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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Rule of the Dead

All students of religion—we leave out priests as being not real students—are well aware of the great part played by death in the formation of religion. There is, in fact, very strong evidence that death itself was a discovery rather late in the history of humanity, and it is still denied by many primitive groups. That, however, I must deal with on another occasion. But there are loads of evidence which lead to the belief that gods probably took their first significance from the mystery of death. The dead leader easily became the still living ruler in the other world. We must leave the matter where it is just now, but a few hours with good scientific books will give all the evidence that associates death with gods, or gods with death. In the vast majority of cases, whenever the genealogy of a god can be traced back, it seems to lead to some primitive ancestor or great man, who became an object of fear and worship after his death. And when we find in parts of India and elsewhere the same process of God-making going on, and have unquestionable evidence of the transformation of men into gods, the proof seems complete. But it may be noted that this worship of the ancestor is not due to affection but to fear. The ghost is not loved, he is dreaded. A great many primitive customs are devoted to guarding the living against the visitations of the dead, and nothing would give the primitive mind greater comfort than to know that whether the ghost had gone too far away to come back, the spiritualists say of their chief spirits, they have migrated to the highest spheres. It is rather remarkable that they have not arranged for regular journeys backward and forward. Most gods are ghosts, and divinity is based on death.

A well-known French writer has said that the greatest tyrant humanity has known has been its dead. That is a melancholy truth, all the sadder because of the fact that this tyranny increases with the goodness of the man while living. The power of the tyrant is broken by death. That of the bad passes away with him. But the admiration and love which the good man arouses blinds people to the evil of accepting him as a guide for future generations. Whether man or myth, Jesus has proved a greater tyrant than Nero, and his rule has caused evils at the side of which the greatest attributed to the Romans are of small account. No powerful organisation has been formed with the specific command "Thou shalt not do this or that" because Nero has commanded it. But the world has been forced to refrain from this or to do that because Jesus, or Moses, or Mohammed has said it. For that reason there is no tyranny so difficult to remove. A regular tyranny has against it always a mass of discontent, and in any case its violation of right is obvious. But a

religious tyranny rules in the name of morality, and enlists some of the best motives of mankind in its service. It is a rule of the dead maintained in the name of justice to the living. No other rule has been so widely planted, and none is so difficult to remove.

All religion, however disguised, is a worship of the dead. When it is not the transformed ghost in the shape of a god, it is in customs, ideas, ceremonies. Go into any church or chapel, and the man who can look beneath the surface finds himself in a veritable charnel house. The phraseology used is largely that of the dead. The sentiments expressed are those of the dead. Even ceremonies performed, the clothing of the priest, his postures, have all been ordained by the dead. None have been suggested by contemporary thought or demanded by contemporary needs. When one is watching a church full of people going through a set religious service, one can hardly escape the weird feeling that one is observing a congregation of corpses that have been brought back to life to go through a set of ceremonies that may mean much to them, but which can mean nothing at all to those who are living the life of to-day. And beyond the officiating priest one sees the ghost of the savage whose fear-stricken mind gave birth to it all, and whose successor now sits in an episcopal chair voicing the ideas of the cave-man in the language of Shakespeare. The whole priesthood has no greater authority than that it is continuing the rule of the dead. No one can claim that if the present generation had not found these priests in possession it would have created them. The power of the priest is based on the dead; he perpetuates their rule as the condition of maintaining his own. He is the mouthpiece of the ghosts. If the people of the world were to revise their institutions in the light of the knowledge and need of to-day they would all be scrapped *sans ceremony*. They are here as servants of the dead—interested agents for the perpetuation of their rule. Some time ago an account of a will was printed in one of the papers in which a man threatened his heirs with disinheritance if they forsook the Catholic religion. A little while before it was a Jew who made a similar provision. They were each trying to rule from their graves the living by means of their money-bags. The injunction really meant that though the people believe a particular religion to be false they will keep on professing its truth. The religious parent, instead of guarding his children from error becomes their enemy. He is a corrupting influence of their lives. They are to be as stupid as he was. The inheritance of religion thus resolves itself into, primarily, the perpetuity of ignorance and folly, and ultimately into the development of cunning and deceit.

At present all over the country there is going on an exhibition of "Taboo." Every attempt is being made to

maintain the superstitions that were alive some few thousand years ago. The public is being denied something on Sunday that is found to be healthy, on six days of the week. Why is this so? Immediately, of course, the clergy are looking after their interests as a class, knowing as they do, that to bring the rising generation up to spend their day of rest in a rational manner is to rob them of congregations. But ultimately it is our dead-and-gone ancestors who try to dictate our lives. Because a hundred or more generations ago a certain day became "taboo" for purely superstitious reasons. We have done our best to convert a day of joyousness to one of gloom and demoralisation. Human sacrifice in a physical form is a thing of the past. But sacrificing the mental and moral life of the people in the name of tribal ghosts is at the doors of thousands. They are operative in our law courts in the shape of blasphemy laws. They are found at the roots of a number of things that owe their existence to sheer superstition. The struggle of the living to escape the strangling clutch of the dead is one of the tragedies of civilisation.

Of course, it is not in religion alone that the dead tyrannise over the living. It can be traced in many other directions. Legal procedure is full of it. Our laws of primogeniture enforce the ideals of a dead and gone generation, and the administration of property is in numerous cases determined by the wishes of the dead rather than by the needs of the living. We take our rules of decorum from the past, and frown upon those who are bold enough to set them at defiance. From the cradle to the grave we are dominated by the dead; and it lies in the nature of human society that we cannot abolish this superstition. At most we can only limit its power by an intelligent revision of its decrees. In legal affairs we create any number of fictions in which the dead rule, but it is in religion alone that it is made sacred. Do what we will the dead will continue to wield enormous power over the living, and when we add to this inevitable influence the weight of consciously organised institutions, the living is saddled with what may well be described as crushing.

The great lesson we have yet to learn thoroughly, and the one that most people find it hardest to master, is that while the past is valuable for guidance, it becomes a power for evil when we seek to fashion our lives by its decrees. The lesson we have to learn is that each generation has its own specific problems which must be answered—if they are answered intelligently and profitably—in their own way and in the light of knowledge and necessities. In most directions the reasonableness of this counsel will not be disputed. It is mainly in religion that in the name of morality we place the dead in control over the living and shackle the existing generation with the fetters of a bygone age.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE DEATH BED

"Let us never forget that it was Christianity which turned the death-bed into a 'bed of agonies,' and that, by the scenes which since then have been enacted thereon, and the terrible sounds which here, for the first time, appeared possible, the senses and the blood of posterity were poisoned for a lifetime."—NIETZSCHE. "The Dawn of Day."

DIVORCE AND THE CHURCH

JUST now, the Church of England is taking a noisy interest in divorce. The Archbishop of York has told Convocation that there are to be "something like" 50,000 divorces this year. "a grave matter"; and so an episcopal resolution is passed setting up a Commission of Inquiry to indulge in futile talk about it.

Ecclesiastics love to chatter about divorce. We need not wonder at that. Of all the seven deadly sins, *fleshly lust* is the most interesting. Hence the constant pre-occupation of the clergy with the topic of copulation blest and unblest, holy and unholy—especially the unblest and unholy.

The Church of England, however, is quite powerless nowadays to do anything about the matter except talk. However, more vigorous spirits naturally yearn for action to express their sentiments.

It is felt by the pious that those wretched people who escape from unbearable marriages that have lost all savour, into fresh unions with possibly younger, and certainly more attractive spouses, are really quite intolerable! Can nothing be done to keep them miserable in that state of marital infelicity to which it has pleased God to call them, Nothing: the State is supreme. Then: "ain't nobody going to be whopped for this here?" Sam Weller asked. The ecclesiastical cry goes up: "Keep them from Holy Communion. And don't let them be married in Church."

Alas! What do the happily-divorced care about Holy Communion, to which few, even of the miserably-married, ever go? The first punishment, then, is quite useless: it is a pleasure. But quite a lot of people who hate going to Church as a habit yet like to go three times in a life-time: to be christened as a babe, to be married as a spouse, and to be buried as a corpse. Modern public opinion is strongly against being nasty to babies and corpses, on account of their helplessness, and so the Church dare only deal drastically with those who come to be married. Hence the cry: "Don't let the divorced be re-married in Church." For "Marriage is a life-long union to be broken only by death," says the Archbishop. The Church, therefore, now refuses to allow any divorced person to be re-married in Church.

But the stubborn facts of biology and human behaviour are against the Archbishop. Biology says that marriage is not a life-long union. Marriage does not begin at birth, or even before it, when life begins, and its physical union is a series of extremely brief affairs. Moreover, marriage-unions are, as a fact, broken by High Court Judges and selected Chancellors, nominated lawyers, as well as by separation, bigamy, and other activities of one spouse or both.

For some time Church-opinion wanted to distinguish between what it called "the innocent" and "the guilty" parties in a divorce. Such artificial rubbish! Petitioners were innocent presumably: respondents guilty. Unfortunately worldly folks know only too well that innocent husbands often allowed guilty wives to divorce them, accepting the imputation of adultery quite cheerfully. The Church, when people laughed at its classification of innocents, realised that it could never distinguish between the wronger and the wronged partner—especially when there was adultery on both sides and only revealed upon one.

Hence, Church-opinion has come to the position stated by the troubled Archbishop: no re-marriage in Church for any divorced person. (That means in practice, not if they know it. But how if the divorced one calls himself or herself "bachelor" or "spinster," as indeed they temporarily truthfully are!)

The Church-position is really untenable—in practice as in theory.

Against it may be set the sensible and secular position. I think, is as follows.

There is a right to divorce. It arises from the right to marry. It is one of the elementary rights of both men and women.

Church or State or individual has the right to prevent or obstruct the exercise of that right. Indeed, the English State recognises this right of divorce—not as fully as it should, for English secular divorce-jurisdiction is the child of ancient ecclesiastical divorce-jurisdiction—but still it does recognise it.

Now in civilised countries like Sweden and Norway, in contrast to an uncivilised country like England, the right to divorce is fully recognised. The law of Norway states: "Divorce is a relief from misfortune, not a crime." And in Sweden divorce is obtainable by consent of the parties, that is to say, if you want divorce you can have it. In England you have to cheat and lie and make horrible accusations against your spouse—accusations which needn't be true and which generally go unanswered, in order to make the divorce an "undefended," and therefore quick, cheap and easy—to get a divorce. But an uncomfortable marriage with an English partner can be so horrible that people gladly do and say anything—and even pay anything—to get out of it.

The English State even comes to the rescue of "poor persons" and helps their divorcees with money for the lawyers—a truly Christian act, for what Good Samaritan would not rescue a hapless brother fallen into the pit of marriage? But the Church opposes. It is even now suggested that efforts should be made by Probation Officers, Marriage Guidance Councils, and other Paul Prys, to patch up the marriages of the poor by "reconciliations." This is recommended by Mr. Justice Penning's Committee. Not the marriages of the rich! Divorce is too good for the poor and should be the luxury of the rich, it formerly was.

Really what is wanted in England to-day is an honest recognition that people are entitled to divorce at request. A Society for the Extension and Protection of Divorce is badly needed; there should be a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Adults. The Church prefers to be cruel and unnatural, and will not let any woman taken in adultery what its Master Jesus Christ

said: "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." It prefers to condemn her, forgetting those other words, "Condemn not lest ye be condemned." Secularists may well be according to that text and condemn the condemnation of the Church, as I do here. Marriage can be, and generally is, misfortune, and as the sensible Norwegians say, divorce is a relief from misfortune and no crime. Even English law calls divorce "a relief" in its pleadings, and, indeed, to the parties, emphatically is.

Let us clear our minds of cant and stand with John Milton for the "wholesome doctrine and discipline of divorce."

C. G. L. Du CANN.

A WORD TO TRADE UNIONISTS

General Franco and the U.S.S.R.

Dear Mr. Editor.—As a Union member, I strongly protest against minute No. 32 of the A.D.M.* condemning General Franco without mentioning a word about the worst type of Fascist State, namely the U.S.S.R.

The lot of the enslaved workers behind the "Iron Curtain" is not rendered any less terrible by the meaningless title of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

We should, as good trade unionists, refuse to handle goods from this Godless State which worships nothing but Mammon.

Yours, &c.,
W. COLRY.

The letter which heads this article is from the current issue of "The New Dawn," the journal of the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers (U.S.D.A.W.). Have we not heard anything like this before? One need not look searchingly at

* Annual Delegate Meeting.

the rabid communique to perceive that its author is a Roman Catholic. This is an ever-changing world.

Some two years ago, Francisco Franco was denouncing men like Churchill and Eden with many others, as "Reds." Godly men, sure enough, but not of the right brand of Godliness to suit El Caudillo. Now, if Mr. Corry is to be relied upon, any variety of Godliness other than the Roman brand is anti-social, but complete godlessness the most anti-social of all. Thus, Franco must be the real socialist!

No, Freethinkers, I am not trying to be funny. You see, the leader of the West Cumberland branch of another powerful trade union has just been awarded a special medal by the Pope, and the R/C Bishop of Lancaster is shortly to make the public presentation of it in Carlisle. "For services to the Roman Catholic Church." It has been evident for some time that the Vatican has had the needle of its hypodermic syringe well into the veins of British trade unionism, but the Pope is now pressing the plunger. It is not so long ago that Catholic priests in this country were trying to dissuade their flocks from joining trade unions. Now they present them with medals! No one has denounced working class organisations more than the Roman Church. In Spain today, and in Rome-ruled South American states (in Germany and Italy until recently), trade union activity is a short cut to prison. As I write, Congress is seriously threatening the trade unions of U.S.A.

In Britain today we have a government which is supposedly a supporter of trade unionism, but, strange to relate, has roundly condemned trade union action even to the extent of using troops as strike-breakers. "Unofficial strike," say they, "without sanction of their leaders." The leaders who get medals from the agents of God! It may well happen that union leaders whose brands of Godliness are other than Roman will receive similar awards in addition to the peerages, knighthoods, etc., which some already enjoy. Most of our present ministers of state are godly men, some of them preachers. Our Prime Minister did his bit for God, and against womankind recently at Margate. But back to the Pope. He leads God's greatest army. In the U.S.S.R., some 170,000,000 of God's children refuse to seek the Holy Father's leadership. Poor Papa! Millions of his Western charges, becoming enlightened, have left the shadow of his Holy Wing! He will never regain them. A great number of Russia's millions are, as yet, not too well educated, and the Pope wants them before their education is improved, as it is almost sure to be in the not too distant future.

Make no mistake about it, the Pope and his gang know full well the potentialities of the fast developing U.S.S.R. They are determined to stem the tide of progress there, in the same manner as through the centuries of Papal domination which present such a blot on European history. Catholic churches pray often, I am told, for the "conversion" of Russia. Note the inverted commas. We know very well what that word means through the Roman mouthpiece.

Perceiving signs of failure in Europe and the Americas decades ago, the Hierarchy intensified its attentions in the directions of the (alleged) unenlightened Asia and Africa. But it is failing there also. It has been mainly under the protection of European armed might that it gained its precarious foothold in Eastern zones, although the brute force of European arms has not helped it to an eastern triumph. Then again, the Papacy has suffered another grievous loss. In its hey-day, western magnates, monarchs and aristocrats were, for the most part, fervent adherents, and under domination, but today these great pillars of moral degeneracy are by no means all Rome fans. However, magnates, monarchs and aristocrats, whatever their religious leanings may be nowadays are anti-communist. Facing losses everywhere else, the Vatican must try for Russia, and seems willing to enlist all ruling classes as allies, no matter what their creed may be. Then again, they must have the usual armed escort, but more of it than ever before.

(Continued on page 231.)

ACID DROPS

Shakespeare said that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. But for once Shakespeare was wrong. There are crowds of people who would find vinegar sweet and sugar sour in given circumstances. For example, in the boosting of the Princess Royal she is being placed before the public as an almost transcendent mixture of ability and graciousness. In the visit to South Africa she solemnly said, quite unnecessarily, she would devote her life to the people, etc. Of course, that was all nonsense. If she comes to the throne she will have to do as she is told by her "advisers" as others have had to do. The picture of the King or Queen, doing as he or she wished to do is just a line out of a fairy story.

Still, there are some who do believe that roses by other names would always smell as sweet. For example, writing in the "Sunday Dispatch," Dr. Joad says that in his opinion the Bible would be improved by being re-written. That is just nonsense. As a Bible it is better in its official form than it could possibly be by any new one. For an honest Bible would be one that expressed the earliest forms of belief, whereas the language of the Bible has been altered in its tone and even in its meanings, it has been altered so much that the Bible of to-day is not the Bible of yesterday, and it is further different when we get to the Bible of a few centuries ago.

We are not surprised to find that Dr. Joad confines his dislike to the old Bible, and that he believes the Christianity of the New Testament is not quite as objectionable as the old one. The miracles of this one book—or collection of books—are as objectionable as they are in the other. The Old Testament is as foolish as is the New. The manufacture of the origin of Adam and Eve is not more foolish than the birth of Jesus without a human father. Finally, the only reason for different readings of both the old and the new Bibles is to hide the real quality of both. We advise Dr. Joad to spend some time in studying Frazer's "Folk-lore in the Old Testament," and note how it fits well into the New Testament. A couple of hours spent in comparing Frazer's writing with that of this semi-clerical outburst would do Dr. Joad good. It might at least lessen the repetition of the praise of the New Testament, as though it were in any real sense superior to the Old. Dr. Joad should be the last one to need telling that the aim of a priesthood is not to educate but to prevent the truth getting known. Ancient or modern the rules of a priesthood are everywhere the same. Still, we suppose that Dr. Joad knows his audience.

The Rev. A. E. Morris says that the family is the essential foundation of any really healthy society. We are inclined to back up that, although we might well have worded it rather differently. For example, Mr. Morris turns out to mean by a superior or healthy society one that is completely saturated with religion. In that reading we are prepared to say that the home is not a socially ideal place in which to bring up a family. Go back a few generations and youth in religious life was treated as so many slaves, minus the whip, although not always. We hold that youth to-day is cleaner than it was in the time when religion ruled. There is a cleaner living and less humbug. We have seen young girls rise up in buses to make room for an elderly person to sit down, to offer to carry a parcel out of a bus or a train, and do a score of little things that indicate a cleaner and better character than the youth of a few generations ago. We have every faith in the youth of to-day. We wish we had an equal faith of the very old ones among us.

We are, of course, with those who wish to see places of amusement open on Sunday, as on every other day of the week. There are two reasons for a free Sunday, one is to have the opportunities of going out on Sunday where one wishes to go on every other day of the week. The plea one so often hears is, on the other hand, not a very good one. It is said—we do not question its truth—that people have nothing to do on Sundays, and that reason is a very bad one. It is a social injustice that a man should be prevented to do on Sunday what is quite right and proper to do on Monday, and that for some fantastic religious doctrine. But it is a thing to say that without cinemas on

Sunday people will have nothing to do but lounge about the streets, which results in misbehaviour. A free Sunday should rest on a better basis than that. The ground for a free Sunday is that we all should be treated as free men.

An organisation has been formed by a group of Nottingham clergymen to encourage Sunday cinemas. They say there is nothing intrinsically wrong in looking at pictures on Sunday, and the pictures should be of the best. So far, so good, even though the new group are obviously not so much interested in getting good pictures, as getting on terms that will enable the clergy to save something from the wreck that is fronting the Churches.

The real desire is found in the statement that what is asked for is that the hours of opening should not clash on Sundays with the proper functioning of Sunday schools and Church services. If the parents wish to send their children to Sunday schools, one can or wishes to prevent them. The fact is that the Christian leaders have no regard for freedom of movement, and are conceding little and gaining much that will enable them to hold in check a free Sunday. And that is the real issue. No one is prevented sending his children to Church when and how he wishes. The rest can be left to common sense.

"Pasquin" of the "Universe," rather angry whenever attention is called to the way the Roman Church treated Galileo, has now come to the real truth about that disgraceful affair. It appears that "the real drama of Galileo is the extremely kindly way the Inquisition treated an arrogant and noisy fellow who tried to teach the Church its own business with a pure hypothesis, like some modern scientists." Which leads us to two reflections: first, that the hypothesis of Galileo was right, and the Divine Church was decidedly wrong. But it took the Roman Church several centuries to permit the earth to go round the sun.

The Rev. A. S. Pink, Diocesan Director of Religion, discovered that "We are living in an atmosphere of implicit Atheism." Well, that is just about it—for Christianity in particular and for all religious systems as a whole. For a belief that is just discussed may end in almost any way. But a belief in fundamental Atheism is saying that it has become a deeply settled opinion that is not likely ever to be removed. It means that Atheism can no longer be treated as a mere floated set of ideas that may disappear. It means not only that Atheism is settled in the more civilised people, and is not likely to have its hold shaken. One may believe in a religion without understanding. Understanding is the sound work on which Atheism rests.

All the Churches appear to be very busy trying to find out what amount of Christian doctrine and practices can be dropped quietly. All sorts of suggestions have been made and new "Baptism" is on the way of making it a kind of "have it if you like, but don't bother about it if you are against it." The great thing is to get people to come to church. All the Church wants is attendance—and silence concerning the social value of "Jesus Christ and him crucified." How are the mighty fallen? It seems but yesterday when Christian leaders were shouting that belief in Jesus would alone save mankind. Now, in large numbers the Christian Churches will welcome all kinds of religious beliefs. In fact, if they were not glaringly against the Christian position, Atheists would be quite welcome to Church.

England is not a Christian country. England never was a Christian. England will never be a Christian country. The first two statements rest upon a declaration by one of the Law Lords in the House of Lords. No one has dared to challenge that decision, and no one is likely to do so. Some of the Law Lords nodded their heads in agreement, the others were quiet, probably they would have liked to have challenged the decision but the matter was too common-place. England is not a Christian country. It never was, and it never will be. For the future, if writers wish to be correct, they will write that England was a country in which Christianity was well established, favoured in situations where favour should not exist, and ready to lie with full strength when it promised profit. There should be no wonder at lying when it is to the benefit of the Christian Churches.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We are always making new readers, and we are always pleased to have any reasonable criticism of the "Freethinker." Of course we do not try the very foolish plan of trying to please anybody—we do not even try to please anyone. The only safe method, and certainly the only honest one, is to say what one thinks one ought to say, and then let the consequences follow. The certain thing is that he who tries to please everyone will not be pleased by anybody.

But here is one complaint that is worth notice. It appears that we do not deal with other people's opinions with proper respect. The first point by way of a reply is, Why should we treat anybody's opinion with respect? The opinion in respect may be obviously foolish, it may be propped up with lies, etc. How do we treat such a person with respect? How can we respect a priest who claims to turn plain wine and water into the blood of Jesus? Or the idea that all Atheists are criminals? All that any person has a right to expect is that his opinions shall be heard, and we do not think that anyone can truthfully say that we have ignored that principle.

There are some discussions going on with various Christian leaders with regard to religious plays being established in good theatres. Well, there is nothing common in that. In fact, at no time religious plays were very common. In the early days of the Church plays were one of the ways in which the Church held the people. It made miracles easy. To a medieval audience a man with a little powder on the head could be cured with a wave of the priest's hand. To the audience it was a real and marvellous cure. To-day audiences would just smile.

But things have altered. The medieval believer looked and really saw Jesus working miracles. To-day the looker-on would look the other way. The theatre would soon advertise the foolishness of the whole religious story. Domestic scenes do not injure domestic life because it is a phase of what people know occur. The Church cannot put an honest version of the New Testament story without giving away the whole of the game. A man may go on playing the fool for a long time, but let him see the foolishness of his part and he will soon throw it away.

The "superior" man is nearly always an impertinent man. Indeed the conviction of his superiority originates in his impertinency. The man who fears to mix freely with his fellows because he is afraid of bringing himself to their level is showing himself to be a little lower than those he shuns. His is a false superiority, the sense of which is kept active by a steady course of self-

adulation. Such people are only really successful with those who cannot distinguish a genuine article from an imitation and whose praise is, therefore, the reverse of complimentary. Above all, this class claims the reputation of superiority, not because they are in love of the thing itself, but because they regard it as an important social asset. Under different conditions the same people would regard the capacity for swilling beer as the most enviable of accomplishments.

In intellectual matter the superior person is still more objectionable. He is so cocksure he is right when he is so obviously wrong. His ability to put his case strongly is generally due to inability to grasp any other point of view except his own. He airs his opinions with a condescending kindness that is out of all proportion to their value. Generally speaking, it is a compliment to call them opinions, they are mostly prejudices. To argue with him is an impossibility. He will be above you or below you, but he is never level with you. He would be uneasy with you if he were, and you would not be likely to gain much from close contact.

It used to be a common expression by religious leaders that the eyes of God covered the whole of His creation. He saw everything and He knew everything before anything happened. How He did it no one can ever make out, but there was—literally—the devil to pay if one did not believe in this non-understandable mix-up. How all this was managed no one ever knew, but what was the good of believing in God and His works if they were knowable and reasonable by anyone who sat down to understand it? In fact, the true Christian was a man like the great Sir Thomas Browne (seventeenth century) who bluntly declared that he believed all that God said because it was unbelievable. It is also the reason why the Roman Church is so fascinating to those who get tired of trying to master God's doings and sayings. If they were simple and understandable the Catholic Church would collapse.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. announce two items of local interest. To-day (June 29th) Mr. F. A. Hornibrook lectures at 38 John Bright Street at 3-30 p.m. and on Sunday July 20th a coach trip to Ludlow has been arranged, starting at 1-45 p.m. from 38 John Bright Street. The number of seats are limited and must be booked in advance with C. H. Smith, 93 Willows Crescent, Cannon Hill, Birmingham. Return fare, 10s. Tea, extra, will be arranged at Ludlow.

SPANISH BACKGROUND

IN forming our opinions of any problem of our times, it is very necessary to examine not merely what is occurring now, but the factors of the past which have led up to it. It is also needful to try to rid ourselves of national or other prejudices—if the problem concerns a foreign country—and see things in an impartial light. These considerations apply very emphatically in regard to Spain, when the affairs of that land are being considered by British people for not only is the history of Spain full of extraordinary events, but the characteristics of the Spanish nation differ widely from ours. This being so, let us try to understand the real meaning of the recent civil war in Spain, and of the events following it.

The first thing to have in mind is that for nearly 800 years Spaniards were engaged intermittently in a war against an occupying foreign power. Not until 1492 was the last fragment of Moorish rule—which at one time had dominated most of the country—expelled. Moreover, the issues were not merely patriotic, but also religious; a conflict between Catholicism and Islam. Is it surprising, then, if Spaniards tend to go to extremes? The conflicts with Islam are now affairs of the long past—but the tendency to extremism still exists, and shows itself in disputes of Spaniards amongst themselves. Perhaps in our own history the nearest parallel is in the battles of the sixteenth century between Catholics and Protestants, when the former burnt

the latter at the stake, and the latter hung, drew, and quartered the former, according as each was in power. In us, the tendency to extremes died down—but it did once exist, and that fact may help us to understand a nation amongst which it still exists. After all, we ourselves may come one day again to it—"absit omen"!

I have before me a very striking pamphlet published by the Catholic Truth Society, London, under title: "The Catholic Church in Spain from 1800 till To-day," by A. A. Parker, M.A., Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (C.T.S., June, 1938, 3d.; Catalogue number H.283). It is a remarkably calm and almost (almost) impartial survey, but implicitly Catholic. We can safely rely on it, therefore, as not painting things too blackly from a Church point of view. Yet the tale it tells is indeed grim.

It begins by admitting that the contention is "a possible *a priori* one," which depicts the Spanish Church as an oppressive enemy of freedom; but it thinks the "theory" is "not self-evident, except to prejudiced eyes." It maintains that "the Church has been forced on to one side by the opposition of the other, which . . . has consistently attacked her" (p.3) "It is in the year 1700 rather than in 1800 that the division of Spain into two camps begins. The advent of the Bourbon dynasty, in the person of Philip V, laid Spain open to French ideas . . . [which] paved the way for Liberalism" (p. 4). "The beginning of Philip V's reign saw a break with Rome which, though patched up by the Concordats of 1737 and 1753, left relations with the Vatican very different from what they had been in the past" (p. 4).

"The other factor making for the conflicts of the nineteenth century was the decline of religion, due to the invasion of deism, scepticism, and materialist philosophy, among the court, the governing classes, and the intellectuals. But is it important to stress the fact that at this time the great mass of the people remained untouched by these ideas" (p. 5). "The Church, as a whole, was not keeping abreast with developments and attempting to direct them along the channel of Christian thought . . . The Church in the eyes of the promulgators of the new theories epitomised obscurantism. Since, for the reason already given, the Church was more concerned with preserving what it had conquered in the past than of setting out on the spiritual conquest of the new age, there was some measure of truth in this allegation" (pp. 5-6).

"Such, then, was the state of religion and the Church in Spain when the opening of the nineteenth century brought the Napoleonic invasion . . . The people rose up in arms, their resistance being organised very largely by the bishops and clergy" (pp. 6-7). At Cadiz, however, a "Liberal" Government "shouted 'liberty,' a word which meant much more than freedom from Napoleonic rule" (p. 7). There were, subsequently, massacres of clergy and nuns, and burning of churches. The Cadiz Cortes (Parliament) drew up a "Liberal" Constitution (1812). It nominally recognised that Spain was Catholic, but legalised freedom of the Press. It abolished the Inquisition. The Papal nuncio (ambassador) was expelled.

The "Liberals" fell in 1814, and Ferdinand VII, who replaced them, annulled the new Constitution. Yet the "Liberals" (this word in Spain signifies something more advanced than it does here!), "driven underground," rose in revolt (1820), and the 1812 Constitution was re-enacted. The Church was again assailed. Two archbishops and seven Bishops were exiled. Diplomatic relations with Rome were severed. The Liberal regime, however, again fell (1823), and Ferdinand was restored "by the French Army, sent by the Holy Alliance" (p. 12). The 1812 Constitution was again annulled. But—"With the death of Ferdinand in 1833 there began the definite period of revolution which was to last, with brief intervals, until 1844, and which was to prove permanent in its effects" (p. 12). There was bitter civil war. Church property was seized. Bishops were appointed without consulting the Pope. In 1844, however, the Liberals again fell, and

were succeeded by the "Moderados" (Conservatives), "the next nine years being a period of relative peace for the Church" (p. 16). In 1851 a Concordat (Treaty) was signed with the Vatican, and it "affirmed that Catholicism was the official religion of Spain and the public practice of any other was prohibited" (p. 27). "Apart from two periods of political upheaval and some later modifications, this Concordat regulated relations between Church and State up to 1931" (p. 25). "The Church found herself implicated in politics and her welfare identified with one party [the Conservatives]" (p. 27).

There was a revolution in 1854, and relations with Rome were again broken. The new regime, however, fell in 1856, and relations with Rome were restored, the 1851 Concordat being once more put into operation. Revolution came yet again in 1868. A republic was proclaimed in 1873. In 1874, however, "the Bourbon dynasty was restored in the person of Alfonso XII" (p. 28). During the preceding confusion there had been attacks on church buildings and two Bishops had been exiled. Alfonso XII's Constitution "granted freedom of worship": "the committee that framed it declared that they would have wished to effect the separation of Church and State had they considered it practical" (pp. 28-29).

"The fruit of Liberalism in Spain was now fully apparent: it had produced both a religious and a political cleavage in the country" (p. 30). Yet Cánovas (Regent in 1874) "declared the [1851] Concordat once more in force" (p. 30). From 1875 to 1923 (under Alfonso XII and XIII) "two parties alternated, in office, the Conservatives and the Liberals (not the same as the earlier Progressives)" (p. 31). "The Church enjoyed a comparatively long period of peace, but this peace was as artificial as the political system which guaranteed it" (p. 31). The Church "was still in practice tied to a particular political form of the State and identified with it by its opponents. The revolution of 1868 had identified the political division of the country with a religious division—revolutionary left-wing politics with atheism—and from that time onwards the one fostered the other; the atheistic or agnostic invariably embraced Left-Wing politics, the revolutionary working-classes embraced atheism" (p. 31).

In 1909 there was a revolt in Barcelona—"known as the 'tragic week,' [during which] . . . forty-three churches, priories, and convents were set on fire. The military dictatorship of 1923 to 1930 postponed the inevitable next phase of Left-Wing rule. In 1931, the transformation of Spain into a Republic was peacefully effected" (p. 32). Riots, however, broke out, churches were destroyed, the Cardinal-Primate left the country, "it having been hinted that his presence was undesirable; when he later attempted to return he was escorted to the frontier" (p. 32). The new Constitution separated Church and State and legalised freedom of worship and thought.

Such was the background of, and such the factors producing the late Spanish civil war. A country was split into extreme antagonisms going back at least seven generations, and having, at the root, 800 years of racial-religious warfare which gave the nation a tendency to violent enthusiasms. It is an interesting psychological-historical study.

J. W. POYNTER

PRECIOUS WARES

GENTLY the waiter lifted the bottle of Chateaufneuf du 1920 from its basket cradle:—

"I often wonder what the vintners buy

One-half so precious as the goods they sell."

I quoted aloud as slowly he filled my glass with the glorious ruby

"Bah!" said one, "like Twain's daeshhund, old Omar lacked bitterness—how about gold bricks and dud mining shares for

precious wares?—They show a clear one hundred per cent. profit in any bucketshop in Manhattan."

"Not without some risk of a sing-song in Sing-Sing," broke in another, "for a bonzer side-line give me the pains of purgatory; our Roman priests collect hard cash from devout Catholics against each year of remission, with delivery of the goods in the next world and no time limit—can you beat that?"

"But sometimes," remarked a third, "the vendors are turned out, lock, stock and barrel, from the countries in which they operate. Now in my country the right to deputise for God Almighty, to issue divine instructions in the shape of 'calls' to livings of so many hundreds per year, is bought and sold in the open market and I have no doubt whatever that that is what the bigwigs bought, just as our brewers do now."

"Bravo," cried I, "for British Business and Brains—your very good health Sir—Rule Britannia!"

W. A. GOURMAND.

A WORD TO TRADE UNIONISTS (concluded from page 227)

Mussolini and Hitler are no longer available. Who will be G.O.C. in the field? Franco must now train in the rôle of Hitler and Mussolini. But why not Eisenhower or Montgomery? Better generals, surely, and the Pope, at present, is not too particular about the brand of religion professed by his allies.

Impossible, as yet, because those two great commanders of death dealing are connected with, and paid by, nations whose masses are organised into powerful trade union movements. These trade unions are a voice. If that voice says "No," then it's no armed escort for the Pope into Russia.

So British and American trade unions must be "converted." President Truman, in America, proposes to do this by abolition, following in the precepts of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Salazar. However, in U.S.A., as in Britain, Catholics have no dominating status, and Mr. Truman's idea may cause much resentment. The suggestion has been badly received already.

There seems to be only one safe course for Papa. He must convince trade unionists that Russia is foul. Urge them to make positions and with them blast the pagan Russians into submission.

That was the formula of the anti-Comintern Axis, which is not so badly broken as many people would delude themselves into believing. The forces of God are being rallied for a last, desperate effort. If the Russian bastions cannot be forced, and the dope administered in large doses to that 170,000,000, God

That will be the end of Jehovah, Mary, and the Lamb. Every movement which breeds reason, progress and fraternity amongst men does the Christian creed attempt to rot. Here in Britain, it is rotting our Labour, Co-operative, and trade union movements. Even the Communist party is not immune, although its leaders delude themselves that it is. All non-Catholic denominations, even the Judaists, whilst fratching on doctrinal matters, are steadily falling into step with Rome on the question of saving God.

Trade unionists, workers, thinkers, what are you allowing to creep into your midst? Can you not smell it? Rome does not want your souls (if you have any), it wants your bodies, your blood, and the blood of your progeny.

It wants a super blood bath to the glory of God. "A Godless state which worships Mammon" says Corry, the philosopher. Snuff it out, workers, ere you once again become slaves in a mammonised state which worships God! Challenge to the last word, anything written or spoken, wherever you find it, that savours of the insanity of Mr. Corry and the ghouls of the Vatican. "The 'godless state' has just abolished capital punishment!"

G. L. C.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES. ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; (Highbury Corner) Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD. Thursday, 7 p.m.; Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1.) Sunday 11 a.m.: "The Challenge of Humanism," Rev. F. H. AMPLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 pm.: Mr. COLIN McCALL.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. REILLY.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture. Mr. J. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, TAYLOR.

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

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.; Messrs. G. H. GREAVES, A. SAMMS.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38 John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: "Religion, Press and Politics," Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK (London).

WANTED.—To buy or loan, "Lucretius on Life and Death," by W. H. Mallock. Any edition. W. B., 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C. 1.

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.

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BOOKS AND READERS

II

ALTHOUGH the opinions of great critics of literature often make fascinating reading, one sometimes wonders what were the reactions of the ordinary reader of famous—or even of the not-so-famous—books.

We know, for example, how the fame of young Charles Dickens shot up rapidly when he introduced Sam Weller to Mr. Pickwick, and this really means that the man in the street, so to speak, bought the "Pickwick Papers" in increasing numbers and looked forward with growing enthusiasm to the appearance of each monthly part. What the professional critics said about his novels really never mattered much, for it was the ordinary public who bought and read his books and laughed and cried with him.

In "The Victorians and their Books," the author, Mrs. Amy Cruse, deals specially with the readers of some of the most popular books published in the first fifty years of the reign of Queen Victoria, and this makes her own book not only extremely interesting but very valuable to the social historian. And such chapters as those on the Tractarians and on Science and Religion must specially appeal to Freethinkers.

As Mrs. Cruse points out, early Victorian England was, "even fiercely, preoccupied with questions of religion," and it is not surprising therefore to learn that the effect Newman's famous tracts had on the clergy in particular, for or against, was terrific. Most of them had been up to then, as Florence Nightingale pointed out, "just country gentlemen or men of the world performing their clerical duties with decent diligence but without any kind of fervour"; and the Tracts brought them up with a jerk to the position laid down by Newman, that "the real ground on which our authority is built" is "our Apostolic Descent," and that "we have been born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This kind of thing, very much elaborated in the best theological manner, with all Newman's power of expression, played the very devil with the clergy of his time, and all religious England was soon engaged in the most desperate evangelical battles with Newman, Hurrell Froude, Keble, and Pusey, delivering more and more "apostolic blows and knocks."

The principal idea was to make the English Church gloriously Roman Catholic—except for the Pope; and when the famous Tract 90 was finally delivered, even Newman was obliged to see that if he wanted an all-embracing Catholic Church he would have to swallow the Pope as well—and he did so.

Mrs. Cruse gives an entertaining account of the controversy, stressing the opinions of people like Dr. Arnold, George Borrow, J. A. Froude, Richard Church, the Duke of Newcastle, Lord John Russell, and others; and we, looking back a hundred years, and reading these opinions as well as some of the Tracts, can only wonder at the almost complete stupidity of most of the participants. What they considered of such terrific importance we now know to be sheer fudge, and for most intelligent people as dead as mutton.

The curious thing is that while all this heated argument was going on, an anonymous work entitled "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation" appeared (in 1844) and set everybody more in a religious ferment than ever. "Vestiges"—I regret that I have not read it—caused a furore because it left God out of creation and preached evolution before Darwin. "It was denounced from the pulpit," says Mrs. Cruse, "abused in the press, laughed at by superior persons anxious to exhibit their own scientific knowledge; it was the theme of conversation in fashionable drawing rooms and in devout assemblies; so that even those who had not read it knew something of its theory and purpose."

It was not known till long after that the author was Robert Chambers whose "Book of Days" can still be read with profit

and interest; and Chambers himself was by no means anxious to side with "infidel" theories though his book was quite infidel enough in throwing overboard the Bible account of creation. Evolution was God's way, "a certain mode of his working," as Chambers said in his defence. Lots of our modern Churchmen who no more believe the Bible account of Creation than I do, find Chambers' argument of immense service.

"Vestiges" was not accepted by the majority of contemporary scientists because it was not "scientifically" written and displayed, as the Dean of Westminster claimed, "utter ignorance of all sound physical logic," and many people thought Darwin had written it as he was suspected of evolutionary and infidel views before his famous "Origin of Species" appeared in 1859. Even Byron's daughter, Lady Lovelace, was accredited with it because she was a noted mathematician and the book looked like the writing of a woman.

Huxley, at the age of 19, read it, and was "irritated by its prodigious ignorance," and Herbert Spencer, then 25, "rejected the theories of the book and exposed the weakness of its argument." It should be added that George Henry Lewes was rather surprised at Spencer's "uncompromising rejection" of the book, and Mrs. Cruse adds that this was perhaps because Lewes' "knowledge of science was superficial"—a very surprising criticism and a quite untrue one of the author of "Problems of Life and Mind." Whether "Vestiges" as a book was a failure or not, one fact is clear and that is Evolution; and Chambers' book, as Darwin pointed out, did "excellent service in this country in calling attention to the subject and removing prejudice."

There was still another book written almost entirely from the Atheistic standpoint which caused a terrific row—a book which in these days is almost completely forgotten. This was "Letters on the Laws of Man's Social Nature and Development" by Harriet Martineau and Henry G. Atkinson.

The sister of a great Unitarian, Dr. James Martineau, whose books and personality certainly had great influence on Victorian religion, Harriet had carved out a way for herself, and was one of the most remarkable women of her time. She seemed able to write on any subject—history, political economy, Positivism, science, and what not, and in addition turned out novels, children's stories, and newspaper leaders. But these "Letters" actually appear to have made people tremble.

Of "Vestiges," the actress, Fanny Kemble, could write: "The book is extremely distasteful to me . . . its conclusions utterly revolting . . . nevertheless, they may be true." And Charlotte Bronte, writing to her publisher, Mr. Smith—though "disrespecting Harriet Martineau"—said of the "Letters" "It is the first exposition of avowed atheism and materialism I have ever read; the first unequivocal declaration of disbelief in the existence of God or a future life I have ever seen." It upset Charlotte and her friend, Mrs. Gaskell, while Charles Kingsley could only feel that the authors were better than their creed. What George Eliot thought was, "Whatever else one may think of the book it is certainly the boldest I have seen in the English language," a rather surprising statement for a woman of her reading especially after mixing with the Hennells and the Brays. What all these good people would think now if they could be suddenly transported the 100 years intervening, we can make a most entertaining volume, for Atheism, which even a word used to make people shudder, is now as common aslice berries; while Evolution is taken for granted by the scientific world as much as Mathematics. There may be still long disputes as to the *method* of Evolution, for example, as to whether Darwin or Lamarck is right, but the fact is no longer questioned.

The social life in early Victorian England was in some ways no doubt very bad, but there certainly was plenty of fire in the intellectual milieu; and for that it was the rising Freethought which was responsible. And it is still Freethought which makes people think.

H. CUTNER