be better understood by the mass than by the few. When ordinary folk refer to "religion" they have in mind the supernatural form, when they talk of "spirits," they mean again, something of the same essence—they mean supernaturalism, not a distorted morality. For my part, I think that Tylor's definition of religion is the best, and the most honest, "Belief in spiritual beings." If readers will keep to this, they will avoid much confusion.

I have already quoted from Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding." I will venture another. Of language, he says:—

"Being the great conduit whereby men convey their discoveries, reasonings, and knowledge from one to another, he that makes an ill use of it, though he does not corrupt the fountain of knowledge, which is in things themselves, yet he does as much as in him lies to break or stop whereby it is distributed to mankind. He that uses words without any clear and steady meaning, what has he but led himself and others into error? And he that designedly does it, ought to be looked upon as enemy to truth and knowledge."

Had these words been read and understood by all who misuse the word "religion," men would be better on their guard when they talk about religion. But it is worth noting that the greatest sinners in the matter we have been discussing are not the ordinary man, but the priests and

heads of Churches, of people who are terribly anxious to gain converts for this or that school. What many writers and leading Churchmen have been doing is to deceive people by playing with words. It is this pseudo-homage to "religion" that has brought the timid ones to heel. If people really believe in "some sort" of religion, they should say so, openly and boldly. If we do not believe in religion, let us be clear in expressing our opinions. This is a duty to ourselves and others—but first to ourselves.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CELTIC MYTHS AND MARVELS

WITH his learned treatise, "The Magic Arts of Celtic Britain" (Rider, 1945, 18s.), Lewis Spence has supplied a long felt want. In addition to the occult superstitions of the Celtic communities he examines the problem of Druidism, the Arthurian Cult with its legend of the Holy Grail, and the romantic tales that have clustered round the Coronation Stone at Westminster.

The story of the Grail, so intimately associated with Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, is instructive. According to Christian tradition, the Grail was the identical dish used by Jesus when celebrating his Last Supper with his disciples. When this sacred vessel arrived in Britain it soon vanished, and the recovery of this lost treasure was the chief task undertaken by the Arthurian knights.

This tale has come down to us in its Christian form, yet it bears indelible traces of its heathen ancestry. In the opening years of the 13th century there appeared in England a work entitled the "Grand St. Grail," manuscript copies of which are preserved in the British Museum and at Cambridge. This writing alleges that Joseph of Arimathea, who witnessed the crucifixion of Christ, became most anxious to obtain some memento of him. So he repaired to the place where the Last Supper was eaten and secured the receptacle used by the Saviour at the meal. Joseph then begged the body from the Roman Governor for interment. His request was granted and the corpse was laid in a sepulchre, but the blood which still ran from it was drained into the holy dish, ever after to be venerated as the San Greal.

We then learn that the Jews were so scandalised by Joseph's conduct that they cast him into prison where he was miraculously nourished by the contents of the sacred Grail. There the crucified one appeared in person to the prisoner and assured him of his ultimate release when he would carry the Saviour's message to far-off climes. Yet forty years elapsed before Joseph regained his freedom when, with five followers, he set forth on his mission bearing the Grail in a wooden ark. After many strange visions and adventures the party reached Britain, at that time shrouded in the rankest heathenism. Some benighted Britons accepted baptism, but those who refused it were drowned in a heaven-sent flood. A Tower of Marvels arose over their remains, and it was asserted that a ruler named Arthur would reign in the land.

Joseph's spouse bore a son called Galahad, and then several new characters were added to the tale which acquired other versions. One of these fictions contains an account of Joseph of Arimathea's journey from Southern France to Wales with his and his companions', settlement at Glastonbury where they erected a sacred edifice and converted the natives to Christ.

As Lewis Spence cogently concludes: "If we carefully examine the elements of the romances proper, as apart from the Christian tradition that interpenetrates them, we shall find that these are almost entirely from Celtic pagan sources. In short, they display a series of themes and ideas reflexive of Celtic pagan factors. A good deal of nonsense has been written concerning the profundity of the Christian mysticism which inspires the Grail legend, and there can be little doubt that Tennyson, Richard

Wagner and others are responsible for much of the pious glamour which hangs about it. . . The pious folk who transformed the Grail legend into a Christian tradition caparisoned it with the traditions of Christian myth at a period when that was inspired by the most grovelling and absurd superstitions—beliefs so basely ignorant that they could be credited, then or to-day, only by ritualists of the most retrograde type."

One outstanding variant of the Grail story relates how Brons guards the sacred dish, an office to which his descendants succeed. This Brons, as Spence indicates, bears a striking resemblance to an ancient Celtic deity named Bran who possessed a mystic vessel as well as a magic cauldron which restored the dead to life. Welsh tradition makes him the protagonist in a conversion story from which Bran derived the title of the Blessed. Spence opines that these and kindred coincidences "reveal the gradual development of the Christian saint from the pagan god."

Another ill-founded fancy assigns an Irish origin to the Coronation Stone in Westminster Abbey and supposes that it was conveyed to Scotland by the victorious Irish from the famous Hill of Tara. This still cherished tradition Spence unreservedly rejects. "The Coronation Stone, as we know it," he avers, "can most definitely be proved to have been in existence in the Royal Scottish demesne at Scone in the thirteenth century, being housed, in all probability, in the Abbey there . . . until it was removed by Edward I to Westminster in the year 1296."

As for the basis of the belief in the Stone's transportation from Erin, it seems that Baldred Bissett, a member of a Scottish Commission sent to Rome in 1301 to submit to the Pope a plea for Scottish independence, was the first to assure us that the Stone was carried to Ireland by Pharaoh's daughter, the Princess Scota. Then, this mythical Egyptian lady brought the Stone to Scotland and conferred on that country its present name.

This tale was not officially sanctioned until 1321 and then, as a reason for the preservation of Scottish independence from English domination. But by 1355, a story circulated concerning the son of a Spanish monarch who ruled in Erin, having transported the Stone upon which Spain's kings were crowned to Ireland. Later, so ran the story, this Stone was deposited at Scone by a chieftain named Fergus. Then a Scottish chronicler, writing subsequently, embellished the fable by making the Spanish king's son a lineal descendant of Pharaoh's daughter, Scota.

Other accounts of this alleged occurrence soon circulated, and the Scottish Minstrel, Blind Harry, averred that the Stone was removed from Iona to Scone by Malcolm Canmore. More fabrications were then scattered abroad, and all found fanatical adherents. As Spence judiciously observes: "In the nineteenth century, McCulloch in his 'Western Isles of Scotland' remarked that the Coronation Stone bore a strong resemblance to that which crowned the doorway of Dunstaffnage Castle. Almost at once a rumour arose that it had actually been removed from that building, and the very space from which it had been taken was solemnly pointed out."

Most antiquaries are now convinced that the tradition of the Stone's transference from Dunstaffnage to Scone, and the tale that the Stone of Destiny and that of Scone are identical must be dismissed as untrue, for the plain reason that the Stone deposited on the Hill of Tara still stands there.

Apart from the clear testimony of archaeology, geological evidence sustains the conclusion that the Coronation Stone at Westminster originated locally. Spence cites the authority of the distinguished geologist, Professor Geikie, who stated: "I do not see any evidence in the Stone itself why it might not have been taken from the neighbourhood of Scone; indeed, it perfectly resembles the sandstone of that district." Another eminent authority, Professor A. C. Ramsay, concluded that the Stone could easily have been of purely local origin, or come from any part of Scotland where red sandstone exists.

Lewis Spence notes that the "even more absurd story that it was the stone on which Jacob pillowed his head while sojourning in the desert was the invention of one, Rishanger, an English chronicler of the thirteenth century."

Stones, and even more, the spirits that were supposed to reside in them, evidently played a prominent part in Celtic popular belief. These invisible influences were endowed with far reaching powers for good or ill. Thus, as Spence urges: "Edward I of England, that highly romantic and superstitious monarch, had the best of occult reasons for carrying off the stone from Scone to Westminster, for he believed it to be the habitation of an oracular spirit which advised the Scots both politically and in a military sense. This is clear enough in the terms of a poem in doggerel Latin which is to be found in the Bodleian Library, and a rough translation which avers that:—

"In Egypt Moses preached to the people saying
That Scotia, the fairy maiden, who is the stone,
Told of the strange manner in which the land should be
conquered."

Apparently, the proud Spirit of Scotland was believed to be inseparable from the sacred Stone whose inspired utterances were prophetic both of impending prosperity and disaster. The occult powers attributed to stones, regarded as the habitations of benign or malevolent spirits, date back to primitive times, while attenuated forms of this superstition still survive in rural retreats in all parts of the British Isles.

T. F. PALMER.

I BELIEVE

I believe in the magic of a spring morning; in the frail beauty of a butterfly's wing; in the song of birds and in the ripple of the running brook.

I believe in the soft wind that caresses the cornfield; in the curling white caps on blue waters and in the fury of the storm that breaks upon the sea shore.

I believe in all the beauty and the ugliness, the strength and the gentleness of Nature; in the wonders of the Universe, the starry skies, the gold and purple sunsets and the still, grey, dewy dawns.

I believe in all that is real and good and true in this world—in all that remains untouched by the defiling hand of Man.

So give me Reason in place of Blind Belief:
Tolerance in place of Narrow Convention:
Understanding in place of Ignorant Superstition.

Let us love all men of all races, colours and creeds. Let us help all those who are afflicted and comfort those in distress. Let us harm nobody by Thought, Word or Deed.

These are the Golden Rules. Let us believe in them and try to abide by them—for in all the religions of the world you will find no better creed.

W. H. WOOD.

A SPIRITUAL POOL

The Catholic Church manages to keep a very watchful eye on wherever money is to be found, so that it is not surprising to find a football pool is about to be launched by a Fr. Leay, "to raise funds for new schools and rebuilding bomb damaged ones." Of course, some Bishop has to give his sanction, but for such a holy cause that should not be difficult. We wonder what would happen if some confirmed Atheist or unmitigated Materialist wins one of the big prizes? It would be an awful thought if he spent the money on riotous living, or gave it to the N.S.S. to help fight the Roman Catholic Church. But there are never roses without thorns.

ACID DROPS

The Reverend Hutchison Cockburn fills two and a half columns of the "British Weekly" lamenting the degree to which division exists among Christians. But was there ever a time when professing Christians were not more or less divided? If the New Testament is to be trusted, quarrelling began directly Jesus had followers, and after his death, the number of different versions of the "true creed" increased with the rising of the Sun. There are now actually somewhere in the neighbourhood of three hundred different Christian sects, each of them certain that it holds the right version of God's will. Imagine what would happen if each person in a firm gave a different version of goods sold and money received. No wonder that God, according to our churches, stopped sending messengers from heaven to earth.

The Archbishop of York has decided that "a jump forward must be made if mankind is to avoid self-destruction." He also adds that there must be a synthesis between religion and science. The impudence of this is sublime, and only a parson would venture it. A "synthesis" means putting things together, the important thing is that there must be something like unity, or agreement, between things, to create a real synthesis. But what have religion and science in common? Religion did try to "boss" things, and told us how man came into existence. But that has been completely destroyed. There is not a single account of things "given by God" that has not been very "shaky." And now, if we are to trust the Archbishop, the whole of our religious nuisances are to join hands with science. For downright impudence, give us some of the humble servants of God.

The Vicar of Golston has discovered that there has been a drift from religion in the last three decades. That will not do. A decade is ten years, and to say that Christianity has been declining for thirty years will not fill the bill. In sober truth, it began with the dawn of science. When Copernicus took the earth round the sun, instead of letting the sun go round the earth, all the churches in the world grew dizzy. Then new ideas began to grow with increasing rapidity, and the steady decay of real Christianity began to assume the character of a torrent.

Really the clergy have our sympathy. If they are to live, they must go on lying. If they go on lying they must go on losing, and if they go on losing they will sink into nothingness. It is a terrible situation. The clergy must lie to live, only to discover that they are digging their own graves. Instead of their being pleased to bring their religion to the front, they try to disguise it as much as they can. It is very easy to fool a body of people, so long as the fooling is amusing. But when it ceases to be even interesting the decay gains rapidity. The world in which we are living is not the one that Jesus knew. In fact, the world that we know would hardly permit a God to exist. Even the B.B.C., which for primitivism is first where religion is concerned, is feeling the clean air of commonsense.

The stupidity of the very, very religious, and the profound believer in god and his angels almost leads one to write down "deliberate liars." Here is an example. A man smashed a statue of St. Joseph on the head of a woman. But the plaster statue broke over the woman's head, and after a cut was stitched she was quite all right. The father, a Colonel, explained that the statue was the Patron saint of the house. That seems to explain everything, but we must say that the "Daily Express" published this item of news, and if a newspaper manager should not understand the quality of his patrons who should? We had almost forgotten to mention that the "Express" printed a good sized picture showing the woman holding the broken statue. That established its truthfulness.

Quite a lot has been said in our religious journals recently about the way in which parsons and priests "gabble" their prayers, and we must confess our sympathies are with the gabblers. How can any sane person read out the incredible tosh waffled to God Almighty slowly without laughing? By gabbling

them one need not dwell on their nonsense and thus can keep a straight face. Archbishop Downey admits that "rapid utterances tend to make a preacher swallow his own words." But that might be a very good thing to both God and the audience. God, surely, does not need to listen to everything that is said, and one can note the feeling of relief of the worshippers when the preaching is all over.

As a result of the recent storms, the Rector of Clifton Parish Church has given notice that on a particular Sunday he will read out the name of every farm in the parish, with the number of the acres. Then prayers will be offered for these farms, and for them only. Nothing could be fairer than this. The Rector is just reminding God that he is not behaving himself as he should. The farmers have done what they could to get good crops, and the rest was left with God. And he has either done nothing or has amused himself in watching valuable foodstuff being destroyed. We quite appreciate that heaven must be a deadly dull place, but that is not justification for destroying good food by way of enjoyment.

According to Doctor P. M. Herbert, Bishop of Norwich, "God is calling us to evangelise England." So far as we are concerned we honestly can say that we have neither heard God or seen him. A number of different people have been floating about and they said God had called them, but we have only their word for it, and others, who claim to be in contact with God, say that he never called any of the others. It looks as though what we need is a document—with an unmistakable message from God as to what he wishes us to do. Up to the present what we get is a number of messengers from God and all of them say that all the messages except theirs are just bunkum. It is really astonishing how God manages to "nug" his messages to man. The vast majority never hear what he says, or they cannot make out what he means.

The Rev. F. C. Baker is the chaplain to the Lord Mayor. He finds that London is full of all kinds of wickedness—pools, dog racing, gambling, etc., and he says that some people have wrongly said this is a pagan country. But, the good Baker says, that is not true, for Pagans had a god, and we only think of prize-fighting and gambling and dog racing. Poor London, poor God, who is run short of worshippers, and poor Rev. F. C. Baker who has lived to see his God have less attractiveness to the attendants at dog racing, etc.

Archdeacon Fitz-Herbert has made a discovery. He says that the decay of Church-going is a symptom, not a disease. Things must be in a very bad state when that is offered by the way of making Christians feel more satisfied with the state of religion. "Disease" stands for an abnormal state of health leading to illness. A "symptom" stands for a perceptible change of an organ indicating a development of disease. In this reading religion is suffering from disease, and the symptom here is that it will go on suffering until it meets with death. The archdeacon is trying to comfort us with a religion that is getting weaker and weaker. That does not look very cheerful for Christians who are down in the mouth. But we suppose Christian leaders must say something.

Whichever way the tide of Atheism runs, there is one fact that should not be slackened—it should be intensified. We are hearing so much about liberty for Man that we should make it certain there is freedom for children. Cleanliness of the body should accompany cleanliness of the mind. Children should be made to feel the importance of forming their own opinions. It is not altogether a bad thing to get children to realise that life is not completely cakes and wine. At present, large numbers of parents seem to delight in children thinking as they themselves do. If Freethinkers really believe what they say they should put it into practice. A start should be made at home. Independence of thought is to be built by growth. It is a sad thing when one has to meet it when children have grown to mean women.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Here is a last-minute reminder to delegates and members of the N.S.S. attending the N.S.S. Conference at Newcastle-on-Tyne on Whit-Sunday to bring either delegates' credentials or current proof of membership for admission purposes to the business sessions. Only members of the N.S.S. can attend those. There are three functions at which friends as well as members can attend. There is the reception at the Crown Hotel, Clayton Road, on Saturday evening, May 24, at 7-30 p.m.; Afternoon tea in The News Theatre, Pilgrim Street, at 5-30 p.m. on Sunday afternoon, May 25; and the Public demonstration in the same theatre, at 7 p.m. Sunday evening. Mr. Chapman Cohen will preside at the evening demonstration and a number of well known speakers will be in support.

In our last issue we printed a lengthy extract of Heine's picture of the birth and death of the Christian deity. Now a friend has informed me that we have printed this before. That is not quite true since we printed only a part of the finest, the greatest picture that anyone has given of the birth, the growth and the bell that marked the demise of Jehovah. This time we gave the full text of the passage, and we are sure our readers will be pleased to get it. It was a great picture of a great man telling of the death of an ungreat God. And we hope that no one will bother with the information that "ungreat" is not good English. I wish that we plead guilty in following the habit of Shakespeare. A man who never coins a new word never ought bother to write. He can have little insight of life.

By-the-way, we see that the B.B.C. has now agreed to let there be a mild disbelief on religion. Commencing on May 13, we brought forward the first of a "What I Believe" series. It was an address by a Professor of Moral Philosophy. It was the poorest thing—even as an address—that we have listened to for a long time. Now we are waiting to see how far the two million believers—there are only two, with eight or nine religionists—will take so much that would bite, and so turn a strong drink into a glass of sugar and water. We do not expect the B.B.C. will publish these in "The Listener."

Our contemporary "John O'London's Weekly," like so many journals even at this day, is always ready to print anything against Thomas Paine—and, no doubt because of the success of

Woodward's "Tom Paine," inserted an extract from the "Diary of Stephen Grellet" sent in by the Rev. T. B. Wilmot in which we are told that Paine, when dying, said that he wished he had thrown the "Age of Reason" into the fire: "for if the devil has ever had any agency in any work, he has had it in writing that book." This is the deliberate lie told by a servant maid called Mary Roscoe and was fully exposed in Conway's "Life of Thomas Paine."

Our valued contributor William Kent immediately challenged the reverend gentleman's statements, but his letter was cut—of course. It is always sad to admit that lies can still be circulated about Thomas Paine, and still sadder to have to retract. However, the salient points in Mr. Kent's letter were published, but we are quite confident that when occasion permits the same lies will be trotted out and, under a clerical signature, will always be given space for the sake of good old Christianity.

NEW GUINEA MIRACLE

WHEN I reached Rabaul, Territory of New Guinea, in 1921, the township was the capital of the many islands, just to the north of Australia which had formerly constituted German New Guinea. The township was on a reclaimed swamp (*Ra—the; baul—swamp*); the streets were straight, thick dust during drought and muddy lanes during the rains; Mount Mother (*Kombiu*), an extinct volcano, rose about three thousand feet from where the streets ended, and the Crater, a few miles away, always active, providing warmth for the bush-hen's eggs, at irregular intervals belched sulphuretted hydrogen over the town, causing men to look involuntarily at the soles of their shoes.

In 1934, the Crater and Volcano Island, in Rabaul Harbour, erupted. The Crater almost buried Rabaul in dust; and Volcano Island rose a thousand feet, belching mud for twenty miles.

That must have frightened the *Duk-duk* (Dook-dook).

Then in 1942, the Japanese came to Rabaul and dug in, tunnelling everywhere. Then the bombs came from Australian and American fliers. The Rabaul of German and Australian days disappeared in bomb craters and Japanese fox-holes. If the *Duk-duk*, a terrifying creation in the native's eyes, survived all that, it must have come of very healthy stock.

The cassowary is a silly bird, a flightless bird. In the jungle it stares at you, then races away, making a noise like a flat tyre, *dook-dook-dook-dook*. I never located the trouble, but guessed that it was either the bird's crop, or its empty stomach, flapping as it ran.

That is how the *Duk-duk*, a widely-spread ceremony in New Guinea, got its name. It was first accurately described by Dr. George Brown, the Methodist missionary who landed in the Duke of York Islands, near Rabaul, in 1874. He regarded it as a secret society with blackmailing activities, and so, too, did the German Government. The picture is confused. In my magisterial work in the Rabaul area I found some instances of *Duk-duk* terrorism, and I feel that in the days when the natives governed themselves it was the *Duk-duk* groups which provided the driving-force, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil, like Tammany in New York. That eminent Roman Catholic, the late "Scarface" Al Capone, would have been proud of it.

Important for theologians is the more-than-miraculous procreation of each season's *Duk-duks*. The Christian missions brought the Bible story of the miraculous procreation of Jesus, the Holy Ghost for father and Mary for mother; but that was only small potatoes when pitted against the procreation of the *Duk-duk*.

Each year, during the south-east monsoon, when fine weather may be expected, the framework of last year's *Duk-duks*, which has been kept in a sacrosanct building on land which is *tabu* to women, is redecorated with cane-leaves and the conical mask repainted. A feast is prepared, not because a star is about to

rise in the east, but because two female *Duk-duks* are to co-operate and bring forth young, the *Duk-duks* for the current season.

Rabaul has been under Christian influence for about seventy years; but the *Duk-duk* was not suppressed. Perhaps it offered a taller miracle than the Christian one.

One morning at dawn I saw the birth of the *Duk-duks* near Rabaul. Two effigies, smaller than the male ones, came ashore from canoes. Then all the *Duk-duks* sprang to life and danced, or, rather, strode like cassowaries, two black legs protruding from a neck to knee mass of cane-leaves surmounted by a dunce's cap. It was a bird dance, an imitation of a cassowary's striding and stamping.

The Rabaul magistrate always learned in advance of the *Duk-duk's* coming. It came from a trader each year, who was registering the annual commercial protest against the ceremony. When the *Duk-duk* season was near, the natives ceased selling coconuts, saving them for the feast; and that meant that commerce had to do without copra until the miraculous birth had taken place.

The *Duk duk* greatly amused the white section of New Guinea. The local Freemasons, who always wore a tropical dinner suit at their meetings—and looked like drink-waiters—were dubbed the "Duk-duk Society," and the clothing the "Duk-duk suit." When dressing for a formal affair, the command to one's valet, "Clothes Duk-Duk," was enough; and the white jacket, stiff collar, dress shirt, cummerbund and black trousers duly came.

And still some people believe the Bible story. Which goes to prove that the age of miracles still drags on.

New South Wales.

B. C.

A WOMAN PIONEER

II.

SHOCKED by this state of affairs Ernestine hastened to Albany in the winter of 1836-37, and personally circulated a petition in the State capital for a law to enable a married woman to hold property. People laughed at her, and all the signatures she could obtain after much trouble were five; yet nothing daunted, she presented the petition to the New York Legislature, which took no action in the matter. She continued for eleven years to send petitions until she brought about the adoption of a Bill which conferred upon married women the right to their own wages, and to equal guardianship of their children. The following incident related by L. E. Barnard (the chief source of these informations regarding her) gives an idea of her courage. At a public meeting in the Broadway Tabernacle, to consider the necessity of an improved system of Free Schools, J. S. Buckingham, M.P. from England, and Rev. Robert Breckenbridge were among the speakers. Mrs. Rose called the Rev. Gentleman to order for violating the sense of the audience by overlooking the important object which had called the audience together, and indulging in a violent clerical speech to attack a class whom he stigmatised as infidels. This bold challenge to the prerogative of the clergy by a woman caused a tremendous excitement. Loud cries of "Drag her out, she is an infidel," resounded in the hall. She, however, held her ground, calm and collected, while the tumult lasted, after order was restored, continued her remarks in a most dignified manner. In 1852 she attended the Woman's Rights Convention at Syracuse, N.Y. She was introduced as "a Polish lady, who had been educated in the Jewish faith," and her presence was pointed to as proof of the universality of woman's demand for equality. She responded with a powerful speech indicative of her cosmopolitanism, "It is of very little importance in what geographical position a person is born, but it is important whether his ideas are based upon facts that can stand the test of reason, and his acts are conducive to the happiness of society yet, being a foreigner, I hope you will have some charity on

account of speaking in a foreign language. Yes, I am an example of the universality of our claims, for not only American women, but a daughter of crushed Poland, and the downtrodden and persecuted people called the Jews, pleads for the equal rights of her sex."

After this gracious bow to the Convention, she got down to business by introducing a resolution that woman asks for her right not as a gift of charity but an act of justice' and that any discrimination in civil rights on account of sex, is in direct violation of the principles of justice, etc. The resolution was adopted.

For the Freethinker. Some passages from a speech, entitled "A Defence of Atheism," will serve to give an idea of her style as an orator—a style which was pointed, logical and impassioned—turning to the story of Creation as related in the Book of Genesis—the same book which involved her in such difficulties when she was a little girl—she goes on to say: "Having finished in five days, this stupendous production, with its mighty mountains, its vast seas, its fields and woods, supplied the waters with fishes, from the whale that swallowed Jonah to the little Dutch herring which the Russian mujik is consuming; peopled the woods with inhabitants, tigers, lions, bears, the elephant with its trunk, the dromedary with his hump, the deer with its antlers, the nightingale with her melodies, down to the serpent which tempted Mother Eve; covered the fields with vegetables, decorated the gardens with flowers, hung the trees with fruit. And surveying this glorious world as it lay spread out like a map before him, the question naturally suggested itself, what was all for, unless there were beings capable of admiring, appreciating, and of enjoying the delights this beautiful world could afford? And suiting the action to the impulse, he said, 'Let us make man.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them. I presume by the term image we are not to understand a mere resemblance of form, but in the image or likeness of his knowledge, his power, his wisdom, and perfection. Having thus made he placed him in the Garden of Eden, and bade them, with a single restriction not to eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, to live, to love and to be happy. What a delightful picture, could we only rest here. But did these beings fresh from the land of omnipotent wisdom, in whose image they were made, answer the great object of their creation? Alas, no, no sooner were they installed in their Paradisean home than they violated the first, the only injunction given them, and fell from their high estate; and not only they, but by a singular justice of the very merciful Creator, their innocent posterity to all coming generations, fell with them. Does that bespeak wisdom or perfection in the Creator or the creature? But what was the cause of this tremendous fall which frustrated the whole design of the creation? The serpent tempted mother Eve, and she, being a good wife, tempted her husband. But did God not know when he created the serpent that it would tempt the woman, and that she was made out of such frail materials (the rib of Adam) that not to be able to resist the temptation? If he did not know then his knowledge was at fault; if he did, but could not prevent that calamity, then his omnipotence ceased to function; if he could and would not then his goodness comes under the same question. Choose which you like and it remains fatal to the rest." Having thus disposed of the O.T. Cosmos, she proceeds to pay her respects to the New Testament. Having failed to purge mankind of sin by means of the deluge God, according to the New Testament, finally sent his only begotten son "Jesus, in order that by his death on the cross he might save the world." But, asks Mrs. Rose in a fine biting sarcasm, did he succeed, even then? If the world saved? Saved, from what? From ignorance? From all around us. From poverty, crime, sin, shame and misery. It abounds everywhere. Look into your poor houses, your prisons, lunatic asylums; contemplate the whip, the instrument of torture and of death; ask the murderer, or his victim, from the raving of the maniac, the groans of despair, the cruel death

of the tyrant, the sufferings of slavery, etc., etc. Count the millions of lives lost by fire, water, sword and epidemic. Why does God still permit these horrors to afflict the race? Does omniscience not know it? No! Humanity revolts against such a supposition.

She lectured in twenty-three States of the Union, some of which she visited often. Ernestine also addressed several State legislatures with marked effect. She paid her own bills, never charged admission to her lectures or took up a collection, her husband gladly defrayed the expense of her extensive tours. After 33 years' work in America she and her husband returned to England. On the eve of her departure Susan B. Anthony presented her with a handsome sum of money and other presents in recognition of her great services. In 1874 she returned for a brief visit to New York. Her husband died in 1882 and his death left her very lonely. When Susan Anthony visited her in England the following year she complained about her isolation. According to Miss Anthony she was vastly more isolated in England on account of her non-religious views than in America. Nine years later this noble, altruistic woman passed away at the age of eighty-two. How much the women of America, wrote L. E. Barnard, in 1881, owe to this noble Polish woman, cannot be estimated, for moral influences are too subtle for measurement.

X.

THE LORD'S PROGRESS

On Monday, April 21, the Christian Commandos inflicted themselves on an audience at the Southgate Forum, London, N. 14.

A Debate had been arranged on the motion that "Only Christianity can meet the World's needs"—the opponent of the motion was that well-known Rationalist, Mr. Howell Smith.

The Commandos' champion was a lugubrious parson from Blackpool who obviously felt that a spot of humour would enliven the proceedings; and here is a specimen of his combination of wit, humour and divine instruction:—

Recently at an ordnance factory in the North, I was in the canteen and was asked by a man to state what difference Christianity would make to him here and now. I replied that we were all Christians he would not have to leave a deposit of 2s. 6d. on his knife and fork. As you well know, you cannot leave anything about without losing it. A girl leaves her powder-puff in the lavatory for ten minutes and it is gone; a man leaves his bicycle for ten minutes and it is gone; a fellow leaves his girl for ten minutes, and . . ."

He followed this up with:—

"Recently I was approached by two camera men of the 'Daily Mirror'—you all know the 'Daily Mirror'; it has Jane between the covers, sometimes almost the only covers which Jane has on.

These men asked with a grin whether it was true that the Commandos were willing to go anywhere, and on my answering yes they asked us to meet them that night and visit a night club. I agreed.

"At about 11.30 we walked up Regent Street, past Oddenino's and came to an entrance guarded by a burly door keeper wearing his utility door keeper's uniform. We knocked at a window, a flap opened and after we had been scrutinised the door was opened furtively and we were permitted to enter.

I had with me a commando colleague and we were told that we could address the guests for four minutes each, which we proceeded to do.

We were then approached by a man who was present who said that he had domestic trouble, and asked for advice; then an Army Major approached us and said that he was mentally distressed.

The proprietor of the club came over with two large glasses, one of brandy and one of gin, and asked if we would like a drink. We replied that we would if he could give us orange juice, and this was produced.

"My colleague and I then sat at a table with a crowd of men and discussed various problems until after one o'clock, when the two tired-faced camera men suggested that it was time to leave."

If this pitiful stuff—and there was more of the same kind—is all that the Commandos can put across as a substitute for serious debate, then the Freethinking movement of this country need not waste much time on them.

It would have been interesting to have had the comments of the ladies at the night club when they found themselves deserted by their boy-friends, who preferred the company of the Commandos to the ladies' charms.

G. FISHER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held May 15, 1947

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair.

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

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Manchester, Halifax, Branches and to the Parent Society. Business was confined as far as possible to matters concerning the Annual Conference. The Annual Report and Balance Sheet were accepted, general arrangements were noted, and final instructions given.

The proceedings then closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m., MESSRS. E. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART. Thursday, May 22, 6-30 p.m., MESSRS. E. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART.

LONDON—INDOOR

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, May 27, 7 p.m.: "Psychology of Religion," fifth lecture, "The Scientific Attitude." Mrs. A. BLANCO WHITE, O.B.E.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street (Room 13)).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: "Colour Bar," Dr. J. MITCHELL, B.Sc. (League of Coloured Peoples, London).

National Secular Society (The News Theatre, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a Freethought Demonstration (see advertisement).

AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY. A Survey of Positions. By Chapman Cohen Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT? By Chapman Cohen. A criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s.; postage 1½d.

Lonely? Join Friendship Circle. Details 6d. Secretary, 34, Honeywell Road, London, S.W. 11.

AN ETERNAL QUESTION

AN inquest was recently reported in the paper concerning a young man of 19 who committed suicide, after a mental deliberation whether life was worth living. The result shows the conclusion he reached.

Many Freethinkers must have made a similar valuation, though not with the same intention. The human race finds itself placed in various portions of a minute part of the universe. Millions of brains have wrestled with the problem, "how and why?" but with varying answers.

Life is a gleam of time between two eternities, but some avail themselves of the short space at their disposal to fashion a torch which gives light to all succeeding generations. Men may argue why they are created, but no one can deny that the musicians and scholars, poets and authors, scientists and emancipators of other days lived, or that the products of their lives will remain an inspiration and comfort to the civilised races of the world. Beethoven, Shelley, Dickens and Faraday are dust, yet we who follow them will always be grateful for men who used their natural creative faculties with such good effect.

With the optimism of youth, I would say that life is a succession of opportunities. Given in a varying measure, it is true, but always appearing, and the wise use them to the best advantage. The man to whom life has been hard might object to this statement, but I contend that it applies to the vast majority, the only variation being in degree.

The most embittered must realise in their hearts that life contains much that makes for pleasure. The opportunity for mental progress is available to all who can read or gain profit from lively conversation. Nature, as though to compensate for her errors, provides a storehouse of beauty and subjects for observation. We cannot all have the opportunities of a Curie or Carnegie, but we can all do something of benefit to our fellows. Even if apparently insignificant, unnoticed and unapplauded, service is worthwhile, not only for the results it bestows, but for the inner satisfaction it creates with the man who does it. Perhaps this latter statement is psychologically unsound, but it is true!

So long as freedom and opportunity are accessible, most Freethinkers would certainly agree life is worth experiencing. The cynic complains, however, that nothing can be of value if the grave is the necessary completion of the mortal span. George Eliot expressed the debt which the living owe to many who lie unknown in unvisited graves. (Incidentally, do the younger generation of Freethinkers realise the debt they owe to Carlyle, Hetherington, Foote, and many others who suffered for freedom of thought and speech?) A man's personal knowledge may die with him, but if he is wise he imparts it to his children and others, by his actions, in print or in various other ways during his life. Most of us would be unselfish enough to agree that however hard and unrecognised our labours may be, they are valuable if they help the human race on its way with a clearer vision and lighter burden.

The increase of Freethought has reduced the fear of death which spoilt the happiness of so many lives. Biology shows that death is as essential a complement to life as birth. Just as the sunset inevitably follows the sunrise, so the grave follows the cradle.

The Christian is in a rather different position. With a conception of God as an experimenter who, for his greater glory, has created a mass of scurrying beings, and watches their actions from a safe distance, life must seem more futile. No one envies the dog, born and dying to satisfy the curiosity of a vivisector, or a collection of amoeba in a laboratory bottle.

(Continued in next column)

National Secular Society

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Pilgrim Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne

A FREETHOUGHT DEMONSTRATION

On **WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 25th, 1947**

Chairman—

Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN

(President National Secular Society, Editor of "The Freethinker")

Speakers—

J. T. BRIGHTON

J. CLAYTON

L. EBURY

T. M. MOSLEY

J. McCALL

R. H. ROSETTI

F. A. RIDLEY

Mrs. M. WHITEFIELD

Doors Open 6.30 p.m.

ADMISSION FREE

Commence 7 p.m.
Reserved Seats 1/- each

To compensate for this satisfaction of his whims at the expense of mankind, the Christian god has created a vague paradise for those who have served his ends well. It has always seemed strange to me that those who are full of assurance as to a glorious resurrection do not employ one of the many lethal devices at their disposal, and by a small, brief action exchange the toil of earthly existence for the bliss of the alleged hereafter.

That this is not so is shown by an anecdote, which may be found in repetition, in "The Pope and the Italian Jackal." McCaskey, that grand fighter for truth, relates: "I happened to be talking to Bishop Patterson when Cardinal Manning, whom he knew intimately, was dying, and, being in my early clerical fervour, I observed that Manning probably looked with joy to his deliverance from this world. Patterson gazed at me as one does at the innocence of an immature girl of 13, and he shortly answered that Manning was fighting for his life."

We Freethinkers may still wonder why we are here, but unconvinced by offers of reward, or threats of punishment, we decide to make the most of the time we have at our disposal.

For life to have meaning and delight for the entire human race it is necessary to bring into being a system in which maximum opportunity is presented to the majority, instead of a privileged minority. Let that be one of the aims of all who desire the advancement of mankind.

ANDREW GLENCOE

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