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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

An Appeal to God

I MUST confess to a certain inability to quite appreciate the shiver of horror with which the story of the Atheist calling out his watch and giving the Deity five minutes to strike him dead has always been received. In the first place, Christians all believe that God *could* do so if he were inclined to exert his power. Nay, they have produced a number of cases in which they say God's power was manifested in this fashion. A favourite form of Christian evidence used to be that of the unbeliever who was suddenly blinded, or paralysed, or killed as a result of using the name of God in a disrespectful manner. Those who are acquainted with the religious literature of a century ago, addressed to juveniles, will also recall the cases of children who were choked by lollipops, or drowned, or run over in the streets, because they had omitted to say their prayers, or had stayed away from Sunday school, or had desecrated the Sabbath. Christians themselves had made the summary extinction of the unbeliever one of the proofs of the existence of Deity, and at most the Atheist was only utilising the test supplied by Christians. Moreover, the Atheist did not endanger anybody's life but his own. Had he asked as a proof that God should kill a Christian within five minutes, the latter would have had some cause for complaint. But he took all the risks himself—which is a way Atheists have. And God took nothing—which is also a way the gods have. At any rate, the challenge and its treatment was a matter between the Atheist and Deity. And if God did nothing and said nothing it seems only proper for the Christian to follow the same example.

Even if the story were true, the Atheist was only calling on God to do in a particular instance what the Christian asks God to do on a much wider scale. When a Christian goes to war its prayer men pray to the Deity to strengthen its arms and crush the enemy. If the enemy is crushed, thanksgiving services are held, and the clergy announce that their prayers have been answered, and that God has crushed their opponents. If we are to believe that England conquered these countries because of the grace of God, we must also believe that these others lost because the grace of God was withheld, for we cannot imagine for a moment that the grace and power of God is circumscribed by such incidentals as superiority of arms, men, or money. If one side wins because God is with it, then, clearly, if the other side loses because he has forsaken it. The power of Deity that is manifested on the one side by victory, must also be manifested on the other side by defeat. Consequently, God has proven his existence by the destruction of some thousands of combatants. But this is only the same story on a colossal scale. Instead of God being asked to strike one person dead within five minutes, he is asked

to kill thousands, and take his own time to do it. Yet the Christian shrinks in horror from the first form of the appeal, and greets the other with a special thanksgiving service. Verily, the Christian is a curious psychological study.

Again, there is the appeal to Deity in the shape of the ordeal by battle, or by exposing oneself to danger in other directions. In the first case, God was expected to manifest his justice by enabling the innocent man to conquer. In the latter case, the accused, by walking blindfold over red-hot bars, or by swearing on the Scriptures, practically challenged God to punish him if he were not speaking the truth. He was thus doing, in principle, exactly what the Atheist is charged with doing in the famous watch story. And in our courts we still have the religious ordeal of the oath. This, it must be remembered, is essentially a religious appeal to Deity. Legally, punishment for not telling the truth could be inflicted without the religious oath. But, on the side of those who impose the oath, the idea is that people will less readily tell a lie when the Deity is called in as a participant. And on the side of the oath taken, the essence of the statement is: "If I do not tell the truth, then may God punish me." Why a Christian should be shocked by an appeal to God to do something to demonstrate his existence, and take it as quite a proper thing for him to be asked to interfere in a police-court case, is rather puzzling to discover.

Perhaps the dislike to the watch story is that God is asked to take someone's life. But if there is a God he does take everybody's life sooner or later; and if religious records are to be trusted, he has deliberately taken the lives of thousands of people to manifest and vindicate his existence. But let us vary the terms of the challenge. Suppose the Atheist, instead of saying, "If there is a God let him prove his existence by striking me dead in five minutes," had said, "If there is a God let him cause the hour hand of my watch to describe a complete circle in five minutes," no one would have been hurt by this being done, and many would have been benefited. It would have effectually settled all the Atheism in that meeting, if not elsewhere. And it would really have been asking no more than the Christian asks when he calls on God to prove his greatness by trampling his enemies underfoot. If this had been done would the Christian have been more content? I doubt it. When Professor Tyndall suggested testing the power of prayer by taking two hospital wards, giving the patients in one prayer and no medical attendance, and in the other medical attendance and no prayer, the Christians objected quite as strongly. Really, they did not object to the test, what they object to is a test—one that would be really decisive to thoughtful people. And their concern was not that the Atheist might get killed—many Christians would face that result with the utmost equanimity. They knew the Atheist was perfectly safe, and that it would be impossible in any court in England to sustain a charge of

attempted suicide. But it belonged to a class of tests that would be fatal to religious claims all over the world.

Clearly, if the question of the existence of God is of such profound importance as theologians say it is, one ought to feel quite sure on the subject. It is a serious thing for the Atheist if he is in error. It is quite as serious a thing if all the time and money and energy spent in the service of God is being squandered on a myth. In the interest of everybody, some test should be devised that would remove all reasonable doubt. At present no one is sure whether there is a God or not. Or if there is, no one seems to know what he does, or why he does it, or whether he does anything at all. In the old days, when God ruled the thunder, sent disease, and averted plagues, when prodigies appeared as his messengers, and ordeals manifested his power, there was no need for any special proof. Everyone was then certain that God existed; the only question was what to do to please him. But now things are changed. Lightning has become the plaything of a child, and health and disease are reduced to phases in an interminable germicidal warfare. Prodigies are catalogued instead of worshipped, and no judge is impressed by an accused person's appeal to God. If one theologian finds a proof of God in one direction, another is fairly certain to tell him he is wrong in his deduction.

The matter is really serious. Will someone suggest an all-round satisfactory "control experiment"—to use the language of the laboratory. No one will welcome it more gladly than the Atheist; no one will more quickly put it into operation. For he is an Atheist not because he wants to be, but because he must be. If he is wrong, he desires to be put right. If he is right, he desires others to be right with him. Anyway, the situation is both serious and critical. The world holds millions of Atheists who might be converted could the matter be brought to a clear issue. This is a much more serious question than the low wages of curates or old age pensions for clergymen. We earnestly suggest that the next Church Congress should consider the matter.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, AND THE BIBLE

ONE of the most remarkable developments of modern theological controversy is the change of attitude of very many Protestant Christians in regard to the Bible. (By "Protestants" I mean here all Christians—except Greek Orthodox—who are separate from the Roman Catholic Church. Many of these disclaim the term "Protestant," and claim to be "Catholics"; but it is needless now to go into that. They use the word "Catholic" in a special sense of their own. The word "Protestant," as used, for example, in the monarch's Coronation service, means simply the Church as apart from Rome; so it is used in this article).

When the sixteenth-century Reformation broke out, the Reformers needed a standard of doctrine to which to appeal as against the ancient, and hitherto-held-to-be infallible, authority of the historic Catholic Church. That venerable authority was the basis of dogma, practice, and discipline, and had established an elaborate code of belief. The Reformers broke with this. To what could they appeal? If they relied solely on individual private judgment, there would be only chaos. They fell back, then, on the Bible. I do not suggest that they did this consciously as a mere act of strategic expediency in a struggle. It came very serviceably for that purpose; but we must also bear in mind that reverence for the Bible was an immemorial

tradition, and was instinctive in the minds of all or most Christians. The Catholic theologians, while relying on the supposedly infallible Church to decide doctrine, yet always illustrated their arguments by appeals to the Scriptures as unerringly inspired divine oracles. In short, no one (except the relatively few "sceptics") doubted that the Bible was a supernaturally guaranteed vehicle of truth. The only questions were, "Exactly which books make up the Bible?" and "Who is to decide what precisely is the meaning of the Bible, and what is that meaning; that is, what doctrines are true and agreeable to Scripture?"

The Protestants, then, fell back on the Bible. At once, however, there arose a dispute: "What books make up the Bible?" As to the New Testament, Catholics and Protestants were substantially agreed; but with regard to the Old, there was a difference over the books called by Catholics "the Deuterocanon" and by Protestants "the Apocrypha"—namely, several books, and parts of books, found in the old Greek "Septuagint" ("Seventy") Old Testament but not in the Hebrew version. These books were: Tobias (Tobit), Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, one and two Maccabees, and two additions to the Book of Daniel. These were in the ancient Vulgate—the accepted Bible of the Catholic Church, and were treated as on the same level as the rest of Scriptures. Most Protestants, however, rejected them and restricted the Old Testament to the Hebrew Canon. Characteristically, the Church of England compromised. In its "Books of Homilies" the "Apocrypha" (the word is plural) are quoted as "infallible and unchangeable" Scripture, and in the first C. of E. Bibles they are found. In the 39 Articles it is laid down that they are to be used "for edification," but not to prove doctrine.

It is difficult to see what grounds the Protestants had for retaining some books and refusing others. The ancient tradition was against them—and by what, except ancient tradition, could they believe any Bible books to be divinely inspired? In fact, this was from the first logically a fatal weakness in their position: but it was not seen as such for a long time, as Catholics and Protestants found quite enough about which to argue in the rest of Scripture.

At the beginning of the Reformation, then, and for a long time afterwards, Catholics and Protestants agreed that the Bible is infallible. Then came, in the eighteenth century, the criticisms of sceptical students. These found many errors in the Bible, and eventually cast doubt on it as a whole. It is not the purpose of this article to give even the smallest sketch of that criticism. It is enough here to mention its existence and influence, and the result to which it led.

For generations the vast majority of the Protestants continued to stand by the Bible as the infallible Word of God. Quite apart even from its being necessary to their position so to do, they did so by instinctive inherited reverence. The later nineteenth century, however, saw a vital change. It was a result largely of Darwin, and of German "Higher Criticism." The theories of Evolution seemed to discredit the book of Genesis, and the Higher Criticism seemed to destroy much of the credibility of that and the other Biblical books (at least, of the Old Testament). It was a crisis for Protestants. Many (such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon and the bulk of Evangelicals) refused to abandon the old beliefs—and their successors persist in that refusal ("Fundamentalists" are by no means extinct). Nevertheless, a vast change came over much Protestant thought. Leading Christians, both Anglican and Non-conformist, gave up belief in Biblical infallibility. They retained a kind of reverence for the Bible, but claimed a right to discard whatever in it seemed to them untrue. As a consequence of this, there is now widespread disbelief, amongst Protestants, in the Bible as unerringly true.

This change alters basically the old problematical position. If the Bible is not infallible, how are we to know what Christian doctrines are true? To that question the ancient Catholic

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Church returned the same answer as ever: "By the testimony of the Church, of which testimony the Bible (the Church's own book) is part; and we refuse to give up any part of either the Bible or Church tradition as wrong; we stand by all."

What a reversal! For generations the Protestant cry had been, "The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants; the Papists are condemned by Scripture." Now, vast numbers of Protestants, including most of the leading thinkers amongst them, have abandoned belief in an "infallible Bible," while Rome?—well, Rome still stands by it. In recent Encyclicals (following that of Leo XIII, "Providentissimus Deus," in 1893; which reaffirmed the Church's traditional teaching) Popes have asserted yet again that the Bible contains "no formal error." (It must be added, however, that by various arguments it is endeavoured by Catholic theologians to meet difficulties which confront this claim. One striking example of such endeavours is in a 3d. Catholic Truth Society pamphlet, "Who Perished in the Flood?" by E. Sutcliffe, S.J. Catholic theologians also argue that when it is said the Bible "contains no formal error" it is meant that no statements in it are wrong "if understood in the sense intended by the Divine Author"—and this leaves scope for innumerable subtle distinctions).

We come to this: The old Protestant "Bible only" claim has largely collapsed, and more and more it is clear that, logically, the real struggle is between Catholicism and Freethought.

J. W. POYNTER.

MORALITY AND RELIGION

(Continued from page 296)

CUSTOMS change, and with the need for change in a changing world, we need not discuss evolution as a fact. We are concerned with its implications to ourselves and morality. There is no evidence of any noticeable physiological difference between ourselves and our primitive ancestors, either of cranium or complexity of the brain. It has been argued that the savage was less sensitive to pain, but against this, there is evidence, for instance, of Polynesian natives dying from fear of the taboo. Though able to stand physical pain, they appear to have been more emotionally sensitive. The great difference between our primitive ancestors and ourselves is cultural; one of social development. It has also been argued that the savage was amoral. Such an argument depends upon technical definition of morality, and confuses moral consciousness with social consciousness. Another argument is that the savage was, in every way, just as intelligent as we are, which might also be put that we are no more intelligent than he was. But in considering the evolution we need not, as was said of a famous German philosopher, try to evolve a camel out of our own moral consciousness.

Using the comparative method we can go further than Buckle who argued that, whereas there had been a continuous process of intellectual development, morals remained stationary. Whereas there had been an increasing accumulation of knowledge, of inventions and discoveries, new methods of inquiry, and the development of the sciences, we were still echoing classic ethics and the Christian beatitudes. Having the advantage of further research, we can go further and show that morality retreats as knowledge advances. At one end of the evolutionary scale we see the rigidity of the taboo, which affected the life of the savage from cradle to grave, and at the other we have the moralist's own word for moral laxity. At one end we have the intensity of emotion associated with the taboo, and at the other, highly sophisticated arguments to prove the necessity for morality, which meet indifference and even derision. The development is one of the impact of increasing knowledge upon ignorance. This explains how, with insufficient knowledge, bad

results follow from good intentions. It also explains the absurd and often childish analogies, and the extreme verbosity of the moralist. Morality arises in ignorance; understand morality and we have no further need for it. We are concerned with each other; given a sufficient knowledge there would be no further need for moral precepts or principles.

We can also trace the development. The taboo, termed negative magic by Frazer, was certainly customary if not traditional. It was a fact of supreme importance concerning primitive human behaviour. And the emotion associated with it had all the characteristics of the moral conscience. The question to what extent there was any theory connected with it is of interest, for it concerns the soul or self. The savage was certainly self-conscious, for he invented the animistic soul. To what extent this was rational needs a further consideration of reason, for the "thou shalt not" developed from the taboo, is also unreasoning. The magic "word" is law, for we see in the "thou shalt not" the germ of the concept of law; and of personification in the law-giver, or mythical ancestor; and also of projection in the Divine Father. We see also the beginning of the Atman of the Veda, the "That" which is at the same time "Thou." The personal relation of the totem develops with the amalgamation of totem groups into tribes, and projection is more clearly seen in the tribal and hero gods. With the growth of powerful priesthoods came faith and works, with custom enshrined in "the Law." With polytheistic nature-worship and the expansion of Empire, the pantheistic Universal Law includes both natural law and moral law on the analogy of political law; reflecting also the astrological celestial hierarchy and canon law. Out of the conundrums and paradoxes of the philosophers developed the meta-physical or abstract law. The abstract concept of law became progressively mechanistic, dynamic, and relative; developing into the completely impersonal scientific law. To attribute personal feelings and intentions is unscientific. The idea of an objective law is projection. Scientific law, subjective appreciation of objective fact, establishes relationship between subjective and objective experience.

H. H. PREECE.

(To be Continued)

THE BEST OF BALZAC

ONE of the penalties of the shortage of paper and of the difficulties of the printing and binding trades has been the absence from the bookshops of many of the accepted classics of the literary world. This now seems to be beginning to be remedied, and among the new series of books which all readers will welcome is the Pilot Classics, published at 2s. each by the Pilot Press. The first of these is that delightful novel, Balzac's "Eugenie Grandet." Balzac is a French writer who has long been admired by English readers, and this anonymous translation of what is possibly his best book is very readable. It is not easy in short space to decide precisely where its attraction lies. There is, of course, much that will appeal to Freethinkers—sarcastic remarks at the expense of French priests, and so on—but that is not what most satisfactorily accounts for the immense vogue which the book has enjoyed for well-nigh a hundred years now.

I think that its main excellence lies in its approach to the problems of the middle-class. After all, in spite of many bouts of satire at the expense of middle-class folk which have been indulged in by many authors who should have known better, there are bourgeois virtues without which the world would be worse off. And Balzac, in spite of the way in which he hits off the foibles of his characters, retains a healthy respect for them. The Grandets are a family, each member of which stands out as real. Character is the clue to the great novelist, and, judged by that, Balzac deservedly ranks among the greatest of them all.

H. L. S.

ACID DROPS

There seems a quiet struggle going on between Roman Catholics and Protestants concerning the position of the religious state of present-day Russia. The Protestants look at Russia rather gloomily with the future of religion, and soothe their members by telling them that the Russian people are coming back to Christianity. The R.C. party will not have it so. In the "Catholic Herald" and other similar organs the exact opposite is declared. This, for instance, is what the "Catholic Herald" says in illustration of the way in which Atheism is advancing and how it is being helped by the Government.

We see that in Londonderry some very pious people have dug up well-known golf courses as a protest against Sunday games. The damage done is placed at about £1,000. We suggest that the golfers should all publicly refrain from going to church until the very pious ones behave themselves. That should convince these pious humbugs that more than themselves occupy the earth.

It is a common experience with all of us to discover that things we have once considered of first-rate value gradually shrink into sheer nothingness. We found this illustrated by an article in the "British Weekly," written by the Rev. J. Reid. He has discovered that this change of values may easily occur, religion as well as other things. He finds that his religious beliefs do not take the shape they did once upon a time. Mr. Reid writes as though his religion is giving him some unpleasant reflection. Things have not happened as they should, the passing of time has left holes where things used to look solid. Religion is weakening in every quarter, and its weakening promises the growth of a better life than we have had. It is something for each of us to think that we may have done something to hasten the better day.

Here, for example, is one of the cases which will illustrate what we have said. A father writes in one of the daily papers as follows, and it is given good attention.

"My daughter is twelve years old, right at the top of her form, and apparently a normal girl growing up in the normal way. But when it comes to Sunday School she flatly refuses. Now, by weight of parental control, I can force her to go, but I know that is the way to hate it. I have tried reasoning, questioning and cross-examination. I have tried pointing out that what you get out of religion is what you put into it, and I got back with childlike directness: 'I will be quite happy reading the Bible at home, Daddy, instead of listening to a droning woman in the afternoon and a man who prays in a whine in the morning and peeps through his fingers half the time.' So on Sundays she is in the garden readily reading the books of Bible stories. She says: 'Our teacher gives us a verse of two to learn from the Bible while she reads a book 'For Ever Amber'; that book you bought for Mummy.'"

The father asks, "Am I bringing up a heathen child?" Well, we should say that the child in question is developing in a very healthy manner. She seems to be strong enough to know where she is, and is able to judge good and bad. That might not help the Churches, but it will help to make a type of child of which parents may be proud.

Our leading theologians are beginning to get accustomed to much that a century ago would have brought cries of deadly and wicked attacks on religion, and would be punished by terms of imprisonment. It was religious opposition that prevented social betterment for the "common" people. Some of those old laws still remain, and given opportunity might be operating again. One of these lingering absurdities is the Sunday laws, and which are still in operation. Theatres are closed on Sunday, as their opening would injure the Church. The clergy are permitted to push their goods, but restrictions are against theatrical performances. On the whole, and when one studies them, Sunday laws are the finest piece of humbug that one could desire. Every step of improvement, Sunday trains, Sunday museums and reading rooms, etc., were fought step by step, but there are many steps to be taken before the Sacred Sunday is left to those who desire it.

To-day the great question settles round the cinema. That has given a form of amusement which requires the minimum of human work, and the crowded buildings prove the pleasure of the people. But what is good for the people appears to be injurious to the religious preachers, and also to those survivals of the Middle Ages who believe that happiness on Sunday is a sin.

But sin or no sin, the plain fact is that the people desire Sunday amusements, and to deny that is to pave the way for bad behaviour in the streets. But to do the religious justice, our clergy are not so concerned with the conduct of men and women as they are for the effect on children, and some of the clergy are ready to come to terms that will close cinemas for a time for religious lessons to the young. All we need say is that the plan is not even artful. It is just the desperate efforts of interested people whose religion is getting weaker and weaker.

Protestants have their stupidities as have the Roman Catholics. Both give vent to what one may plainly call "rubbish," but the Roman Church are more barefaced in their absurdities. In this elaborate nonsense the miracles performed by "Our Lady" take the first place. Only a few years ago "Our Lady," in the face of large numbers of people, brought to earth Jesus, caused the sun to leap from its position, etc., to prove that the Catholic Church is the true Church. We confess we should be affected if we saw these things, but it seems that these wonders are only present to those who believe beforehand.

"The Church Times" is asking "What is Christianity?" That is rather interesting because we, a few years ago, published a book bearing the same title. (It is still in print.) We did not succeed in getting a clear answer to the question, but we did discover there were several hundreds of different Christian sects, each one declining to mix with the rest. Actually we got no nearer to the right Christianity in the end than we were at the beginning. But it did lead to many interesting items concerning the influence of Christianity on life. But as to what was the correct Christianity among the crowd of quarrelsome friends of God we were left where we began. So we cannot help the "Church Times" in this matter. The only people who are firm in their position are those who do not believe in the Christian scheme.

But the "Church Times" does say that through the Prayer Book of the Church, like the Bible and the movements from Man to God, we see the miraculous redemption of a fallen race. That really does throw some light on the subject. It seems to be all part of God's plan to create an opportunity for the "miraculous redemption of the human race." That makes the situation clear. God appears to have known what was coming. He knew every thing. All we can do is to hope that God will manage every thing better than he has done up to date.

Actually, of course, rigid believers in a supernatural Christianity hate being asked to prove anything. As one of them says, "The first need of men to-day is not for arguments about theism or for treatises concerning Christian evidences." People should be told "what Christianity is" just in the same way as the "Apostles" taught—no easy task, it is regretfully admitted. As for "evidence"—that, good Lord, is the last thing which should be taught. Believe or be damned!

Those who are not quite blind to the quality of those "miracles" that occur in the Catholic Church, will have noticed that the miracles occur—when they happen—far away from the place where the unfavoured ones live. Of course, this prevents ordinary people investigating the cure on the spot, such as Blarranganam (in Travancore), South India, and so on. So far as religious people are concerned, all of it is just a mass of ignorance. All scientific men know that many people have suffered for long periods from a disease they never possessed. The simulation of complaints that live only in the mind of the sufferer—for it is a real illness—are well known. It is left for the established religions to take this mixture of ignorance and cunning to keep their creeds alive.

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Would Mr. A. Marshall be good enough to send his address to the Manager.

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SUGAR PLUMS

The central executive committee of Komsomol, the only licensed youth organisation in the Soviet Union, has just issued a brochure under the title "The Ten Commandments of Communism."

This is a translation of the original text:—

(1) Never forget that the clergy are the bitterest foes of the Communist State. (2) Try to win your friends over to Communism and remember that Stalin, who has given a new constitution to the Russian people, is the head of the "God-less," not only in the Soviet Union, but all over the world. (3) Prevail upon your friends to avoid contacts with priests. (4) Beware of spies and tell the police about saboteurs. (5) See to it that Atheist publications are widely distributed among the people. (6) A good young Communist must also be a militant Atheist. He must know how to use his weapons and be experienced in the art of war. (7) Wherever you can, fight religious elements and forestall any influence they might bring to bear upon your comrades. (8) A true "God-less" must also be a good policeman. It is the duty of every "God-less" to protect the security of the State. (9) Support the "God-less" movement with money which is needed particularly for our propaganda abroad, since under present circumstances it can only be carried on underground. (10) If you are not a convinced "God-less" you cannot be a good Communist and true Soviet citizen. Atheism is insolubly tied in with Communism. Both ideals are the foundation of Soviet power.

There is no denial that among the people there is a growing liking for asking questions. Even the B.B.C. brains trust, which took great care to see that no "dangerous" questions were carefully salted, had their interest—to some. So we note that there is with Catholic papers a part which carefully answers questions to matters that believers find awkward. Thus, one person asked why the Catholic Church never condemned the cruel practices of "Bloody" Mary, etc. The reply was, "There were no special cruelties inflicted on Protestants in the reign of Queen Mary." It was openly, obstinate heretics who disturbed the peace. It should be remembered that some of these heretics who disturbed the peace actually mocked the Catholic religion. And that made torture and executions of those who spoke plainly about the Catholic Church justifiable. Well that is honest, to say no more of it. But what twisted brains these people have when they write in the manner given.

THE WHITEHAVEN DISASTER

The terrible disaster at Whitehaven numbs one by its very extent. Bad as these deaths are, the great lingering pain of wives, children and friends still continues. Time will numb their pain, but the gap will be there. Death on the battle-field is little compared with death in the pit. The soldier dies strengthened with the glory of war. Who, and how many, think of the pitman risking his life hour by hour, day by day? We need our values restating. We have felt the suffering of the living ever since the news came through the air. It has never left us. We should all feel honoured if we can join our sorrows with those who have the right to weep.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. is holding another of its popular outings today (August 24) and all members and friends are invited. Meet at Lickey Tram Terminus at 3-30 p.m. prompt. Tea has been arranged at the Cofton Tea Rooms (top of hill) at 5 p.m. The social side is a very useful addition to Branch activity.

The West Ham Branch N.S.S. will not meet in August, the next Branch meeting will be on Tuesday, September 30, at 8 p.m., at 62, Forest Lane.

REVERENT RATIONALISM

II

ONE of the most striking features of the book, "The Philosophy of Jesus," by Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts, is its simple and child-like acceptance of Christian apologetics. Jesus was, if not born, brought up at Nazareth. We are told that Nazareth "is a place of great natural beauty," and in the map of Palestine in the days of Jesus we are shown exactly where Nazareth was. Yet, had the distinguished authors taken the trouble to look up the article on the town given in the Encyclopædia Biblica, they would have seen that its famous author, Canon Cheyne, did his best to make out a case that there was no Nazareth at all in the days of Jesus. Not that this would have made much difference to the thesis of the book, "The Philosophy of Jesus," for the reverent Rationalist is always ready to throw overboard a mite here and there so long as there is plenty of "religion" left to cling to.

One of the "relevant facts" we are given about Jesus also is that he had four brothers and at least two sisters. Here it is obvious that the heretical hand of Protestantism has crept in, for this would never be agreed to by devout Catholics. These four brothers and two sisters are, according to nearly all Catholic authorities, really cousins—or children of Joseph by a former marriage; you pay your money and take your choice. Moreover, as it is a very difficult thing to account for the fact that the four Gospels are in Greek, and the people of Palestine spoke Aramaic, it is quite easy to say that Jesus, being "described as an exceptionally quick-witted and observant child" readily learnt "scriptural" Hebrew and Greek as well as his native language, Aramaic. There is no evidence whatever for any of this, but why bother about evidence when it is a question of Jesus?

The reverent Rationalist naturally cannot stomach *blatant* miracles so that, like Renan, he has to explain them away or deny that they ever took place. In this way the Virgin Birth can be glossed over and anything repugnant to our modern ideas of what can happen or not be also glossed over very simply. I wondered exactly how Lord Horder would deal with the famous dream in which an Angel tells Joseph that Mary's baby

was actually by the "Holy Ghost." It is worth putting on record:—

"During the earlier betrothal period (which lasted about a year), Joseph discovered that his wife was with child; and being a kindly as well as a religious man, decided to break off the betrothal 'privily' and with as little scandal as possible. Warned, however, in a dream, that Mary was innocent, he carried on with his marriage and publicly accepted the child that was to be born as his own."

The reader should compare this with "Holy Writ." There is not a word about Joseph being either a "kindly" or "religious" man, nor is there anything about "publicly" accepting the child—except through implication. Joseph disappears from Matthew after having another dream, but it is astonishing how a little imagination can make him do all sorts of things not recorded. In case the printed word does not carry conviction an artist is called in, and in this way the public can become familiarised with the features of Jesus and Mary and Joseph as well as of Peter, Paul, and the other disciples. To show you what a carpenter's shop looked like in the days of Jesus, we are given a reproduction of Millais' famous "Christ in the House of His Parents" as if this purely imaginative—and very beautiful—rendering of the scene had the slightest resemblance to the reality. This kind of pictorial "evidence" quite equals the Gospel's printed word—as evidence.

When it comes to dealing with the Gospels, Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts never stray into the field of "destructive" Rationalism. "Modern critics," we are told, date Mark as having been written in A.D. 62, Matthew in 69, Luke in 70 to 75 and John 85 to 90. Readers have no need to be reminded that there is not a scrap of evidence for any of these figures which appear to me to have come from the Salvation Army. As I have repeatedly shown in these columns, W. R. Cassels in his "Supernatural Religion," made an exhaustive examination of the evidence given by Christians for dating the Gospels in the first century, and proved beyond any doubt that in the form we have them they were quite unknown before the year A.D. 150—and quite possibly even later, A.D. 180. The only attempt worth reading in reply was by Canon Lightfoot and—as was shown recently here by Mr. J. W. Poynter—no one could have made a bigger mess. J. M. Robertson mentions Professor Pfeleiderer's work, "The Development of Theology in Germany" as containing a severe criticism of Lightfoot. One might have expected that at least on such a point as the dating of the Gospels, Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts would have consulted Cassels—but that really would have been too much to expect where a reverent Rationalism is concerned.

However, the two writers very daringly admit that "we cannot of course be at all sure that the words of Jesus have come down to us with literal exactness"—though it is only fair to point out that these same words are given in their book as if they had been transmitted literally and correctly. Dr. Bevan is quoted as saying that "even in the case of our earliest gospel, what we have is only what St. Mark recollected of what Jesus had said that some thirty-eight years before St. Peter's death, and that translated from Aramaic into Greek; so that it is absurd to press every clause and every sentence in the words attributed to Jesus as if they had been taken down at the time by a phonograph or in shorthand." This kind of quotation is necessary in case one is given some of the difficult "sayings of Jesus to explain—such as: "All who came before me are thieves and robbers." Bearing what Dr. Bevan says in mind, one can quite easily reject this or that as not having been really said by "gentle" Jesus, but inserted by one of the naughty disciples or editors. Why they should, however, is never explained.

The Gospel of John is a bit difficult for our two authors, for it is apparent that they do not know exactly how to deal with

him. Obviously, if Jesus spoke as he does in the three synoptics, he could not possibly have spoken as he is made to in John. We are informed that it contains much "theology" and "the ways in which it differs from the synoptic gospels are many and striking." But does this prove anything—for example, in the small matter of its "authenticity?" Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts prefer to be discreetly silent on such a delicate point. It is easier to accept Jesus as a fact and what he is said to have said as another fact without bothering what any irreverent and iconoclastic Freethinkers say. After all, who are they? In the one or two small encounters I have had with reverent Rationalists so very anxious to preserve all that is good in Christianity and the whole of Jesus, I have always been sharply put in my place. We must not wound the delicate susceptibilities of earnest and sincere Christians. We must live and let live. Even if they scatter lies about Paine and Bradlaugh, what of that? Christianity has filled a place in men's hearts, satisfied a longing for something "spiritual," not grossly material. We must take care to deal gently with people of other beliefs even if we think they are wrong. As William Blake said (quoted by Lord Horder): "Man must and will have a religion: if he has not the religion of Jesus, he will have the religion of Satan and will erect a synagogue of Satan." This is, of course, unmitigated nonsense even if it was uttered by Blake, but what an apt quotation for our reverent Rationalists!

H. CUTNER.

DUTY

I

WHENEVER we have anything to do of an unpleasant or compulsory nature we call it our duty. Likewise those whose avocations involve submission to authority classify such surrender as duty. Similarly workers employed for fixed hours upon defined tasks term them duty.

Often the prescribed details required of subordinate or employee are listed as duties. So widely is the word duty used that everything except pleasure-seeking and trifling preoccupations of personal privacy become dubbed duties.

A word of such broad application can be viewed from many aspects of its suitability or otherwise; found to mean many differing things to different people.

It follows us through life from our earliest years: as an incentive or urge; as a baying hound forever on our heels; or as a lofty and noble ideal.

From the latter elevation Wordsworth speaks of duty as "Stern daughter of the voice of God."

Before accepting such an awe-inspiring definition we need to be convinced the duties expected of us are of sufficient importance and ethical content to justify our regarding them as divinely inspired. Unthinking embracement of that concept of duty may make us victims of tyranny, akin to slaves, forever obeying orders without hope of freedom or escape, or of making reasoned choice in action.

In its Catechism for young Christians the Church, agreeing with Wordsworth's dictum, envisages a dichotomy of duty by prescribing a duty towards God and a duty toward our neighbour, both amplified by preachers and moralists in considerable detail. They omit to mention our duty toward ourselves.

School is usually our first introduction to the idea of duty. There it takes shape as obeying orders, observing regulations and indulging traditional practices, few of which we can avoid, penalised if we do so, although essays at eluding such duties have a thrill of mild adventure.

II

Throughout life we are faced with the problem of unthinking obedience presented to us as duty; or if we think for ourselves departing from prescribed paths, involving questions of rebellion,

going mentally into the wilderness to live alone. For getting a livelihood most have to conform, experiencing reluctance and resentment which may be cause of much secret misery. Newbolt, in common with numerous other poets who would inspire youth, exhorts us to—

“Play up, play up, and play the game.”

They who are sceptical of this sporting attitude toward the burdens of life may retort, grimly or scornfully according to temper, “The game isn't worth the candle.”

By contrast, comedians, especially of the vaudeville variety, try to cheer us by humorous descants upon duty, as the comic policeman singing details of his routine with the lilting chorus “Doing me dooty.”

Too often duty is used to push men into lost causes or useless courses, as the soldier fighting where and for what he is ordered to without question, having no control over that which led to war or how it is conducted.

So Tennyson sings—

“Not once or twice in our rough island story,
The path of duty led the way to glory.”

Fine for a few, but not comforting to those who died painfully. Conceding this, Tennyson summarises the defect of over-stressed duty in—

“Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs but to do and die.”

This excess damns such duty as an enemy of human happiness and dignity, making its doers mere carrion of governmental error and ambition.

III

Harking back to civil life, the idea that duty must be instilled into young people took other forms beside religious and school preaching.

In Victorian albums one often found—

“Straight is the path of duty,
Curved is the line of beauty;
Follow the former and you'll see
The latter ever follow thee.”

This was what might be expected from the nineteenth century, which might in one of its outstanding features, not confined to preachers alone, be termed the preaching era of English history. At that time more use was made of plural duties, and adjectival forms duteous, dutiful, and significantly its converse. dutiful, also the adverb dutifully.

Duty has become a portmanteau term. Relations between parents and children, teachers and pupils, rankers and officers; relations of officials, civil servants and all employed in public, municipal or governmental capacity are swept up into the single definition duty. It couples conveniently with discipline, obedience, honour and such like concepts whose bounds are expanding as the state takes wider control of our lives.

Individuals who can live without obligations of duty are few and grow fewer. Such are fortunate; very fortunate indeed.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

LIFE AND DEATH

Life is only lent—and all our living is ill-spent
Unless in giving and forgiving we are free.
Love is lonely, lost—unless in loving others most
Our hearts are proving an un-moving constancy.
Hope is useless, vain—if we are hoping but to gain
Our ends when groping in the darkened depths of Greed.
Death is sweet release, so fear not dying. For this peace
We should be sighing—freed from Sorrow, Pain and Need.
W. H. WOOD.

RE PROSTITUTION IN MADEIRA

A CORRESPONDENT writes:—

You probably know that prostitution is in the hands of the State and girls are not only encouraged to enter these houses but are more often than not forced into them by the police. For example, a young girl is seen laughing or talking to a boy or boys on the street. The Chief of Police, seeing in her a likely prostitute, has a card of entry made ready for her, which he proceeds to force on her. If she refuses, which through fear she seldom or never does, she is beaten and her hair shaved to the skin and then sent home to face the censure of the neighbours—a much more serious ordeal than with us. The Latin girl never wears a hat, so you can guess how she would feel.

Here is an extract from the “Regulamento Policial das Meretrizes” (prostitutes) 1946: “The inscription of a woman as a prostitute can be made by her voluntarily, or she can be coerced into inscribing herself as a prostitute.” I also have the minutes of parliament in which it is stated that children from eleven up can enter a house of prostitution. The prostitutes were allowed to have abortions but now that is forbidden. There is no provision for the babies who are brought up inside the brothels.

I entered one where there were several children. I saw one young girl pass her baby to another while she attended to a customer. All prostitutes, whether in brothels or not, have to pay a monthly tax. They must also pay the state medico who visits them—and such things happen in Roman Catholic countries. N. F.

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. F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD, E. C. SAPHIN. Thursday, 7 p.m.: MESSRS. F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD, E. C. SAPHIN.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S.—Sunday: Ramble, meet at Lickey Tram Terminus, 3-30 p.m.; tea at Cofton Tea Rooms, 5 p.m. (bring friends).

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

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.: 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.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Messrs. G. L. GREAVES and A. SAMMS.

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

WANTED.—Sincere Freethinkers in all countries who are prepared to turn their hand to a congenial task. Write to Box 101, “The Freethinker,” 41, Grays Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

CHARLES BLOUNT

(Continued from page 297)

IN the same year appeared his most noted work, "The two first Books of Philostratus, concerning the Life of Apollonius Tyaneus; together with philological notes upon each chapter." The work is dedicated to the reader alone, in caustic contrast to the fulsome dedications of the period. In the preface any anti-theological object is ostensibly disavowed. "If one heathen writer (Hierocles) did make an ill-use of this history by comparing Apollonius with Christ, what is that to Philostratus, who never meant nor designed it so, as I can anywhere find?" So far from crediting his new miracles, Blount says his daily prayer is for faith enough to believe the old. Professing no predilection for martyrdom, he says he is ready at all times to pin his faith upon my Lord of Canterbury's sleeve.

"Wherefore, if the clergy would have Apollonius esteemed a rogue and a juggler that, being risen from the dead, he is one of the principal promoters of this Popish Plot; or that there never was any such man as Apollonius, with all my heart, what they please; for I had much rather have him decried in his reputation than that some grave cardinal, with his long beard and excommunicative ha, should have me burnt for a heretick. Therefore, for these weighty reasons I have thought fit to prorogue the remaining part of this history till interest have no longer need of a holy mask, and till there be discovered some new road to the heavenly Jerusalem, where every honest man may go without leading-strings, or without being put to the temporal charge of a spiritual guide, and till men quit thoughts of going to heaven by the same means as they go to the playhouses—viz., by giving money to the door-keepers."

The notes or illustrations to Philostratus were longer than the text itself, and throughout smack of the scepticism of Hobbes. For instance, take the remarks on chap. iv.: "I question not but Hierocles in his parallel did impiously compare this miracle of the swans and lightning at Apollonius's will, with the melody of holy angels, and new star appearing at Christ's nativity, as being both equally strange, but not alike true." "For to believe any stories that are not approved by the public authority of the Church, is superstition; whereas to believe them that are, is Religion."

The "Biographia Britannica" informs us that the work was soon suppressed, and only a few copies sent abroad. "It was held to be the most dangerous attempt that had ever been made against revealed religion in this country, and was justly thought so, as bringing to the eye of every English reader a multitude of facts and reasonings, plausible in themselves, and of the fallacy of which none but men of parts and learning can be proper judges." A French translation of the work and of Blount's commentaries was made by M. Salvemini di Castiglione, and was published at Amsterdam in 1779.

Blount so closely escaped prosecution for the publication of his "Philostratus" that he deemed it prudent to put forth his next work anonymously. It was entitled "Religio Laici," and, professing to be supplementary to Dryden's poem of the same name, was founded upon the deistical treatise, "De Religione Laici," of Lord Herbert of Cherbury. The following year he published "Janua Scientiarum; or, a Compendious Introduction to Geography, History, Chronology, Government, Philosophy, and all Gentle Parts of Literature," and he commenced a "Life of Mahomet," which was never published. The pieces which he selected to translate from Lucian all show a Freethought animus. They included "Alexander the False Prophet," "The Dialogue of the Gods," "Jupiter Tragicus," "The Liar," etc.

The Licensing Act, passed in 1685, was to expire in 1693. Blount recurred to the attack, publishing "Reasons Humbly

Offered for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing," to which is subjoined the character of Edmund Bohun, the Licensor of the Press, the latter being an attack upon the official who had stood in the way of the publication of many of his pieces, which afterwards came out under the title of the "Oracle of Reason." But this was not all. Blount laid a trap for Bohun into which he fell. Bohun was requested by a bookseller to publish an anonymous pamphlet really written by Blount, entitled "King William and Queen Mary, Conquerors," a discourse endeavouring to prove that their majesties have on their side against the late king the principal reasons to make conquest a good title." The argument was that William had conquered King James, but not the nation, and that therefore he acquired a title to all the rights of King James, but not to any rights of the nation. Macaulay says:—

"The censor was in raptures. In every page he found his own thoughts expressed more plainly than he had ever expressed them. Never before, in his opinion, had the true claim of their majesties to obedience been so clearly stated. Every Jacobite who reads this admirable tract must inevitably be converted. The non-jurors would flock to take the oath. The nation so long divided would at length be united. From these pleasing dreams Bohun was awakened by learning, a few hours after the appearance of the discourse which had charmed him, that the title-page had set all London in a flame, and that the odious words, King William and Queen Mary, Conquerors, had moved the indignation of multitudes who had never read further."

As Blount had foreseen, the title was sufficient to raise a disturbance and remove the licensor of the odious pamphlet, which was ordered to be burned by the common hangman, while Bohun was dismissed from office, and even committed to prison. In the following year the Licensing Act was allowed to expire, and was never renewed. Blount's ruse was, says Macaulay, "a base and wicked scheme," but it secured the emancipation of the press.

In 1693 Blount published the "Oracles of Reason," consisting of 16 papers, in letters to Hobbes and others by Blount, Gildon, and others. Papers 1 to 4 are a vindication of Dr. Burnet's archeology against the Mosaic account. No. 5 is an account of the Deist's religion; 6, on immortality; 7, on Ariens, Trinitarians and Councils; 8, the Felicity consists in pleasure; 9, of Fate and Fortune; 10, the Origin of the Jews; 11, the Lawfulness of marrying two sisters successively; 12, of the subversion of Judaism and Origin of the Millennium; 13, of the 'angury of the ancients; 14, of natural religion as opposed to divine revelation; 15, that the Soul is Matter; 16, that the world is eternal.

In the eleventh of these Blount had something more than a theoretical interest. His wife having died, he became enamoured of her sister, a lady of great beauty, wit, and discretion, who was not insensible on her side, but who was scrupulous in regard to the lawfulness of the connection. Blount is said to have applied to the Archbishop of Canterbury and other divines, who, having decided against his opinion, and the lady thereupon growing inflexible, he threw himself into a fit of despair, in which he shot himself in the head. The wound did not prove immediately mortal; he survived for some days, refusing to take food from anyone but his beloved sister-in-law. He died in August, 1693, and was buried in the family vault at Ridge, Hertfordshire. His miscellaneous works, comprising the best of his treatises, with the exception of the notes to Philostratus, were published in 1695, by Gildon of "the venal quill." It is curious that as late as 1871 his treatise on marriage with a deceased wife's sister, which is very soberly and concisely written, was published as by Charles Blount, barrister-at-law, and with no intimation of its being nearly two centuries old.

J. M. WHEELER.