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## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Happy Atheist

WHEN conditions permitted, the Christian had a short and easy method of dealing with the Atheist. He burnt him. This plan had at least the merit of thoroughness, and was the only religious argument to which there was no immediate reply. A reply, however, was forthcoming, and was furnished by the race. As human society developed the practice of burning awakened misgivings. It seemed poor use to put anyone to, and, as Voltaira said, it was attaching a very high value to one's own opinions to burn another man because he did not like them. So, gradually the Christian left off killing Freethinkers, for no other reason than that it no longer paid to do so. In default, he took to slandering them. They were not burned, but they deserved to be. And their being allowed to live should cause them to reflect upon the charity of their Christian neighbours, and upon the kindly feelings developed by Christianity.

Once more, however, development came into play. As the number of Freethinkers increased, they became better known, so Christian slanders began to lose their effectiveness. Moderate credulity may accept almost anything concerning a class of people about whom nothing is known. But it demands an abnormal credulity to accept wild stories about one's next door neighbour when his life is open to all. So, once again, there was a change of tactics. Instead of burning the Atheist, or slandering him, pious souls began to pity him. They expressed sorrow for him in the same way that they might use of a dear friend who had just caught yellow fever. They were so sorry that Smith did not believe in God. It was *such* a pity that his children should grow up in ignorance of the truth or value of religion. If Smith confessed to them that he was an Atheist, they received the confession with an air of commiseration, as though he had lost every penny he possessed—which, to the Christian imagination, is the greatest misfortune that can overtake anyone. Freethought has thus had to run the gauntlet of the biting Christian, the barking Christian, and the snivelling Christian. And, for my part, I prefer either of the two former to the latter. One can meet the persecutor with a good hearty hatred or a healthy opposition. The slanderer can be ignored. But the snivelling sympathiser crawls all over one, mentally, and leaves one with the impression of having rubbed shoulders with something unhealthy and unclean.

From the orthodox point of view, it is extremely probable that the really most deplorable feature about the Atheist is that he obstinately declines to live up to the character marked out for him by solicitous Christians. Instead of committing all the sins which Christians obligingly indicated

he ought to commit, the Atheist went on his way, which, if not a better way than that pursued by Christians, was certainly not a worse one. Which added fresh fuel to Christian indignation. A wicked unbeliever the Christian could appreciate, even admire. He fitted in with the religious theory of things, and so long as he was properly and unquestionably a blackguard, faith received an ample justification. But an Atheist who was not a blackguard! What on earth was to be done with him? He was a living disproof of the Christian theory. Preacher after preacher had elaborated a code of misconduct, a kind of Atheist's guide to the Devil, and the same hardness of heart which led the Atheist to reject religion led him to refrain from becoming an incarnation of wickedness. Ingratitude could go no farther.

With equal "cussedness" does the Atheist decline to be as miserable as Christians assure him he ought to be. Atheism, considered by itself, the clergy have apparently never heard of. It is always "blank Atheism," or "barren Atheism," or "hopeless Atheism," or "the dreary creed of Atheism," or some other kind of Atheism equally suggestive of misery and despair. And in this the clergy are obligingly helped by half-developed Freethinkers who accompany their statement of unbelief with a "wistful regret" that they can no longer accept the religious belief of their fellow citizens, and who, to do them justice, express their unbelief in so mournful a manner as to furnish some little support to the religious theorist. But the fully fledged Atheist will not live up to the character. Instead of weeping, he laughs. Instead of being miserable, he is happy. Instead of regretting the loss of his old faith, he unblushingly declares his joy at having got rid of it. And instead of being grateful for the sympathy of the Christian at his condition, he confounds the impertinence of the religionist, and expresses *his* practical sympathy with the deluded believer by seeking to convince him of the error of his ways. The Christian is, in fact, in the position of a man with a boil on his neck, wondering how other men manage to get along without poultices. The Atheist quite appreciates the position; all he reminds the believer is that he doesn't possess the boil, and therefore sees no reason to apply the linseed.

Of course, given the religious belief, it will be pleasant enough to discover compensating circumstances. Given a disease, one naturally looks round for an antidote. If a man really believes he is a miserable sinner, has what religious people call "a conviction of sin," he will naturally desire to find some other conviction of a more cheerful character. If he believes there is no hope and no happiness for the world apart from God, the world *minus* God must appear both unhappy and hopeless. The conclusion is involved in the belief, the belief necessitates the conclusion; and no one will dispute that, given the one, the other follows. The desire for an antidote follows the presence of

a disease. But suppose one has not the disease; how then? What is the use of wooden legs to a man with the proper complement of limbs? And how absurd is the attitude of one with a couple of timber extremities lecturing other people on the impossibility of being happy in their absence!

The happiness of the Christian is really the joy of a man who discovers a little light in a generally dark outlook. If there is a hell, there is some pleasure in discovering how to escape it. If human nature is incapable of goodness by itself, it is pleasant to hear of some force that will make it good. If this life by itself is worthless, it is comforting to believe in another where things are better managed. If there is no answer to man's mental questionings save the theory of a God, the belief in God yields satisfaction. It all depends upon an "if." What the Christian argument amounts to is, "If man cannot be happy, or content, or good, or progressive without certain beliefs, then those without these beliefs cannot be either progressive or happy." As it stands, the proposition is little more than a truism. If A is the cause of B, then B is the effect of A. The conclusion is impeccable. It is the premiss that is open to question.

Now, the Atheist does not believe in hell; consequently he derives no pleasure from a belief in heaven. And a belief in heaven alone can hardly be a subject of pleasant contemplation for anyone. The Christian heaven never had anything else to commend it save that there is a hell to escape. The Atheist does not believe that human nature is incapable of goodness, because he has daily experience to the contrary. It is human nature that ennoble the belief in God, not the belief in Deity that ennoble human nature. The Atheist does not need the belief in Deity to silence or satisfy his mental questionings; on the contrary, as he is not afraid to follow his reason wherever it may lead him, he realises that the belief creates more difficulties than it destroys. And being an Atheist, he is without the difficulties that beset the Theist. He has no "problem of evil" to solve, since that only arises from the necessity for harmonising the existence of God with the existence of evil. He does not believe there is a Deity to consult or to petition, and so he is not puzzled to account for unanswered prayers. He is not called upon to justify the "plan of creation" because he is unaware that any pre-arranged plan exists. He does not need the belief in a future life to cheer him up in his last moments, because he fails to realise how any possible future life can wipe out the circumstances of this one. His own problems are numerous enough to occupy his attention, but they are of a different order to those of a believer in God. They all arise out of the realities of life, and the Atheist is satisfied that sooner or later they will yield to human intelligence properly directed. Therefore the Atheist goes on his way quite happily, and the Christian remains perplexed and miserable at the sight. He has discovered a phenomenon that doesn't fit in with his philosophy.

The Christian is not only perplexed at the sight of the happy Atheist, he is annoyed. He loses his temper and calls names. We do not agree with him; therefore we are different from him. And, being different, we are consequently worse. If we are happy as Atheists, it must be because we lack the fine moral development of the Christian. It is the pleasure of a pig wallowing in his sty, the comfort of a debased nature finding enjoyment in its

own degradation. If we were only better, we should know how poor is the happiness we feel as Atheists.

The Atheist hears it all, and still remains happy in his Atheism. He declines to feel miserable, as he declines the pious invitation to be criminal. And he has the advantage over the Christian in knowing by experience what the "joys" of religion are really worth. He has tasted them, and there is not an Atheist in existence that does not feel happier and freer in his present mental life than he ever did as a fervent Godite. Difficulties, problems, sorrows, he has, as we all have, but they are the inevitable consequences of existence, not the gratuitously manufactured hardships of a wholly unnecessary theory. He does not play the coward by seeking refuge in "God," and, as a consequence, his mental life is the purer and stronger for conflict. He has no need to confuse his moral sense with attempts to explain why a God who ought to prevent injustice and wrong permits its existence, and this also gains in effectiveness from its alliance with a sane mental life. The Atheist's problem is not to justify the world, but to understand it and rule it in the interests of a better human life. And, as a consequence, his happiness is neither the vacuous enjoyment of the fool, nor the short-lived pleasure of the rogue. It is rather the expression of a disposition that has ceased to torture itself with foolish fancies, or perplex itself with useless beliefs.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## IN PLACE OF RELIGION

RELIGIOUS people often say: "But if you abolish religion, what would you put in its place?"

The answer is often given: "Nothing." Then it will be objected, in return, that the questioner believes that if religion goes, ethics and philosophy will also go. Worst of all, the morality of the "dangerous" common people whom religion of Church and State keeps in order, will go, too. For "no religion, no morality," is many foolish people's belief, as foolish King James believed: "No bishop, no king."

It may be conceded at once that religion serves many purposes besides its own. For instance, to the rulers of the people it is a means of assisting law and politics to keep the mob quiet, or a powerful auxiliary means of rendering toilers contented, or at least passive and acquiescent, through their imagining hopes and fears of after-life rewards and punishments. Heaven and hell have their uses to politicians and the State. Even the Press and the B.B.C. know that. The Third Commandment is a useful adjunct to the Perjury Act and the Eighth to the Larceny Act, while the Tenth has long assisted to keep "the poor man at his gate" from attacking "the rich man in his castle" in this world where it has pleased God, as the Church Catechism sensibly teaches, to "call" men to various unequal states of life.

Perhaps this is one meaning of Voltaire's celebrated *mot* that if there were no God it would be necessary to invent him. From the ancient statesman's point of view it certainly would. But the modern statesman has discovered an excellent *ersatz* substitute for God in deifying THE STATE. A piece of useful statecraft, as old as John Selden's advocacy in England but only recently brought to perfection in socialistic and communistic doctrine.

So it may well be that the hosts of heaven will no longer be needed by human governments as an adjunct to police forces, military, naval, aerial, or civilian. The State is the new God.

But what of the individual? What shall he put in the place of religion? A realistic, as opposed to a superstitious, outlook

upon life supplies the answer. Cool good sense of the heart and head (a blend that is more than mere rationalism) will be enough in worldly matters; and for my part I ask no better guides than Lord Bacon, La Rochefoucauld, Chesterfield, Tacian, and similar stars of worldliness. And for the other world, "those infinite regions," which so affrighted that most admirable and thoughtful of all priests, Blaise Pascal, what is wrong with the speculations of metaphysics, the dreams of poetry, and the discoveries of science, in place of theology and ecclesiasticism?

To sum it up in a word: what should be put in the place of religion is Thought.

For as Pascal well said: "Man is evidently made for thought - all his dignity and worth lie therein; and his one main duty is to think aright." He went on: "And the right course of thought is to begin with self" - a remarkable unpriestly admission - and then added "our Author and our end." Even if we substitute an abstract "authorship" for the concrete "Author" in this saying, it still betrays a limitation of thought, a course that merely notes Alpha and Omega and none of the alphabet between this first of birth and this last of death.

The terms and conditions upon which we hold our precarious lease of life are so dreadful that no wonder men cry: "What must I do to be saved?" There is no more pitiful sight than a new-born babe, except a corpse. Each is an indictment of God. Fortunately we need reckon with neither babyhood nor corpsehood so far as each of ourselves is concerned; that we have been a babe and will be a corpse is irrelevant to the task of living in the present and providing for life in the future.

And for present and future provision wherein does salvation lie? Not in the old falsehood that the only alternative to religion is "to eat and drink for to-morrow we die." Salvation, I think, lies in mere living itself (where all animals and plants find their salvation) with thought as its guide, its consolation and its justification: Making the best of life, physically, mentally, and spiritually, individually and collectively: that is enough.

On that basis, every man is his own Redeemer and Saviour and the Redeemer and Saviour of the human race. Not by death nor by blood, as is taught of Jesus Christ, but by life and by its activities, as is shown in the stories of all of us.

And, after all, it is by some such "unsystematic philosophy" as we use (John Stuart Mill's phrase) as this, that most men, even those who think themselves religious, actually guide their steps. They would prefer a neat, tidy, system of philosophy or religion that fits life like a glove. None, however, exists. The golden rule is that there are no golden rules for living, and the One commandment is that there are no commandments save those inherited instinct and acquired experience.

The best of priests is a man's self: the best Church is a man's own mind: the best prayer is thought: the best religion is a man's own living according to his own nature. Broken glimpses of these truths are to be found in all religions, overlaid with stifling falsities to the contrary, setting up artificial standards, buildings as "Houses of God" and Gospels and Gospels in place of natural living. Even my poor Saint Blaise Pascal (why does not the Roman Church canonise him in place of some of the wretched creatures it proclaims saints?) realised that despite his religious inhibitions.

To substitute religion for thought: what a blunder, what a crime, what an ironic jest! To quote old Selden again, as the only taken in adultery by her indignant spouse said in denying

"Will you believe the mere evidence of your own eyes before your own sweet wife?" We had better believe our own mind's upon the situation in which helpless man finds himself here on earth instead of Mother Church's jumbled and distorted view of it. We can piously tell the Church that God takes good care that we shall not have too many brains or use such as we have, too much. He has not in this respect over-burdened his children, being a tender and loving Father. Still,

with such minds as we have, thought is the only remedy for such lives as we live.

Let us think, then, rather than pray, and express ourselves rather than submit to be preached at. Let us put thought in the place of religion.

C. G. L. Du CANN.

## ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

AFTER a keenly contested conflict between Crown and Parliament for pre-eminence that of the Legislature was definitely established by the bloodless Revolution of 1688, which led to the evolution of party government. Of the two Chambers, the House of Commons became the predominant partner, for no minister could retain authority unless he could command a majority in the Lower Chamber.

Still, fear of royal encroachment was frequently expressed, and the dissensions of Whig and Tory mainly related to this issue. In the words of Leslie Stephen: "The essential Whig doctrine is indicated by Dunning's famous resolution (April 6, 1780), that 'the power of the Crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished.' The resolution was in one sense an anachronism. As in many other cases, politicians seem to be elaborately slaying the slain and guarding against the attacks of extinct monsters. There was scarcely more probability under George III than under Victoria that the king would try to raise taxes without the consent of Parliament."

Yet, George III determined to obtain influence, if not authority, by introducing his personal adherents into Parliament. For the king possessed an immense amount of patronage. The Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall, the principality of Wales, and the earldom of Chester, all yielded rich revenues. Edmund Burke averred that the royal turnspit sat in the Commons, while innumerable sinecures and civil list pensions, with other sources of revenue furnished the funds which enabled the Crown to create a personal following, amenable to its dictates. So Burke's measure of 1782 was passed to lessen the encroachments of the king.

Not that Parliament itself was a spotless institution. It depended on the support of a handful of electors who commonly sold their votes to the highest bidder, while the distribution of seats was farcical. "In Cornwall, 21 boroughs with 453 electors, controlled by about 15 individuals, returned 42 members, or, with the two county members, only one member less than Scotland; and the Scottish members were elected by close corporations in boroughs and by the great families in counties. No wonder if the House of Commons seemed at times to be little more than an exchange for traffic between the proprietors of votes and the proprietors of offices and pensions."

Monstrous as this system was, it survived until 1832, when the Reform Act placed the middle classes in a majority of the electorate. Indeed, before the French Revolution, our ancestors contemplated their electoral system with approval, while the earlier reformers themselves appealed for the restoration of many imaginary glories of the past, rather than to a truly progressive future.

It is a melancholy truth that the masses were too ignorant and superstitious to entertain any political opinions worthy of the name, and were mostly content to leave the control of their country to their "betters," who were usually members of the landholding class. Still, the business men were steadily increasing in wealth and influence, and trade interests now decided the direction of public policy. The wars of the 18th century were waged largely in the interests of foreign and colonial commerce, while the penetration of India was the work of a chartered company. Also, the moneyed merchants and industrialists largely financed British sea power.

Nevertheless, the main ambition of the opulent banker or merchant was the possession of real estate and to rank with the landed aristocracy. Moreover, they married into territorial families. For instance, Sir Francis Child, one of the founders of the Bank of England, numbered the Earls of Jersey and Westmorland among his descendants. "The Barings, descendants of a German pastor, settled in England early in the century and became country gentlemen, baronets and peers. Cobbett, who saw them rise, reviled the stockjobbers who were buying out the old families."

In those days, the intellectual life of England was far more greatly influenced by the Anglican Church than in ours. The Establishment has been defined as the religious department of the State. A Parliamentary creation, legislation concerning it emanates from the House of Commons. The Act of Uniformity prescribes the profession of belief imposed on the clergy.

Difficulties, however, arose with the granting of toleration to dissenting sectaries, despite certain disqualifications which were gradually disappearing. Several attempts were made to relax the rules of subscription. Profession of belief in the Bible was suggested as a substitute for subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. But for sundry weighty reasons Parliament shirked the risks of Church legislation, and the more recent attempt to purify the Prayer Book, which aroused such fiery religious fury is certainly no inducement to modernists to seek a decision from Westminster.

At the close of George III's reign, the prelates who possessed the princely Church revenues were appointed more by favour than by merit. As Stephen notes in his "English Utilitarians," of the 27 bishoprics, "eleven were held by members of noble families; fourteen were held by men who had been tutors in, or in other ways personally connected with the royal family, or the families of ministers and great men; and of the remaining two, one rested his claim upon political writing in defence of Pitt, while the other seems to have had the support of a great city company. . . . So far then, as secular motives operated, the tendency of the system was clear. If Providence had assigned to you a duke for your father or an uncle, preferment would fall to you as a right. A man of rank who takes orders should be rewarded for his condescension. If that qualification be not secured, you should aim at being a tutor in a great family, accompany a lad on a grand tour, or write some pamphlet on a great man's behalf."

In these circumstances, the fathers in God appropriately led respectable lives. One bishop, however, who coveted a more opulent diocese, considered his merits unrewarded especially as he had controverted the infidels, Gibbon and Paine. Carlyle's friend, John Stirling, likened the clergy to a garrison to preserve the rights of property in an orderly community, while Arthur Young remarked that, in France, he had never seen such advertisements as some he had heard of in England, such as: "Wanted: A curacy in a good sporting country, where the duty is light and the neighbourhood convivial."

Without question, many of the parochial clergy were men of exemplary character, Crabbe and Gilbert White among them. It is a fair conclusion that: "The clergy of the eighteenth century probably varied between the extremes represented by Trulliber and the Vicar of Wakefield." Still, they were little likely to emulate John Ball in his demand for peasant emancipation or to disturb the somnolence of rural life.

Gibbon assures us that, in his day, the dons at Oxford were sunk in prejudice and port. Wesley, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham coincide in this condemnation. Oxford and Cambridge were still clerical preserves and no serious changes were made in the college constitutions until the middle of the 19th century. Cambridge proved more progressive than the sister University and various professorships "of such modern studies as anatomy, history, botany and geology were founded during the eighteenth century, and show a certain sense of a need of broader views. The lectures upon which Blackstone founded his commentaries

were the product of the foundation of the Vinerian professorship of 1751."

Still, as training centres for intellectual achievement, the Universities failed. The religious tests told against the heresies of Wakefield and even against those of Richard Porson, the greatest Greek scholar of the age. The average divinity student obtained a degree, and the squire's son or lawyer gained the traditional culture and was able to spend three or four years in indolent pleasure or even in undisturbed study.

Truly enough: "The men of the time who contributed to the progress of science owed little or nothing to the universities, and were rather volunteers from without, impelled by their own idiosyncrasies. Among the scientific leaders, for example, Joseph Black was a Scottish professor; Priestley, a Dissenting minister; Cavendish, an aristocratic recluse, who, though he studied at Cambridge, never graduated; Watt, a practical mechanic; Dalton, a Quaker schoolmaster. John Hunter (1728-1793), was one of the energetic Scots who forced their way to fame without help from English universities."

The pretension of the Roman Church to supernatural guidance and authority which prevailed throughout Western Christendom until the Reformation, ranked theology as the queen of the sciences, and claimed for theologians alone the capacity to rightly interpret the principles of religion and ethics. Rome selected her own ministers and her College of Cardinals appointed the Pope. But the Anglican Church, on the other hand, was dependent for its episcopal and parochial appointments on selections made by the Crown or lay patrons of livings. Thus, the Anglican divine naturally sympathised with the opinions of his patron and enjoined a peaceful acceptance of the inequalities of existence in this mundane sphere.

The eighteenth century rationalisation of Protestant teaching was the prologue to Colenso, "Essays and Reviews: *Lex Mundi*," and the Biblical criticism so brilliantly enumerated by clerical and other scholars in the iconoclastic pages of the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* of the succeeding century. For as Stephen reminds us, many of the Christian mysteries had to be clarified when the educated laity tended to become contemptuous or indifferent to the orthodox dogmas of theology. The prelate of the age of enlightenment "had been disarmed and had to suit his teaching to the taste of his patrons and congregations. The divines of the eighteenth century had, as they boasted, confuted the Deists; but it was mainly by showing that they could be Deists themselves in all but the name."

As the century ended, philosophy was restricted to Scotland where Reid, Dugald Stewart, and Adam Smith held aloft the torch of the departed David Hume.

T. F. PALMER

## WHISPERS FROM "DOUBTING CASTLE"

Item.—"An impressive list of the leading lights of Athenaeism in U.S.A. are planning an active campaign against organised religion. This appears to be the most energetic group since the days of Ingersoll, and several of its leaders belong to 'Doubting Castle.'" (See item below.)

Item.—"Attention is called to a current living active example of word metamorphosis. The process is somewhere midway of its course, but the end is clearly in sight. Most of us are too young to remember how or when 'usury,' 'citizen,' 'anarchy' and a thousand other words were perverted from their original meanings, but here—for everyone to see—the same thing is being done to the word 'discrimination.'"

Time was when the term was complimentary, indicating fastidiousness, skill, taste, breeding, experience, ability, judgment—in short, *discrimination*. Now, by a change in the tone of voice employed to pronounce it, 'discrimination' becomes a dastardly act, even punishable by law in some States. *Commandment XI*—"Thou shalt not choose!"

Item.—“The stigmatic Therese Neumann, reported dead in 1930, is still alive and bleeding, according to Associated Press.”

Item.—“Mrs. Vashti McCollum, who refused to permit the Illinois public schools to teach her son religion received so many commendatory letters from all over the country that it was necessary to *print* a thank-you reply.” (See item above.)

Item.—“After studying the eclipse of September 7, 1945, Professor Knut Lundmarch, chief of Lund University Observatory, Stockholm, said that sun spots caused wars, and the ‘next’ one will come in 1962.”

Item.—“The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee, an activity in which *anti-God* Joseph Lewis has been a moving spirit, announced in November, 1945, that after twenty years of effort it had finally succeeded in getting Thomas Paine admitted to the Hall of Fame.”

Item.—“In Oakland, died Dr. Duncan McDougall, who claimed to have weighed the human soul. He carried a postal scale (letter balance) in a handbag and ‘dashed here and there in a bicycle looking for people who were dying.’”

Item.—“J. W. Fletcher of Cremorne, N.S. Wales, started standing on his head a few minutes every day, five years ago. He is reported not to have had a cold since.”

Item.—“According to a contributor, everybody in New York is busy reading the best seller, *Frank Fay is my Co-Pilot*, by God.”

Item.—“God’s chillun in the tall and uncut who play with snakes, set a district to squabbling about whether it was legal or not. Coming under the head of religion, nobody could stop them. The Virginia State Police did kill some of their snakes. The officers said the snakes were not prime specimens, that poison had been removed, fangs drawn, and the crawlers drugged before services. Nevertheless, Lewis E. Ford, a ‘lay’ preacher, took a bite, and so did Mrs. Anna Kirk and her baby, delivered between the bite and the mother’s death. Four of the *Bible* papers were indicted on a murder charge.”

Item.—“Ezra Pound is at present lying in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, Washington, where friends have visited him. He is engaged in the art of translating Chinese poetry while he waits for the world to become sane.”

Item.—“The American Journal *Time* recently told the strange story about a man named Cherepanov being regarded as ‘dead’ some time and then later recovering. This event caused correspondence to start as to where his ‘soul’ had been in interim. This subject was settled by E. M. Smola in an issue of October 1st, 1945. He said that the soul ‘remained attached by a tenuous chord’ to the man’s heart, ‘within seven feet of his mortal body.’”

Item.—“A report of a rain of beans reached the weather bureau at St. Louis in November, 1945. Then some old lady asked the bureau if the world was coming to an end.”

Item.—“Gertrude Stein wrote in an article in the U.S.A. magazine *Life*: ‘When General Osborne came to see me just after victory, he asked me what I thought should be done to humiliate the Germans. I said there is only one thing to be done, that is to teach them disobedience, because as long as they are obedient so long sooner or later they will be ordered around by a bad man and there will be trouble. Teach them disobedience.’ General Osborne shook his head sadly, you’ll never make the heads of an army understand that . . .”

(NOTE.—Lie-busting is the sole occupation of the members of Doubting Castle.” People who have the mental strength to get out of bed are cordially invited to co-operate with them. Patent medicine vendors, Press tycoons, ecclesiastical dignitaries, persons in authority, swamis and other werewolves need NOT reply.)

The above flashes are gleefully culled from the magazine *Doubt*, which is published by the Fortean Society of U.S.A.—The Red House of the Human Mind.

ED. H. SIMPSON.

LEAVES IN THE WIND

Leaves and petals, by the wind  
Scattered, here and there we find:  
Seeming of such little worth—  
Yet giving goodness to the earth.

1. The Herd Mentality is the Curse of Civilisation.  
All creatures of low intelligence will flock together for safety, content to follow any leader or to be driven so that they be not separated.  
Only the man of superior intellect will have the courage to choose his own path—and walk alone.
2. The small mind is like a tightly closed box which the owner fears to open—not lest something might escape therefrom but lest something might enter in!
3. There is no fear of death except in the ignorant mind.  
Only the enlightened surrender life thankfully and pass into oblivion peacefully and without regret.  
Only the selfish give up their dead grudgingly.
4. Small talk is always the product of a small mind and a small mind is the unfortunate result of narrow teaching and blind belief.  
Always remember that an ounce of Wisdom will outweigh a ton of Ignorance.
5. The Wise Man is discreetly silent but the Fool can be heard for many miles.  
Truly, when the little cock-sparrow boasts of his own importance the mighty eagle can afford to be silent.
6. Humility is the highest virtue. Servility is the lowest vice.  
Only the strong can be truly meek; only the weak can be utterly servile.  
He who has learned real humility has learned everything.
7. The Cloak of Religion is a torn and tattered garment shrouding the superstitious and disguising the unworthy—but it never quite conceals the lean and twisted frame beneath.
8. No man can be completely virtuous neither can any man entirely without virtue.  
The Soul of Goodness cannot be recognised by the outward expression of piety but by the inward feeling of love and goodwill it engenders in all hearts.
9. It is not race, creed nor colour that matters but the wisdom, kindness and understanding of the individual.  
Bigoted condemnation merely condemns the bigot.  
It is not unknown for a white skin to conceal a black heart and vice versa.
10. Human judgment is not infallible; neither is human justice.  
The Wheels of Justice too often creak with the Rust of Prejudice and are clogged by the dust and grime of Ancient Tradition. But worst of all, its spokes are badly bent by the pressure of an outworn and intolerant religious system.

W. H. WOOD.

After Buddha was dead people showed his shadow for centuries afterwards in a cave—an immense frightful shadow. God is dead: but as the human race is constituted, there will perhaps be caves for millenniums yet, in which people will show his shadow. And we—we have still to overcome his shadow!—NIETZSCHE.

## ACID DROPS

Ever since the freeing (?) of India became a certainty—sooner or later—we have been curious to note whether some of our leading newspapers will feel inclined to mention the name of Charles Bradlaugh, an Atheist, who did much for India inside and outside of the House of Commons. Up to date we have observed none. India has not forgotten Bradlaugh, but India is not a Christian country and it will never be one. This is a Christian country, and it managed to some degree to hide from the general public the greatness of Thomas Paine. His crime was two-fold. He did not believe in the Christian Bible, and he attacked the moneyed classes in the interests of the people. Yet the recent acts concerning the bettering of the poor were Paine's work—almost line by line. And later, Churchill could take his suggestion of creating a "United States of Europe" without any reference to one of the greatest men of his time—a man who fought in three countries for the same thing—freedom of the people. There are many ways of telling lies. Suppressing truth and forgetting facts, are good hard-worked examples.

But all the more we welcome the few exceptions to the general rule, one of which is the well-known journalist, Hannen Swaffer. Writing in "The People," he gives us some of his recollections of Bradlaugh and others. He says: "Dr. Haden Guest, taking part in the last Indian debate the Commons will hear, told how, 'as a small child' he was taken to the House to hear Bradlaugh speak on 'a subject very unpopular at the time, the condition of the Indian peasants.' As Guest is now seventy, that was over six decades ago. 'I remember little of the substance of the speech,' said Guest, 'only the tremendous energy of the speaker and his immense enthusiasm. My father told me afterwards of the great work Bradlaugh was trying to do for India against apathy, contempt and difficulties of every kind.' That story should be a lesson to those who, amid ridicule to-day, are striving for reforms that will not be accomplished till after their death. Then, James Carmichael, a Clydesider, reminded the House that the date of our resigning governance of India—August 15—was the birthday of Keir Hardie, 'who is derided and abused not only outside but inside the House to this day.'"

From a Christian point of view the Archbishop of York might well be discharged from his post. It was his job to see that this country was in a good state, and it was to be done through the "grace of God." Now it turns out that things are in a very, very bad state, and the situation is going from bad to worse. The situation is plain. Either God is not doing what he ought to do, or he is not pleased with his agent, and the Archbishop is warning the people that in the bad times before us God will not lend a hand. That seems to us the real situation. And either the Archbishop or the deity should retire, and another agent who knows his job installed.

The plain fact is that God does not help those who cannot help themselves, and those who can do not require his assistance. In all man's doubts and difficulties, in all his trials and troubles, man finds no help from God; that has to come from his own strength of mind and body, or from the labours of his fellows. In helplessness and ignorance was the cry born; in helplessness and ignorance it finds its chief support to-day. And because of this the world still finds itself oppressed by the weight of demoralising creeds, and of rapacious and retrogressive priesthoods. These are the real dangers from which we might well pray to be released; for while our minds are oppressed by religious fear, and our national life more or less controlled by the Black Army, it is "God help us," indeed.

Here and there we meet a clergyman who is touched with commonsense. There is one in the Rev. J. S. Spears, and he says that if parsons would "Let us laugh" instead of "Let us pray," the Churches would be better filled, and the people would be happier. We agree, and if the clergy were to hang up on the altar of the Church tips for racing—horse and dog—there is not a Church in the country that would not be full. But Mr. Spears should remember that the whole Christian scheme is not one that encouraged jokes and general jollifications. We hear of Jesus weeping, but we never hear of him laughing. His remark, "Woman, what have I to do with thee," hardly suggests a jolly

home, and the general run of misery and ill-living that accompanies the Christian creed, does not suggest jollification. We like the plan of Mr. Spears, but we do not think his brother preachers would follow it. We confess that during the few times we have been in Church we have been amused, but we have also been sorry. We do not think that a laughing Church will work.

The Rev. W. M. Parker, the vicar of West Wickham, is very much in the doldrums. A Protestant himself, he has been obliged to confess that Protestantism "seems to have singularly failed to keep England a Christian country where Sunday observance is concerned." So he proposes an infallible remedy—"the best solution is for England to become Roman Catholic." The Pope no doubt will say, "hear, hear," but with this sentiment in Mr. Parker's heart we are left wondering whether he is still drawing his salary as a faithful member of the Church of England.

Lord Pakenham, who is the Minister in charge of German Affairs, and an ardent Roman Catholic, was once Under-Secretary for War. The other day, he told some Danish officers that his intention then was to make the British Army thoroughly democratic—and "thoroughly Christian," by which he may have meant thoroughly Roman Catholic. Fortunately for honesty and fair play, where religion is concerned, Lord Pakenham's aim never succeeded. Openly or covertly such an attempt would mean a bad time for the men who had some respect for personal honesty, and intolerance in the name of Jesus and the Church would create humbugs in large numbers.

Bishop S. J. Fitzgerald has submitted that the most honest people he had ever met were the Eskimos. We are not surprised, but if the Bishop will pursue his inquiries further he will find that the honesty faded when the natives got acquainted with people from the Christian countries. The Eskimo people is one of the groups of natives that have clearly deteriorated following their acquaintance with Christian peoples. Bishop Fitzgerald should read one book at least on this matter. That is the one written by a great traveller, Fridtjof Nansen, "Eskimo Life," published in England in 1893. Nansen did not pay the traveller's visit, he lived with the natives, lived in their own huts, and knew them intimately. He describes how the natives suffered from their being "saved," and does not hesitate to say that the natives in truthfulness and in honour, "had put into practice the doctrine of love and charity very much more fully than any Christian nation." During the whole time he was living with Eskimos he never saw a child beaten, and the natives could not understand how or why anyone should beat a child.

The women occupied a fairly high place, although they had not the liberty that some outsiders had. Of the children, Nansen said he never heard them crying, and it took some time for the natives to believe that children were beaten. They did not practice Nansen and they could see no good results coming therefrom. Nansen had the fortune of knowing the Eskimos before they were civilised by Christians and for Christians. The natives were changed from the time they became more or less Christianised. But they remain honest. "Honest," think of that word in a country that has been sprinkled for centuries with all kinds of ill-living and lying. Fortunately the Eskimos have retained some of their original characteristics.

We sympathise with the "Universe" that the advertised portraits of Jesus are built on imaginations. We are informed that there is no substantial portrait of "Our Lord." Now that is rather serious. There are multitudes of men and women—and misled children—who are hoping some day to see Jesus. But there is no particular picture of Jesus, how will anyone be certain that he, or she, will get the right God? For there have been very, very numerous gods, some apparently died, but other just moved on. Again, female saints have been in the night embraced by "Our Lord." We have scores of that kind of visitors, and they have been mentioned in Roman Catholic books. The situation is had. Somehow or other the Church must secure an authentic picture of Jesus. He *must* have looked like somebody. Or are we to believe that the right picture of the Son of God is a picture of no one?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

A rather curious statement was given by Dr. Julian Huxley in a reply to an American writer who described him as an atheist. Dr. Huxley says in reply that he is not an atheist. He considers himself a "religious man." A curious reply, which we will deal with next week.

The St. Christopher's Catholic Cycling Club recently attended Mass and Holy Communion and of course had to leave their cycles outside. Here was a splendid chance of proving the efficacy of prayer as a preventive of theft, but the members were having no chances. They got the police to guard their cycles. It was far more prosaic but so very effective!

It is not quite certain that society would benefit if all the churches and chapels were closed, and the clergy turned to exclusively social work. Like everything else the pulpit is selective, and the type of mind that longs for the pulpit might well take to the platform—with troublesome consequences. At present, those who are engaged in important matters are not bound to the church, and those who are tied to the Church turn to other matters that are not concerned with, say, business matters. There is in fact a certain collective process always going on, and the practice of moving by degrees is sometimes the wisest plan. Fancy that would befall if all the clergy in England suddenly gave up their religious ideas and went straight into ordinary life. Some curious things would occur. Improvement may come too quickly.

Will Manchester Freethinkers note that a Sunday Cinema Poll will be held on Saturday, August 16. A supply of "Sunday Cinema" leaflets published by the National Secular Society has been applied to Mr. B. Lewis, 47, Northward Road, Wilmslow, who would welcome any assistance from Freethinkers in that area.

The quality of present-day religion, and the methods by which leading Christians hope to stem the stream of Atheism, may be judged by a Catholic journal. A boy met an Italian in the street crying for a doctor to save the life of a baby. The boy, a Catholic, asked if the child had been baptised. He was told "No." So the boy ran into the house and baptised the child in front of the broken-hearted parent. The result—the child died. There must be a moral somewhere. Perhaps the one here is that there is a fresh fool born every day.

Most of our readers will remember the day when the report came from Russia declaring a Revolution. There were the usual exaggerations, particularly with regard to the churches. It was said that they were all closed, together with the practise and teaching of religion. That, of course, was not true, but the Russian clergy were mere tools of the Czar. What happened was that the Church could no longer be used as an instrument for fooling the people. The road was cleared for a new way of life. In many respects the Revolution in Russia was a repetition of the Great Revolution in France. The French did not forbid the teaching of religion, neither did Russia. In both cases there was the same attack on the same class of people, with aims of creating a new life. Those who wish to see the difference between the Russia of to-day, compared with the Russia of yesterday, should read "Russian Characteristics," published in 1892, and the Russia that followed the Revolution. The old Russia was so bad that any move at all could hardly avoid being an improvement.

What the early revolutionaries did was, not to prohibit Christian teachings or the opening of churches, but to prevent them being used as an implement for attacking the new Russia. From the beginning a certain number of churches were open, and an honest appeal for more churches was granted as far as circumstances permitted. But the churches were not permitted to take part in political movements. Naturally there was not, and there is not, the same freedom that exists in England concerning church activities, but neither is there the same double dealing by the priests and the use of religion to frustrate social betterment. Revolutionary Russia was determined to build a new Russia, and there was this in its favour: it simply could not be as bad as the Russia that was destroyed, and which can never live again.

At Burnham (Bucks.) the choirboys are permitted to leave the church before the sermon. We imagine that many of the congregation will envy those choirboys.

## MORALITY AND RELIGION

THEOLOGICAL denunciation of the "rags of morality" is no more an indication of basic difference between morality and religion than the denunciation of Christians by Christians shows any fundamental difference between them. Christians agree in calling themselves Christians so long as we do not ask what is meant by Christianity. So also with morality. The word is used in many different ways and its very ambiguity is a sufficient reason for its renunciation. Although theoretically a consideration of human behaviour, it is invariably a maze of mystical confusion or obscurantist sophistry; as in that theological absurdity, the knowledge of right or wrong, and the metaphysical search for the eternal verities. It is remarkable that moralists constantly assert the prevalence of "immorality" and the need for moral incentive. That the religionist is more downright and even vulgar in his condemnation does not absolve the moralist. To say that men stray from the narrow path is really an assertion of the failure of morality. To advocate the need for morality is an open admission of failure, if the failure is given as evidence of the need for it. The fallacy lies in that a consideration of incentives or motives is irrelevant, as the most disastrous consequences may arise from the best of intentions. There is no necessary connection between intentions and consequences. But divorce morality from such considerations and it ceases to be morality.

This peculiar inversion is a characteristic of religion and it arises in fear. Fear of the charge of immorality in the challenge of old ideas ignores the fact that the ideas challenged is the old morality, and the new ideas are also claimed as moral. It is claimed that moral courage is needed to challenge these old ideas, but can it be moral to challenge morality? If we wish to distinguish this from physical courage we might call it intellectual courage. It requires no courage to flow with the moral stream and the charge of immorality can only be faced in a challenge of morality. In endeavouring to avoid the charge

of immorality, the moralist avers concern only with the good and the true, the moral virtues. But, if morality is concerned with human behaviour, the other aspect is involved, and in his temerity, he fails to face up to the question at issue, namely, the immorality, which is religion's strong point. To claim a new morality is to assert that there can be different ideas or interpretations of morality; that it is a matter of opinion. To which, we have the Pauline objection of caprice, chaos or despotism. It becomes a personal matter and involves the charge of selfishness; eat, drink and be merry. The question involves not only moral incentives but also moral duty; personal pleasure and the pain of discipline; praise and blame, rewards and punishments.

Considering the intellectual inversion and the emotional complications, an interesting twist may be shown in the argument that one cannot love without hating the opposite; the identity of opposites attempts to justify intensity of feeling and at the same time avoid the taint of immorality; so that virtues become vices, and vices, virtues. The sentiments of the savage are perpetuated in a brave new world. We either have an accentuation of extremes so that pleasure or pain become moral obligations or else a mystical combination of both. There is not only an intellectual twist, but also a psychological twist. Personal feeling, expressed in moral sentiments show a basic duplicity and complexity. We kick our heels and weep for joy in pleasure as an antidote to pain, or find ecstatic joy in pain in giving expression to our feelings. Laughter is an emotional outlet and ridicule is a moral corrective. Ridicule, like the discipline of duty, gives a feeling of humility or shame; called the moral conscience. The possession of this conscience is presumed to be evidence of moral consciousness; though it may also be spoken of as self-consciousness. An individual, being more sensitive, is supposed to be more responsive to moral influence. The merits of this hyper-sensitiveness is highly debatable, as it may be neurotic and delirious. It is not only "the still, small voice" but also that god-intoxication so beloved of the religionist. But the peculiar thing is that this moral conscience has little or no effect on those hard-bitten, unscrupulous types, who, it is claimed, are most in need of it.

That there is a definite relation between morality and religion seems clear. Praise and blame, rewards and punishments, show that we have practical considerations; in fact, the relationship between theory and practice; that is, different interpretations of social relations. The differences are theoretical. Religion and morals are not separate issues. There is much in common between theological and metaphysical speculation, and it is impossible to avoid the connection. If we analyse the moral virtues we find that our standards are inherited from the past. The inflexible rigidity of the concept of moral duty has similar indications; while the idea of moral law, and such expressions as the moral government of the world, have distinctly theological implications. Metaphysicians tried to explain their fellow-men, and even the world at large, by analysing their own minds. Although presumptively concerned with human behaviour and relations, consideration is not practical but extreme theoretical; though ostensibly concerned with the relationship between man and man, consideration is introspective, concerned with personal feelings and sensations. In search of moral principles, they either, by a process of mental elimination of the undesirable, discover the most useless of moral platitudes; or else, trace tradition back to some philosopher or sage, away back into the dim and distant past, to the Twelve Tables, the Scriptures, the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Dead, the Vedas, the Analects, the Avestas, the Eight-Fold Path, or the Tao; so find the unsophisticated, moral teaching in all its childish simplicity. This speculative introspection is, in fact, repetition of the intellectual gropings which form a development in which the basic assumptions are axioms inherited from the past; and it parallels the regressive tracing back to moral principles, which are thus perpetuated.

In view of the extreme reverence for moral teaching, it is surely absurd, for instance, to speak of the wonderful influence of the Confucian analects on the millions of illiterate Chinese. Rather was it that the Analects were perpetuated by illiteracy and ignorance. The continuity of culture is due as much to custom as it is to tradition, and custom and tradition are similar in character. What tradition is to ideas, so is custom to behaviour; indeed the two words are in some respects interchangeable. The word morals is derived from the Latin for custom and it has the general character of tradition; like tradition it carries the dead hand of the past. Religion is handed down by tradition, and morality, handed down by custom, is the last ditch for religion. But as we, so often, act first and think after, there is a constant need to square morality with changes in customs. But the greatest difficulty lies in that, although the teachings are customary, and it is customary to think of them as being of consequence, it is not customary to consider the consequences, either of the teachings or the customs.

H. H. PREECE.

## CHARLES BLOUNT

IN any estimate of the lives and work of the early English Freethinkers, it is necessary to remember the atmosphere of opinion by which they were surrounded, and the penalties which they incurred by the publication of their opinions. Down to 1678 any person convicted of heresy was liable at law to be burnt by force of the writ *de haeretico comburendo*, which was granted out of chancery upon certificate of such conviction by the ecclesiastical courts. Matthew Hamont, John Lewis, Bartholomew Legate, Edward Wightman, and others, were so burnt for anti-Trinitarian heresies. The principles of toleration were held but by few, and, despite Milton's noble plea for the liberty of unlicensed printing, every publication had to pass a censorship which scotched where it could not kill, and emuscated where it did not suppress. If only for his share in the service of ridding England of this incubus, the name of Charles Blount is entitled to remembrance.

A younger son of an illustrious family, Charles Blount was born at the seat of his grandfather, Sir Thomas Pope Blount, at Upper Holloway, April 27, 1654. His father, Sir Henry Blount, the traveller, whose "Voyage to the Levant" [1674-36] ran through several editions, and who enjoyed high distinction both under Charles I and the Commonwealth, was a man of keen observation and somewhat sceptical turn of mind. Charles Blount inherited the same disposition and a strong propensity to learning, which was fostered by his father, who took upon himself the direction of his studies. At the age of 18 his father had him married to Eleanora, daughter of Sir Thomas Tyrrel, of Shotover, Oxon, and gave him a handsome settlement.

His first work, published soon after his marriage, was a vindication of Dryden's "Conquest of Granada" against the aspersions of a Mr. Leigh. In a translation of Lucian, in which Blount had a hand, which was not published until the year 1711. Dryden, in his "Life of Lucian," returned the compliment, speaking highly of Blount's wit and abilities. In 1679 he sent abroad his "Anima Mundi; or, an Historical Narration of the Opinions of the Ancients concerning Man's Soul after this Life. According to Unenlightened Nature," by Charles Blount, Gent. His father, who probably inspired his son's heretical opinions, is said to have had some share in this early essay on comparative religion. The "Anima Mundi," it appears, has long been handed about in manuscript, with several passages in it much strengthened in the work as licensed by Sir Roger L'Estrange. His mutilation, however, did not suffice, and the work was condemned by Dr. Compton, Bishop of London, and publicly burnt.



NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

AT the time of the life or recorded appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, and for some centuries before, the Mediterranean and neighbouring world had been the scene of a vast number of pagan creeds and rituals. There were temples without end dedicated to gods like Apollo or Dionysus among the Greeks, Hercules among the Romans, Mithra among the Persians, Adonis and Attis in Syria and Phrygia, Osiris, Horus and Isis in Egypt, Baal and Astarte among the Babylonians and Carthaginians. And an extraordinarily interesting fact, for us, is that notwithstanding great geographical distances and racial differences between the adherents of these various cults, as well as differences in the details of their services, the general outline of their creeds and services were—if not identical—so markedly similar as we find them.

I may roughly say that of all or nearly all the deities above-mentioned it was said or believed that:—

- (1) They were born on or very near Christmas Day.
- (2) They were born of a Virgin-mother.
- (3) And in a cave or underground chamber.
- (4) They led a life of toil for mankind.
- (5) And they were called by the names of Light-Bringer, Healer, Mediator, Saviour, Deliverer.
- (6) They were, however, vanquished by the Powers of Darkness.
- (7) And descended into Hell or the Underworld.
- (8) They rose again from the dead, and became the pioneers of mankind to the Heavenly world.
- (9) They obtained Communion of Saints and Churches.
- (10) And they were commemorated by Eucharistic meals.

Let me give a few examples.

Mithra was born in a cave, and on the 25th of December. He was born of a Virgin. He travelled far and wide as a teacher of men . . . He had twelve disciples or companions. He was buried in a tomb, from which, however, he rose again; and his resurrection was celebrated yearly with great rejoicings. He was called Saviour and Mediator, and sometimes figured as a Lamb.

Osiris was born on the 361st day of the year . . . He was betrayed by Typhon, the power of darkness, slain and dismembered . . . His body was placed in a box, but afterwards came to life, and as in the cults of Mithra, Dionysus, Adonis and others, so in the cult of Osiris, an image placed in a coffin was brought out before the worshippers and saluted with glad cries, "Osiris is risen." His sufferings, his death and his resurrection were enacted year by year in a great mystery play at Abydos. . .

What we chiefly notice so far are two points; on the one hand the general similarity of these stories with that of Jesus Christ; on the other hand their analogy with the yearly phenomena of nature as illustrated by the course of the Sun in heaven and the changes of vegetation on the earth.

The similarity of these ancient pagan legends and beliefs with Christian traditions was indeed so great that it excited the attention and the undisguised wrath of the early Christian fathers. They felt no doubt about the similarity, but not knowing how to explain it, fell back upon the innocent theory that the Devil—in order to confound the Christians—had centuries before caused the pagans to adopt certain beliefs and practices . . . Justin Martyr, for instance, describes the institution of the Lord's Supper as narrated in the Gospels, and then goes on to say, "which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithra, commanding the same thing to be done. For that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn." Tertullian also says that, "The

At his father's request Charles Blount sent a copy of the "Anima Mundi" to Hobbes, with a letter, dated 1678, in which he praises Hobbes's "Treatise on Heresy," which he had seen as a manuscript, and which Hobbes had written in view of a prosecution of his own works. Soon after Hobbes's death (December 4, 1679) Blount published "The Last Sayings of the dying Legacy of Mr. Thomas Hobbes, of Malmesbury," being aphorisms, mostly from "The Leviathan," beginning with the sayings: "Fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, is religious; not allowed, is superstitious." "To say that God hath spoken to a man in a dream is no more than to say he dreamt that God spake to him."

The Licensing Act of 1662 concerning the press, which had been directed against the works of Hobbes and the Deists, and also intended at the same time as a safeguard against sedition, was to expire in 1679. In that year Blount published a notable pamphlet, which is reprinted in the sixth volume of the "Harleian Miscellany." It is entitled "A Just Vindication of Learning; or, An Humble Address to the High Court of Parliament, in Behalf of the Liberty of the Press, by Philostratus." Macaulay sneers at its "garbled extracts from the Arcopagitica of Milton," and brands Blount as an unscrupulous plagiarist. The truth is, that in 1679 it could only have injured any cause to have used the name of the Republican poet in its defence. Even that noble treatise, the Arcopagitica, which in Milton's own words may be called "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life," lay neglected, and was not only, as Macaulay says, "at the mercy of every pilferer," but was best utilised by "garbled extracts" given anonymously. Blount was not an original writer. His works show indebtedness to Herbert, Hobbes, Montaigne, Taylor, Brunet, and others; but he had a good mind, industry, a wide range of knowledge, and some will and enthusiasm in putting it to use in the service of Freedom. The "Just Vindication" was well received, and had the due effect. The pernicious Licensing Act was not renewed until 1695, when James II came to the throne. It was then put in force again for seven years; but Blount, as we shall see, did not cease to attack the despotism which he was destined to overthrow. Shortly after publishing the "Just Vindication" under the signature of Junius Brutus, published "An Appeal from the Country to the City," which the "Biographia Britannica" describes as "the strongest invective against Popery and Papists that was published even in that age."

In 1680 appeared "Great is Diana of the Ephesians; or, The Original of Idolatry, together with the Politick Institution of Gentiles Sacrifices"; an attack upon heathen superstition and priestcraft, with Jewish and Christian ditto read between the lines. For instances, he says:—

"Apollonius Tyaneus is reported by Philostratus to have raised a maid from the dead, but Reason questions whether the maid was not only asleep; for sleep is the image of death. Philostratus also foretelleth that Apollonius vanished away out of the Emperor's presence before a great number of people; but here Reason bids me observe that, although it is reported to have been done in the presence of a great number of people, yet I have but the testimony of one man for it—viz., Philostratus." J. M. WHEELER.

(To be concluded)

CHILDREN AND THE PRIEST

If you desire a better world for mankind do your best to keep the young who are our future hope away from all religious influence and its barbaric teachings. No one has put this truth better than that fine scholar and scientist William Kingdon Clifford when he wrote: "If there is one lesson which history presses upon us in every page it is this—Keep Your Children Away From The Priest, Or He Will Make Them The Enemies of Mankind."

devil by the mysteries of his idols imitates even the main part of the divine mysteries . . . He baptizes his worshippers in water and makes them believe that this purifies them from their crimes . . . Mithra sets his mark on the forehead of his soldiers; he celebrates the oblation of bread; he offers an image of the resurrection, and presents at once the crown and the sword; he limits his chief priest to a single marriage; he even has his virgins and his ascetics." Cortez, too, it will be remembered complained that the devil had taught the Mexicans the same things which God had taught to Christendom.

Justin Martyr again, in the Dialogue with Tryphon, says that the birth in the stable was the prototype of the birth of Mithra in the cave of Zoroastrianism, and boasts that Christ was born when the Sun takes its birth in the Augean stable, coming as a second Hercules to clean a foul world; and St. Augustine says: "We hold this (Christmas) Day holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the Sun, but because of the birth of him who made it." There are plenty of other instances in the early Fathers of their indignant ascription of these similarities to the work of devils, but we need not dwell over them. There is no need for us to be indignant. On the contrary we can now see that these animadversions of the Christian writers are the evidence of how and to what extent in the spread of Christianity over the world it had become fused with the pagan cults previously existing.

It was not till the year A.D. 530 or so—five centuries after the supposed birth of Christ—that a Scythian monk, Dionysius Exiguus, an abbot and astronomer of Rome, was commissioned to fix the day and the year of that birth. A nice problem, considering the historical science of the period. For the year he assigned the date which we now adopt, and for the day he adopted December 25 . . . the very date, within a day or two, of the supposed birth of previous sun-gods. From that fact alone we may fairly conclude that by the year 530, or earlier, the existing nature worships had become largely fused into Christianity.—From "Pagan and Christian Creeds," pp. 20-6.

EDWARD CARPENTER.

## A SICK PIG IN PORTUGAL

HOW we all loved that pig, so fat, so black, so sleek. When her owner, Senhora Kosta, patted her head or rubbed her ear she grunted and grinned with delight. Sometimes Senhor Kosta, who loved to play a joke on his wife, slyly opened the door of the sty, when out darted the pig mad with joy at her new-found liberty. Then we all gave chase, through the sugar canes, over the sweet potato plants and in and out the rows of banana trees we rushed in hot pursuit of the pig, until she was eventually caught and dragged screaming back to captivity.

Senhor Kosta never joined in the chase, he just leaned on the door of the sty and rocked and rolled with laughter.

But one day our pig fell sick and there was a great sadness over all the house. Senhor Kosta looked glum while Senhora Kosta and the maid openly wept. I, being more practical, suggested sending for the Vet.

"This," said Senhora Kosta, "is not a case for the Vet! The neighbours were all jealous of the good condition of my pig and one of them has given her the Evil Eye. Only the priest can cure her."

The next morning I awoke early and was surprised to see a curious procession passing my window on the way to the pig-sty. The priest led the way, dressed in long soutane and surplice. Round his shoulders was a bright yellow, embroidered shawl, which, as I learnt later, was called a "verba" and was specially blest as a protection against the Evil Spirits. The acolyte, also in church robes, accompanied the priest swinging the thurible and throwing rolls of incense fumes in the air.

As the procession marched, the priest, tripping over his skirts, chanted from a red-covered Missal which he held in his hand. Senhor and Senhora Kosta and the maid followed, all muttering over their dangling rosary beads. I, expecting some fun, hastily dressed myself and rushed to join the party. We arrived at the sty to find our poor pig lying an inert mass on the floor. The priest, taking hold of the thurible, entered the sty and advancing towards the pig with discreet ecclesiastical steps, he waved it in the pig's face, while all falling on their knees and raising their eyes to heaven earnestly besought the Lord to spare the life of the pig. Suddenly the pig, doped by the incense, rose to her feet and staggered blindly round the sty. "A miracle! A miracle!" cried Senhora Kosta: but the miracle was short-lived as the pig again fell and lay as if dead. She was now amply sprayed with Holy Water by the priest: a hymn was sung and the rest was left to the Lord. The priest then left carrying with him the 100 eggs and two hens, the price of his services.

In spite of all our prayers and hopes the pig got worse and sorrow and gloom reigned in all the house as we sadly awaited her death.

The following morning, what was my surprise on visiting the pig-sty to find our pig gone and a new pig installed in her place. A large beer bottle, suspended on a string from the roof of the sty, shone and glittered gaily in the morning sun. As I stood wondering, Senhora Kosta appeared and explained matters to me: she and her husband, realising that the pig would never get better, had sold her to a pork butcher. "And the bottle," I inquired, "what is the meaning of that?" "Oh, that," she explained, "that contains a special Holy Water which will protect our new pig from the Evil Eye."

I turned sadly for home, fearful for the fate of our new pig as the sty had neither been cleaned nor disinfected and the new pig was innocently wallowing in the diseased mess of the old.

N. F.

## HOT AIR AND DAMP SPIRIT

CUMBERLAND is reputed to be a wet county. That is to say from the point of view of the rainfall. Recently, however, a great deal of additional wetness has been experienced in the county, supplementing that form known to science as  $H_2O$ . This fell on Sunday, July 6, not from the clouds, but from the lips of the Bishop of Carlisle, preaching the National Prayer Day sermon in the Cathedral. Listen to a little of the cascade:—

"Today in our world there is a decline in faith in God and in spiritual affairs. I believe this is the primary cause of the suspicion and distrust which today is dominant amongst the nations. When a man loses his faith in God and His eternal purpose, he soon loses faith in man and in consequence distrust and fear take the place of confidence and co-operation."

He then quoted Jeremiah!

The oration begins with a truth, the decline in faith in God was never more marked than at the present time. In fact, the great majority of those who assert the existence of a Deity are much more satisfied with human assistance when help is needed. They rarely prefer to leave matters entirely to God.

The Bishop says, however, that when faith in God declines, it does faith in man. Another sample of Christian invertedness. Exactly the opposite is the case. For the majority, faith in man has become confidence. A few examples at random will substantiate this. Who gave the world Penicillin? God? I believe the name Fleming is more generally associated, and Sir Alexander Fleming and his colleagues are men not gods. Sight is now-a-days often restored to the blind by ophthalmic suggestions.

not gods. Forty years ago, appendicitis meant certain death. Today, *men* have reduced its consequences almost to those of a minor ailment. Sounds can be caught and stored, and reproduced again at will. Cinema stars made to speak their parts in many languages of which they cannot utter a word. The radio (so cherished by the Church in Britain), telegraph, telephone, X-ray, and a thousand etceteras, are man's products, not God's. Gods have a habit of being late. They become associated with things only after men have produced and developed them.

The astounding record of man throughout the ages, from the stone hammer to the hydraulic press; from the dugout canoe to the ocean liner; from the reed pipe to the Wurlitzer organ; from the witch-brew to streptomycin; and a million other comparisons has consolidated man's faith in man. Confidence has ousted belief, and our world of cultural, scientific and industrial wonders represents the triumph of knowledge over superstition.

Thus, to return to the Bishop, man has increasing confidence in himself, and because of it is fast losing faith in God. Having lied, however, the Bishop cannot retract. He goes on. He asserts that lack of faith in God has created suspicion, distrust and fear.

These, my lord Bishop, are the products of intolerance which have been fed and fostered more by your creed and your priestcraft than by any other agency in the last fifteen hundred years.

Your text should have been taken from the first of Genesis: "In the beginning all was dark." How you and your fellow dope peddlars wish it had remained so!

G. L. C.

**ON CHRISTIANITY**

What Nietzsche says, and many others think, about Christianity:—

"I condemn Christianity. I bring against it the most terrible accusations that ever an accuser put into words. It is to me the greatest of all imaginable corruptions. It has left nothing untouched by its depravity. It has made worthlessness of every value, a lie out of every truth, a sin out of everything straightforward, healthy, and honest. Let no man dare speak to me of its humanitarian blessings. To do away with pain and woe, it has created pain and woe in order to perpetuate itself. It invented the idea of original sin. It has bred the art of self-loathing—repugnance and contempt for all good and cleanly instincts. Parasitism is its praxis. It combats all good and noble, all love and all hope of life, with its anaemic ideal of asceticism. It sets up "the other world" as a negation of every reality. The cross is the rallying post for a conspiracy against beauty, well-being, courage, intellect, benevolence—life itself. This eternal accusation I shall write on all tablets. I call Christianity the one great Curse, the one great Depravity, for which no expedient is sufficiently efficacious, secret, subterranean, mean. I call it the The One Moral Blemish Upon The Human Race."

**GOT IT ?**

"Colonel Backhouse, opening with the question, 'Do you believe in God?' repeatedly challenged the veracity of Kramer's statements . . . ."

—From the "Manchester Guardian," October 10, 1945, report on the Belsen Trial.

"There you are," said my pal Will Buttin, "that's what your freethinking leads to, your anti-religion, your blatant atheism, to the very vilest of brutality and most bestial sadism—you want showing up and I'll do it; I'll write to the papers about it."

"Steady, steady, wait for it" I protested, "that brute Kramer's answer to the question was not 'No' as you seem to suppose, but just 'Ja, ja'—got it?"

**OBITUARY**

**ROBERT ROSE**

We regret to have to record the death of Mr. Robert Rose, who, after a long illness, died at the age of 77 on August 4. He was a life-long member of the National Secular Society. He was a Branch Secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union for 30 years, and a representative on the London Trades Council. Many tributes were paid to his activities in trade union and political spheres and to his unflinching tolerance, helpfulness and unswerving Freethought principles, which he at no time tried to hide. Representatives from his Union, Trades Council, local Labour Party, and Women's Section I.P., were present at the Honor Oak Crematorium where a Secular Service was conducted by John Seibert. Robert Rose will be missed in South London; he leaves a widow and two daughters to whom we extend our deepest sympathy. J. S.

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.**

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- 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. F. PAGE, JAMES HART (Mythology), C. E. WOOD, E. C. SAPHIN. Thursday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. F. PAGE, JAMES HART (Mythology), C. E. WOOD, E. C. SAPHIN.

**COUNTRY—OUTDOOR**

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- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Messrs. KAY, TAYLOR and McCALL.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.
- Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.
- Preston Market.—Sunday, 3-15 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON; 7 p.m.: Debate with a Mormon Missionary.
- Read.—Monday, August 18, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m., Messrs. G. L. GREAVES and A. SAMMS.

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