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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Mystery Mongers

THERE is a story, which has the unusual quality of being quite true, told of a Provost in a small town not far from Glasgow. The Provost was known for his Freethinking opinions, and to emphasise them he never, or hardly ever, attended Church. One Sunday morning, however, one of his friends met him and learned that he was going to the Kirk. "Why," queried the surprised man. "Oh," said the Provost, "I hear the minister is to preach on the mystery of godliness, and I just thought I would go and hear what he has to say." Again the two friends met, a little later in the week, and enquiry was made of the Provost as to what he thought of the sermon. "By God," said the Provost, "it is as much a mystery as ever." I am reminded of this story every time I come across a teacher or writer who dwells upon the mysteries, or "sacred" mysteries—for it appears that there are several kinds of mystery—of the Christian religion. When a thing is called a mystery this kind of person thinks, not only that he has stopped enquiry, but that he has in some mysterious way given a satisfactory explanation of the question at issue. Of course, one can quite understand that a religion people would understand would not—as religions go—be a very satisfactory article. Again, to quote a Scotch story, the old lady who greatly enjoyed her minister's sermons, but declared that she wouldn't be so impertinent as to pretend to understand them, is not a very uncommon type. There is a kind of mind with which familiarity does indeed breed contempt. They are impressed with what is far off, or cloudy, or incomprehensible. One recalls the ingenious surprise of one of the late Labour Ministers who discovered when he met the King that he talked to him just as an ordinary man. He was doubtless impressed, but one would imagine that with that type the glamour of Royalty would wear itself off. And that type of intellect would seem to be ready made by nature for a religious office.

Now it is quite true there are quite a lot of things in the world we do not understand, but it does not follow that the mere fact of not understanding affords ground for believing in or worshipping them. And calling them a mystery and ignorance in capital letters does no more than exhibit their "mysteries," but they did not use the word in quite the same sense as does the modern Christian. They were mysteries to the people, things the uninitiated did not understand, but they were not mysteries to the initiated. Indeed, their claim to veneration was that they were conversant with the Mysteries. By divine favour they knew, and because they knew, they held the control of people who did not know. But as time passed the veil of mystery wore thin, and gradually became difficult, in some cases impossible, for

the priest to keep up the old cry that he was conversant with things which to the ordinary Tom or Dick were a mystery. So the medicine man was compelled to change his ground a little. He could not do without mystery of some sort, that is an indispensable part of his stock in trade. But the mysteries were pushed farther back. They belonged to the legion of the unknown, and the unknowable. They were a mystery now and they would be a mystery for ever, or at least until man died and knew the secret of things. And as when a man died he did not come back to tell us whether he knew anything or not, the priest was quite safe. And if only the race could be stricken with incurable stupidity, then would the rule of the priest be ensured and the reign of religion become eternal.

The only use of these religious mysteries is the help they give to a professional priesthood. They are positively useless to anyone else. If I do not understand how the world came into existence, how am I helped by being told that it came by an act of God, followed by a mystery? The world is a mystery. Granted, but does the mystery become less of a mystery by having another one added to it. Double nothing and the product is—God. Or if I cannot understand the relation of mind to body, if that is a mystery, does that disappear when I am told there is a directing soul which keeps them both going? As I do not know what the soul is, and should not know one if I came across it, how can it help me to understand something else of which I am supposed to be totally ignorant? The facts are what they were before the new mystery was introduced, my understanding of them is precisely what it was.

I am enriched only by a "mystery" about which I know nothing whatever. Our ordinary procedure is to attempt to explain the imperfectly understood by the better understood, and so far as we speculate about the unknown, to do so in terms of the known. To explain what we do not know by appealing to what we know is common sense. To explain the known by the unknown, by the inconceivable, is a procedure that is worthy of a lunatic asylum. And it is the accepted method of a good old-fashioned theology.

The truth is that, as is often the case, the religionist is just playing with words. "Mystery" is used for but one purpose, and that is to stop criticism. Otherwise the statement that a thing is a mystery leaves us exactly where we were, with the difference—a very important one to the Christian preacher—that we are called on to believe something connected with it. For example, the Christian asserts a belief in the Virgin Birth. What does this mean? A man, Jesus Christ, is born. Granting this there is no mystery about his existence. But it is said that in his case, alone among the countless millions that have been born, no human father is concerned; and this is the mystery. But this is not a mystery; it is sheer verbiage. It conveys no meaning, and nothing more reasonable than the statement that Jesus grew on an apple tree. For so long as we

bear in mind the facts of reproduction it is impossible to conceive a child born into the world without male and female parentage. And if we do not know the nature of reproduction the statement stands for no mental conception whatever. Thus, our first step is to lay down a mentally inconceivable proposition, and then when asked for an explanation call it a mystery as a means of evading criticism. To say that we believe in a mystery is nonsense. We cannot even say what it is we believe in, but can only mouth a phrase. We can say we believe in it, but we might as well mutter abracadabra, and consider the matter settled.

But it is often said, and by those who should know better, that we are compelled to believe in many things we do not understand. I deny this completely. Belief does not imply the absence of knowledge or of understanding; it implies rather the possession of knowledge which falls short of completeness. I may believe that to-morrow may be wet, or warm, but I do so on the ground of my knowledge of what previous days have been like. Were my knowledge complete I should not believe, I should know. But in every case belief waits on understanding. So when I am told that we are bound to believe in electricity, or gravitation, or in life, without knowing what these things are, I meet the statement with a flat contradiction. It is reading into our beliefs more than they contain. I observe certain phenomena which we agree to call electrical. Scientists tell me how to measure the voltage of an electrical current, its direction, amperage, etc. And the things which I know about electricity cover absolutely all I mean when I speak about electricity. Electricity is not to me or to anyone else the sum of electrical phenomena plus a mysterious and unknown something called electricity. It is a general term covering a class of phenomena which we agree to call electrical. And my belief concerning it keeps pace step by step with what I understand concerning it. To believe a thing we must be able mentally to realise the thing believed. Whatever lies beyond the capacity of mental realisation cannot give rise to any state of mind whatever. It is the indication of a complete blank.

After all, mystery mongering is one of the oldest games of the medicine man. He was at it in the very dawn of history, and even before history began to be. And he is still at it in the most modern of cathedrals. None of them can afford to dispense with it. There is indeed something significant in the dictionary description of the derivative word "mystify" as "to perplex, to bewilder, to befog." For that is the essential thing about the religious chatter concerning our lives being built upon a mystery, "the essential mystery" of things, etc. It is an attempt to bewilder, to perplex, to befog. It will be noted that there is no other department in which so much stress is laid on "mystery" as there is in religion. Everywhere else where we find ourselves up against a wall of ignorance we confess it with a sense of sorrow or of failure. But the religious advocate announces it as one proclaiming glad tidings or as the indication of a victory. And if it were admitted it would be a victory for the Christian medicine man and his supporters. He can no longer pretend, as did the ancient priest, that he has powers which are denied the ordinary man. His strong card to-day is to insist that religion rests upon fundamental mysteries that are beyond the understanding of anyone. In this way it is hoped security may

be gained. And if this were agreed, then security would be his. For while man is content to personify his ignorance and fall down in stupid worship before it religion remains enthroned. It was so in the far-off days of the cave-man. It is so to-day with his modern representatives. It is when instructed intelligence plays on religion that the gods totter and crumble into dust.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CONTINENTAL SUNDAYS

VARIOUS Protestant religious sects in England are accustomed to speak with an ignorant horror of the Continental Sunday and its possible introduction into England. Rigid Sabbatarianism no doubt is declining, even in remote country districts in Scotland and Wales, but some of it still persists.

What is this dreadful "Continental Sunday" in reality? In exact fact it is nothing more than a holiday and festive day in place of the dreary, vacuous English Sunday we English know so well. It consists in substituting pleasure for boredom. And it is to the credit of the Roman Catholic Church that it has never introduced the English Sunday upon the Continent. Such a crime, the Catholic Church (which has survived so many crimes) could hardly survive. The ideas of purgatory and hell can be borne by Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, Belgians and Dutchmen, but they cannot be expected to endure an English Sunday or English cooking. No foreigner can face either.

Here, in this delectable Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (where I write this article) you can see the Continental Sunday at its worst—or best! For here you may drink all day and all night on Sunday; and many of the good Luxemburgers do, for their beers are excellent and their Moselle wines even better. Here on Sunday (as on weekdays) every kind of food (both native and imported) is plentiful—and the poorest Luxembourg housewife cooks in butter and knows nothing of the fifth called margarine considered good enough for English folk by themselves and their Government. Restaurants and cafés are open offering unlimited butter, cheese, milk, fish, meat, wine, beer, grapes, oranges, bananas, liqueur and other chocolates, cakes (with real cream), in short, every luxury and delicacy. No coupons, no queues, no rations! Excursions into the "pocket Switzerland" on Sunday afternoon, with eating and drinking on a vast scale is the usual thing for the ordinary Luxemburger. And Sunday tea, which may be tea, coffee, chocolate, beer or wine is taken in the cafés with every imaginable kind of cake or ice cream (every ice cream being three times the size and many times the quality of the London equivalent).

"Every Sunday a Bank Holiday plus," with all catering places open would not be an inapt description of this beautiful capital.

There is the sound of revelry even at seven o'clock on Sunday morning here. The local beauty and chivalry (incredibly large, fat, solid, bulky females with vast, broad, enormously-bellied males) come in by tram, charabanc, motor-car and train. They come to enjoy Sunday not to endure it. Feeding, willing, laughing, chattering, singing, or sitting and doing nothing (after an early Mass) are the orders of the day. Happiness and contentment prevails. Sunday (as they themselves say) is a "good day."

The wretched "British refugees" (as they mockingly call English tourists to-day) ask, "Where is the world food shortage our politicians tell us about?" The reply is "In England." For the only shortage here (even on Sunday) is political speeches about "Work or Want" or "export" or "cuts" or "crises." The Luxemburger worships his God, his Grand Duchess Charlotte and his (or her) stomach in ascending order. And the fat, smiling, plentiful priests who eat, drink and smoke cigars a

hastily as their flock to the glory of God and the Grand Duchess (whose picture vies with the Virgin Mary's in popularity and who has a theatrical elevated solitary Royal box in the cathedral), these excellent priests tell the people that Sunday enjoyment is no sin at all, especially following a brief Mass!

No wonder the men and women of the working-class are bigger than any in Europe, not excepting the Swedes to-day. Their Sunday meals alone would last a couple of English folk a week! If only the British working-class could see their Hitler-conquered counterparts here at dinner. If only they could contrast the "dead" appearance of most of London on Sunday with the "live" vividness of Luxemburg on Sunday! If only they could compare the dreary, drab, shoddy-clothed, ration-starved perambulating Sunday English with these vivid, laughing, well-dressed Luxemburgers. If only they could see them enjoying the goods English factory-fodder have sweated and laboured to produce for foreign delectation!

It may be said that Sunday (Continental) versus Sunday (English) is a small matter. It is not. It is the fetter that makes the slave and the endurance of small fetters makes the man accept greater tribulations. Our habits are ourselves. Chastise a man with whips and soon you can chastise him with comparisons without his noticing the change. Make a Government God as we English do, even a Five-Year's God—and the trick begun if not done.

Let England introduce the Continental Sunday and be the better for it! As Jesus so well said: "The Sabbath is made for man not man for the Sabbath." Let Sunday be a day of rejoicing in Merrie England which has much to be thankful for—being still—at legal war with Germany and preparing for the next with some other country, having longer queues, more queues and forms, and greater restrictions than anywhere except in an old rival, Germany. Let us rejoice on Sunday as we are not as the Luxemburgers are: an over-fed, under-working, under-exporting, un-political, selfish lot of "sluicers and browsers" as P. G. Wodehouse would call them, but the great British Empire on which (nowadays!) the sun never shines one of the ruins that Hitler knocked about a bit.

C. G. L. DUCANN.

MONKEY — OR MAN?

"YES, I come here often," said the one with the huge shoulders and the lanky arms, looking steadily into the orang-utan cage. "I come here and so did His Lordship."

"And is it true," asked the meek little man, "that His Reverend Lordship understood monkey talk?" The big man's head turned quickly, as his fierce glance landed into the little man beside him. "Well . . . His Lordship spent years in the jungle . . . perhaps he . . ."

The words seemed to sting . . . while a strange fear came over the meek little man's consciousness; an awfulness from which he would flee! That big brute-like man with huge shoulders and fierce eyes looked half animal!

And then, O Lord, the big one began talking in animal language to the oranges!

Little Meek listened while the animals asked questions and the Big Man answered; a strange, weird tongue it was . . . Here, O Lord, in modern London!

Soon the conversation finished, the ape-man in his grey felt hat and huge top-coat addressed his amazed companion, "Have you any fear. I am part gorilla, yes; but I'm civilised, with the usual light veneer."

"Yes, His Lordship did come here often; and he did talk in monkeyese. He said it was a relief from the sort of talk which furnished him a livelihood. Said these gorillas were logical and thoughtful and never lied. Which was more than he could say for his parishioners."

"And he spoke truth; because behind my veneer, I'm still a monkey and I know."

"Well, apparently you have heard this story before. Milord brought these cousins of mine from the jungle. But he died before his plans were accomplished. All this was years ago."

"It was back in the seventies, when His Lordship was a young explorer in B'wangeland, he shot a gorilla which had held a French woman captive for a year. The woman was frightened and fled to the arms of another gorilla."

"You'll find the story in DuChallu, slightly disguised. That woman and that gorilla were my grandparents. Then in later years, I was captured in youth and according to a plan of His Lordship, I was shipped to Bilgewater Hall gradually taught English and tutored like any boy. Likewise all my brothers and sisters."

"Here is the pay-off, Stranger. I am the only one of my family who made good. All my brothers reverted to type. All had the same chance. They became murderers, thieves, arsonists. That gorilla in Poe's murder in the Rue Morgue was one of them. My sisters went bad, too; harlots, thieves, bawds, blackmailers, and one went crazy over a prominent Archbishop."

"Alas, we were raised as Christians!"

"And I'm just a man-monk. Now I'm embarking on my real life work. I'm demanding Freedom and the Right to vote for all monkeys in captivity! Right now I'm on my way to Oxford University."

"But life is tough, Mister . . . its a tough fight!"

Even after he ceased talking the underslung jaw kept moving. Weakly the little man asked, "You're going to Oxford—to study?"

"No," answered the man-ape, "they're going to study me."

The moment was embarrassing for both.

"Well, good day!" snapped the big fellow.

"And good day to you, Sir!" as Meek touched his cap.

"Maybe His Dizzy Lordship did come here," thought Meek, "maybe he did talk monkey! But, O Lord, I'm never comin' here again. Could I be awake, O Lord, and yet dreamin'?!!"

His next stop was the Elbow Inn, to partake of some spirits.

"Monkey talk!" he mumbled, while approaching the bar.

"Mr. Host, my friend . . . I'd like a B'Wanga Special if you don't mind—and make it a dabble!"

And after that one, and another, and, yet another, little Mr. Meek, eventually, slid quietly under the table.

EARL CORNWALL.

California, U.S.A.

A DREAM

I dreamed of a Land—fairer than yet I knew—
A smiling, friendly land, not favoured for the few.
Within its whitened cities all men found equal scope—
Sharing Earth's goodly riches; living in new-found Hope.

I dreamed of a Day—brighter than yet was born;
When war's dark shadow never dimmed a Golden Dawn.
With Fear and Want abolished did Man's Good-will increase—
Life's Purpose was fulfilled in that Day of Lasting Peace.

I dreamed of a Man—a Super Entity,
Knowing not Hate, nor Greed, nor bitter Enmity;
But living in obedience to the Law Supreme—
Loving each man his brother. *Must it remain a Dream?*
W. H. WOOD.

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ACID DROPS

The Bible tells us that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a living God. We cannot be sure of this, but taking the fact of the Christian and other gods they are usually a bit of a nuisance. For one piece of good council they give us a dozen orders that are certain to make for trouble. He was jealous of other gods, although He made as many blunders as they did. Some people believe they can talk to God, although no one has proved it. Some of them sing of the pleasure of sitting in his arms in some other world, and then try as hard as they can to keep away from him. Personally, we should like to see a god of any kind, but he must make the first move.

The Rev. Longford seems very angry with the Bishop of Birmingham who has been trying to make the New Testament more believable than it is. We can understand these two old gentlemen, the one trying to make the Testament *look* reasonable, and the other saying that he doesn't care whether the New Testament is stupid or sensible, the good Christian must take it, and the less reasonable it is the sounder the Christian who believes it. As an outsider we can sympathise with both, and a man who can swallow the Christian religion—the historic religion—should not be too particular. What we should like to have from the Bishop of Birmingham is: "What can we get *with* Christianity that we cannot get without it?" We have been asking that question for many years, and have never found an educated Christian who could supply us with a reasonable answer.

It is said, authoritatively, that there will be no rebuilding of the Coventry Cathedral for many years. (The Cathedral was demolished during the war.) We are glad to hear it. It is surely common sense to see that homes are found for men and women and children before we build Churches. There are quite enough Churches at present to more than accommodate particular groups of worshippers. If there were more worshippers than buildings, it might be advisable to get into touch with the Roman Church that every now and again publishes accounts of weekly miracles that are performed on earth. We have published many of these miracles and it is quite clear that creating a church by the "Let there be" process could easily be done.

While we are on the subject of building we may note that no one yet has shown any feeling with regard to the building of a new home for the Princess, whose marriage is likely to take place soon. There is surely plenty of room in the Royal palaces for a home to be found for the Princess and her husband. The Princess has publicly declared that she will devote her life to the people. This would be a very striking illustration that the promise meant something. We have seen no comment in the press, but with growing hardships for the people the two things do not run together very well.

It is quite interesting to note the horror with which our Christian leaders discover that Russia has no religion in its schools. In Russia people may teach religion to their children if they please, but there is to be no religion in the State schools. In England for a very long time all schools had religion, whether parents wished it or not. The power to withdraw children was considered a great thing. Russia permits religion of many kinds, but it will not have the Churches acting as enemies to the State Government. What is bothering the Churches in Russia is that while more Churches have been permitted, the number of non-Christians is steadily becoming more numerous. Our own religious leaders are foretelling their own fate, and they do not like it.

What a delightful place this country would be to live in had Catholics the power to suppress whatever they disliked in art, literature and music! The latest example of their impudent interference is the film "Black Narcissus," in which some Anglican nuns are shown to have womanly feelings—and failings—and the "National League of Decency," a Roman Catholic organisation in the States, wants to suppress it. Any film portraying a priest so as to show him ready to play cricket or have a drink and generally behave like a thoroughly decent fellow, is hailed with enthusiasm for it helps the Church. But God help any film producer showing a priest like Stiggins, or a nun like those claimed by Maria Monk to have ill-treated her. In any case, think of

the impudence of these people objecting to an Anglican film—what would they say if the Presbyterian Church were to hold mass meetings objecting to Bing Crosby?

There used to be a time when Christianity was always presented to us with Jesus as the "despised and rejected"—a Man of Sorrows, utterly and hopelessly doleful. Somehow or other this view of both the religion and its founder has gone quite out of date. Jesus is no longer the Man of Sorrows—he is hail-fellow-well-met, full of fun, witty and humorous, ready for a laugh and a lark. In fact, the painfully solemn Catholic journal, the "Universe," is now trying to inculcate "sanity with sanctity," or a "Christianity with a Smile." The filthy saint, St. Simeon Stylite, who lived on top of a pillar, or St. James the Apostle, who boasted that he never took a bath, is considered quite out of date, and no longer a suitable example for a Modern Faith. This sounds rather peculiar from a religion which has always boasted that it has never changed!

We often wonder whether many of the letters which professional preachers say they receive from penitent people are really genuine. If they are, then the mass of the people are more foolish than we imagined they were. Here is an example offered by the Reverend W. H. Elliott. It is said to come from a man who says, "He is an Agnostic, but he is not quite so certain of himself as he used to be. So he has resolved to send his children to some place of worship, and to be taught the Christian faith." Now we wonder whether that is really a genuine letter, or not. If it is, what kind of man it is who writes, and the clergyman who thinks it really something good?

Consider. The father, an agnostic, is not so certain as he was. How much certainty does he indicate in sending his child to a preacher? If it is better than non-belief, why does he not go himself and join a Church, instead of sending his child? Does he treat the child so as to see what Christianity is like, and if it is all right, then he will risk it himself? That does not strike us as a parent that is worth much. It is as though the parent wanted a hot bath and threw his child in to see if the water was hot enough to hurt. It should be his duty to take the risk before the child. A real man would do so. A good man would for the sake of decency. We cannot believe the letter to be genuine. It sounds much like the old fashioned books that were sold to preachers so that they might tell to their congregations experiences they never had. We should dearly like to see some of Mr. Elliott's letters from agnostics and the like. We should like to know who reads the books!

A Catholic writer has discovered that if his religion is to make headway it must adopt new ideas and wade in with modern weapons of attack. Quite a real fighting decree. But the Church claims to be the same in the past, in the present, and for ever, and to throw this overboard is to admit, if not defeat, at least a great deal of lost territory. The fact is that every religion is to-day losing some ground and, to repeat the old gag—One may fool some of the people part of the time, but one cannot count on fooling the people *all* the time.

Once again the old rivalry between Lourdes and places in which "apparitions" have appeared, is in the news. Bishop Theas of Tarbes and Lourdes utterly denies that the Virgin has appeared at Espis in Southern France, and forbids the priests there to say Mass or organise processions in honour of "our Lady of Espis." The story that a bedridden woman there suddenly got up and walked as the result of a miracle performed by "Our Lady" is characterised as a lie—in fact, this kind of competition within the Church is strongly deprecated. The only genuine place of business where the goods are guaranteed is, of course, Lourdes.

Pity the poor servant of God who has the name Jack Marts. He belongs to the U.S.A., he is also in intimate touch with God: and one day God moved his servant to drop his U.S.A. preaching and his himself to England. So he came to London: and he hired the Albert Hall, which cost £200, plus other charges. There was no charge to go in and the offerings amounted to £22. We believe Mr. Marts is returning to the U.S.A. to have it out with the Lord. It has been suggested that the next time God sends out a messenger it will have to be "money first."

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SUGAR PLUMS

There has been of late a very marked appreciation of the qualities of Thomas Paine in England and the U.S.A. On the social and political side Paine's work is recognised. Among other things, Paine was the first advocate of a United Europe, and had his advice been taken a world war would have been almost impossible. It is a pity that Mr. Churchill forgot to place Paine in the limelight. But that would probably not have pleased the Christian Churches that worked so hard to bury one of the greatest of Englishmen. That, however, makes an excellent full-page article on "Thomas Paine" in the "Monthly Journal" of the engineering union. The author is Mr. J. W. Smith, and he has given in very small space a good sketch of the most blackguarded of all eminent men. We congratulate the writer for a neat piece of work.

Both as a journalist and an author, the name of H. L. Mencken ranks high. To his credit he never disguised his Freethinking opinions, and among his useful books, "Treatise on the Gods," is a very creditable work. Mr. Mencken had also played the part of a journalist, and in the book named he gives an account of a man, a very sincere Christian, who was executed for murdering his wife. This is the way he describes the scene. He says:—

"Once in my day as an active journalist, I attended one poor fellow in his last moments. With the Seventh Commandment in mind, he had butchered his wife, and was now about to pay his debt. A devout Baptist, he was attended by a clergyman of his faith, and gave over his last hours to prayer. When, finally, the sheriff came to his cell and summoned him to the gallows, he broke into a recitation of the Twenty-third Psalm. Thus the last inspiring scene. The march begins: first the sheriff, then the condemned man, then the condemned (loudly). "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. (They reach the foot of the gallows.) He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul (they mount the steps). He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. (The sheriff binds his legs.) I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (The sheriff adjusts the noose.) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou preparest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (The sheriff signals to the hangman.) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of . . ." (The drop falls.)

We think that indicates the essence of Christianity in the fewest words.

Many years ago we stood in the castle of Nuremberg and saw its truly Christian monument. On the face of it it was nothing but a life-size figure of a woman. But it had a door, and when one saw the inside of the figure it was seen to be covered with strong, huge nails. It was a home for those who offended the Church. A man or woman was placed inside, and very, very slowly these huge nails bored into the human prisoner until he died. But we must be fair. Christian Germany was not the only country in the world that so behaved in the name of Jesus. There were others, and only the growth of Freethought made for a more humane life.

A religious gentleman named Shipton has discovered that a "half a century of Secularism has proved that morality and religion cannot be divorced." That is a bloomer in more ways than one. First, the separation of life into sections belongs to the Christian Church. Ancient Rome and Greece knew no such division. Secondly, the more religion dominated life the lower the Secular section of life—and also the religious section—grew. The revival to a better state of life came with a return to the ancient learning, and with the social development from the science-cultured section of the Mohammedan world. Since their life has got better as the Secular outlook grew stronger. Mr. Shipton should go back to school. He might get some useful hints if he read the "Freethinker" regularly.

The Halifax Branch N.S.S. opens its indoor season today at 7, St. James Street, Halifax, when Mr. J. V. Shortt will speak on "Did Jesus Christ ever Live?" The meeting begins at 7 p.m. and full announcement of the season's work will be made during the evening. Other Branches are making arrangements and details will be given as they come to hand.

THE ARAB EMPIRE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO OUR MODERN CIVILISATION

II

ALTHOUGH these Jew and Christian "unbelievers" were encouraged to either embrace the only true Faith or emigrate, one finds no mention of any cruelties being inflicted upon them other than the inevitable privations of any conquered people. I invite the reader to compare this humane treatment with the conduct of our Christian Crusaders who, later on, retook Jerusalem from the Saracens, slaughtering the entire population, men, women and children, in the name of Jesus, till every lane and street ran with innocent blood, and every gallant Crusader was laden with all the loot he could possibly carry away. To tell the truth (which no history book could ever be permitted to do), these crusades were little more than organised expeditions of robbery and murder, hypocritically camouflaged under the cloak of the Church and on which any rascal could enrich himself so long as a comfortable portion of his ill-gotten gains were passed on to the Church on his return.

More than one of our noble families trace their emergence from commercial middle class obscurity to the time of the "Holy" Crusades!

A hundred and fifty years later (circa 800) the great Kalif Haroun-er-Raschid seems to have been filling the part of Light of the World. He took great pleasure in encouraging learning and scientific research, lavishing his fabulous wealth on the collection and translation of all that was best in Greek philosophy, geography, medicine, and other literature, being most efficiently assisted in these educational undertakings by his favourite ministers, the unfortunate Barmecide family. His son, Mamun (813) carried on the tradition, and is recorded as having spoken of philosophers and scientific searchers after truth as "specially sent by Allah to perfect men in reason, and to be the light and guide of humanity along its stumbling path, without whom men would speedily relapse into barbarism," a pronouncement the truth of which was demonstrated, to the loss of the entire world, when these enlightened men were even-

tually conquered and their accumulated knowledge suppressed by the Christian hordes from Northern Europe (Gilmore's "The Saracens").

These Kalifs were men of what was, for those days of fanatical Faiths, a most remarkable tolerance, honouring and promoting to positions of importance men of no matter what religion—Parsee, Christian, Jew, Buddhist or Atheist—so long as they had talent or knowledge of some sort to impart or cultivate. Not one of our modern rulers, with the possible exception of the Turkish dictator, could lay claim to such enlightened and genuine love of knowledge and truth for its own sake.

At the time when Haroun-er-Raschid was at the peak of his cultured greatness at Bagdad (say, A.D. 800) our own Leading Light, the Christian King, Charlemagne, little more than a savage, who ate off a bare board with his fingers, had never washed in his life and could neither read nor write, was casting anxious glances towards the Bosphorus, as well as over the Pyrenees, wondering when and if the dreaded invasion of Europe was going to materialise. It is interesting to think that these two great leaders, poles apart intellectually, used to correspond by means of Embassies carrying presents to one another, each hoping to impress the other with his magnificence, power or culture.

Haroun would amaze the hairy Frank with such characteristic gifts as a water-clock, a roll of purple silk or a printed picture, while our superstition-ridden warrior would, in his turn, expect to flabbergast his pagan enemy with a barrel of "holy" water specially blessed by the King's chaplain and guaranteed to extirpate all manner of evil spirits!

One imagines Europe at this time to have been in a state of considerable chaos; Emperor, Pope, and the Patriarch of the Greek Church at Byzantium, that moribund corner of the Roman Empire, all plotting and struggling for supreme power over the lives and souls of men, while the mass of the people were in a state of scarcely modified barbarism (Wells, p. 248) only bound together by a common belief in the superior power of their god over that of the dreaded Saracen, or those of the no less dreaded Norsemen.

Periodical raids by wild men from the North-East—Slavs, Russians, Turks or Mongols—helped to make confusion worse confounded, and of which, I confess, I could never make head nor tail. The civilisation (if such it could be called) of Europe might perhaps be described as stagnant, if not actually retrograde. Not one single thought, discovery, attempt or achievement worth recording seems to have justified our existence at that time. Everything of the great civilisations that had previously existed seems to have been completely obliterated by these benighted forebears of ours, densely enwrapped in a fog of stultifying religious superstitions, inhibitions, taboos and whatnot.

An unforeseen result of the astonishing religious tolerance of the more enlightened Kalifs was that a great many Persians attained positions of power in this part of the Mahomedan Empire, permeating Islam with their more rationalistic outlook and even coming near, at one time, to discrediting the Divine inspiration of the Moslem Bible (Gilmore's "The Saracens," p. 384). Their intelligent questioning and pertinent criticisms were at the same time seriously endangering the sanctity of our own Bible. In fact, to use a colloquialism, they "had it coming the them"; an alert, inquiring mind was liable to be in those days of all-powerful churches, a very dangerous possession, unless you happened to be sufficiently powerful yourself.

The Kalif Mamun organised vast schemes of public instruction, practically unhampered by religious taboos, a state of enlightenment we Western nations are only now just beginning, with considerable trepidation, to approach, after a thousand years of "progress"! Only a few years ago a schoolmaster was arrested, tried and punished (Tennessee, Monkeyville, circa. 1930) for daring to instruct some of his pupils in the elementary principles

of biology, scientific facts which dare to be contrary to popular religious superstitions about "creation." Even now, ten centuries after Mamun, the great majority of Christians are strictly forbidden to read any scientific book that contradicts, or even questions, anything written in the Bible (vide the Pope's "Index Expurgatorius").

Mamun, besides his many Persian favourites, had also many favoured captains among his Turkish mercenaries. These Turks gradually acquiring more and more power (like the Janissaries at Constantinople) eventually succeeded in superseding the original Semitic line of rulers by a dynasty of their own, the Seljuks (974-1288). It was the intolerant treatment by one of these Seljuk princes of the Christians at Jerusalem that culminated in the Crusades, in which the followers of the two rival gods, Allah and Jehovah, vied with one another in slaughters and counter-slaughters, spurred on by the exhortations of their respective priests. There never was a war of any kind, anywhere, in which the priests of both sides did not wholeheartedly co-operate, no matter how obviously the injustice of the Cause might stink to heaven. Some theologian could always be faked up to justify their action.

Gilmore records of one of these kalifs, however, that in Bagdad in 1164 he had provided 60 free hospitals and a large lunatic asylum where those "possessed of devils" received humane treatment, even if they did have to be chained, as was the only known method of treatment in pre-scientific days, after the priests had tried their hocus-pocus (without the success claimed for Jesus on similar occasions).

Philosophers, physicists, astrologers, theologians, poets, magicians, historians, botanists and wise men from all countries resorted to Bagdad to teach or discuss everything under the sun sure of a warm welcome and mutual advantage. 1164 was, incidentally, the year in which the Great Mogul Jengis Khan first saw the light of day, the Tartar conqueror destined to begin the overthrow of this Eastern Arab Empire, and which his grandson completed about 1250. Read B. Yan's "Jengis Khan" (Hutchinson).

M. C. BROTHERTON, COMDR., R.N.

MORALITY AND RELIGION

(Continued from p. 315)

THE advent of Christianity is an historical demonstration of the failure of classic ethics. Christian condemnation of "the rags of morality" is justified, for classic ethics fails even to face the facts referred to in the term "evil." It was so abstract as to be out of touch with customs of masquerade and mystery. But with its basic axioms, the maxim "know thyself" led straight back to custom and tradition. To speak of being inspired by higher ideals in the utterance of noble sentiments is only a verbose way of referring to the vision which speaks through the mouth of the prophet. With knowledge limited, it led back to the Gnosis, knowledge of self; the stronghold of ignorance and fear. With knowledge of the self in the "mystery" we have convincing evidence of the reasons for other people's actions. Such casuistical "knowledge" enables us to divine the intentions of others; to distinguish "right and wrong" and the difference between the higher "spiritual" and the lower "material" values. And it implies the prophets' condemnation of abomination. It was no accident that the study of rhetoric went together with the study of ethics. In each case it is word magic; the appeal is to sensation and feeling; sympathy and antipathy. And it needs but little study of the Prophets to see how prophecy is derived from the magic curse. Prophecy may mean accusation or condemnation, for we read of prophesying against and of being prophesied against. The curse is projection, divination is projection; the curse is crude prophesy, just as vengeance

rough justice. The magic curse developed into the theological anathema which calls upon the wrath of god. The odium theologium has given a rare twist to the language we use, but it is as well to realise that words have their customary usage and their association with custom. Future rewards and punishments, the Christian Heaven and Hell, is projection carried to the point of lunacy, and, like the Christian explanation of pain, that all things are sent to try us; arise in the idea of moral duty and the practice of loyalty testing.

The development of script, through hieroglyphics, from magic inscriptions, has its parallel in that of thought and speech from magic incantations. Words are not just marks on a piece of paper, the spoken word is older than the written word. The power of word magic developed from the magic curse; expressed in its most vehement form in the theological anathema. The most powerful words are those with old associations. The most expressive terms are those of a theological character. In making an appeal in forceful argument we use the strongest words we can; slogans and shibboleths; and often fall back on words with theological implications. The force lies not only in the expressive character of the words themselves, but our response to them is customary; we have been conditioned to them. The words are handed down by custom, and it is the customary usage which gives words with old associations their deep-seated significance. With the continued repetition of a word in any specific sense, we become accustomed to it, and a word may even acquire a sinister meaning; for instance, propaganda has come to have an association with ulterior motives. The meaning of words, lies, not only in our definitions of them, so much as our response to them. A scientific or technical term may be abracadabra to the uninitiated, yet most people use words they would be incapable of defining. By the continued use of appropriate words we are able to satisfy ourselves of the goodness of our own intentions. Intricate verbal gymnastics is unnecessary if the simple substitution of one word for another will suffice. For we have inherited a useful vocabulary of words which we are accustomed to use to describe with subtlety and precision, the difference between our own behaviour and that of others; what is courage in ourselves is recklessness in others; devotion to duty in our own troops is blind obedience in those of the enemy; our own determination is obstinacy in another; we speak of Russian expansionism and the Russians of our imperialism. The words we use express our feelings but their implications may be different from our intentions. The word "reason" is used to mean not only cause of motive, it also means rationalisation.

H. H. PREECE.

(To be continued)

A.A.A.A. HONOURS MADAME CURIE

At 4-15 p.m., November 7, 1946 (79th anniversary of her birth), there was placed at the Curie plaque, west of New York's City Hall, a laurel wreath with the following card:—

"In Memory of Marie Sklodowska Curie, a great Atheist Benefactor of mankind, from The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism."

At 5-45 p.m., four well-dressed men walked up to the plaque, appeared to admire the wreath, but when they left, the card was gone! At that, ninety minutes is quite a while for an atheist sign to stand on a busy corner in a city which has its share of religious hoodlums.

The atheistic views of the co-discoverer of radium were so well known that the Catholic Church, which she attended until 18, has never tried to canonise her. Had Madame Curie affected fake cures by prayer rather than real cures by science, she would have been a saint.—"Truth Seeker," New York.

OBITUARY

HENRY JAMES HEWER

The name of Henry James Hewer will recall to many North London Freethinkers a very sincere and loyal member of the N.S.S. With deep regret we have to announce that he was knocked down by a trolley bus in Edmonton on August 19, and died the following morning in the North Middlesex Hospital. I knew him for many years as a keen supporter of the Society's meetings in Finsbury Park and surrounding districts. One of his happiest hobbies was to leave our literature in places likely to attract intelligent citizens. He had been suffering from a painful kidney trouble for over two years but was always hopeful of returning to his work as a gardener. His remains were cremated at Enfield Crematorium.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead). Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. A. LUTON, Mr. E. C. SAPHIN; (Highbury Corner) 7 p.m., Mr. LUTON.

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Glasworthy's Social Philosophy," Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A. LL.D.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Blackburn Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

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

Enfield.—Saturday, September 6, 6-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Hapton.—Tuesday, September 9, 6-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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.

Preston (Market).—Sunday, 2-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Worsthorne.—Friday, September 5, 7-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (7, St. James Street).—Sunday: "Did Jesus Christ Ever Live?" Mr. J. V. SHORTT.

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.

REVERENT RATIONALISM

III

ONE must never be surprised to find the Reverent Rationalist swallowing wholesale as many fairy tales as the other side can give him so long as they do not actually outrage reason. As an example, take the way Christians vilify the Pharisees of the (supposed) time of Jesus. It is almost impossible to pick up a book or an article by a true Christian in which the terrific contrast between the absolutely perfect Jesus and the foully hypocritical Pharisee is not contrasted. There is not, it need hardly be said, a scrap of evidence that Jesus was perfect even if we accept his "biography" as given in the Gospels; and outside the Gospels there is no evidence whatever to justify this malignant vilification of the Pharisees. All one can bring against them are the lying slanders of Christians from Jesus downwards. This does not mean, of course, that all Pharisees were perfect; there were good and bad among them as in any other body of men; but to show Jesus as a spotless Lamb it was necessary to have awful villains in contrast and so the lie against the Pharisee is ever being perpetuated. In their book, the "Philosophy of Jesus," Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts follow the Christian tradition faithfully and call the Pharisees "sanctimonious" and naturally Jesus "opposed" them, opposed their "mere legalism." There is not a scrap of evidence that the Pharisees were any more "sanctimonious" than Jesus—or Lord Horder for that matter. The Pharisees, as far as we know anything about them, had certain beliefs about aspects of their religion, and they were as entitled to stand up for these beliefs as Lord Horder is against "unqualified" medical practitioners.

It is very amusing to find the authors of the "Philosophy of Jesus" never tire of quoting the praise of Jesus. Years ago, when I first entered the controversial field as an out-and-out Freethinker, my Christian opponents use to quote against me the eulogies of Jesus, written by Lecky, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Paine, D. F. Strauss, Ernest Renan, and many other "Rationalists," and I was supposed to be overwhelmed. Well, we must face the fact that there have been and still are many opponents of orthodox Christianity who feel that Jesus was the greatest of the "sons" of men. They are entitled to their belief and to express it, but—as I am never awed by great names—I have always demanded the evidence on which they rely and I never got it. When Lecky was relating the influence of New Testament teaching on the lives of Christians, he could appeal to authority and he drew a very grim picture. Yet, almost in the same breath, he threw over what he had written from historical fact, and had the audacity to claim that Jesus had, in three "short" years of active life, "done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists." He never gave any evidence whatever in support of this nonsense—but we must not forget that Lecky never ceased (as far as I know) to be a member of the Church of England. Lord Horder quotes the passage with relish, as he does another passage from Mr. Gardner-Smith's "The Christ of the Gospels," in the foreword to which Dr. Foakes Jackson says that "crude freethinkers" claim that Jesus was a neurotic peasant. We are always "crude" if we say anything against Jesus, and I expect Dr. Foakes Jackson would be very greatly surprised if he knew that we returned the compliment with interest. For me, at all events, people like him are not only crude but credulous and stupid.

Needless to say, like Lecky, Dr. Foakes Jackson insists that "the greatest of all miracles" is that Jesus "changed the whole course of human history and thought" through his "short presence on earth." Persecution of the Christian Church failed to stop him and he still survives. That may be, but even

Dr. Foakes Jackson is not silly enough to believe that the Jesus who has survived is exactly the same as the Jesus believed in by the Popes and their train of illiterate monks in the Dark Ages. Nor even the same Jesus believed in by the Puritans and the Mormons. The way Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts scurry away directly a hint of the supernatural is given in connection with *their* Jesus proves that the primitive Saviour God believed in by Dr. Foakes Jackson and the highly ethical Sunday school teacher believed in by them, are as poles apart.

Jesus is also "the trust of democrats." No doubt this is because Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts believe in democracy. I have seen Jesus described as the truest or the greatest of a score of things—the greatest poet or vegetarian or spiritualist or orator as well as the greatest of all gods. The two authors have no doubt that Jesus was "a brilliant impromptu public speaker," and that his "philosophy was a simple one." So simple indeed that thousands of books have been written to explain it—including that of Lord Horder. If you asked him whether the philosophy of Jesus included a belief in angels, what would he answer? Was Jesus able to explain to his hearers in simple language exactly what was an angel? After telling his hearers about "our Father which art in heaven," did they know exactly what he meant? Does Lord Horder? If so, why does he run away from any discussion of the "divinity" of Jesus?

Jesus was, we are told, "unrevengeful." Yet he said that "he that believeth shall be condemned"—"condemned" being mercifully changed from "damned" which was the word used in earlier translations. But condemned or damned—is not that revengeful? If Hell is as Christians have always described it, and a place where, as Jesus said, there was weeping and gnashing of teeth, where people were literally burning in everlasting fire because they did not believe in Jesus or his God—is not that "revengeful?" It is useless for Lord Horder to run away from the implications of the teachings of Jesus because he himself refuses to discuss the "supernatural" with regard to Jesus. He can make a dogmatic statement, any dogmatic statement he likes, but the fact remains that Jesus believed in Heaven—a place where there were many mansions, in Hell where there was the most awful everlasting torture, and in Angels, sexless beings who could come from Heaven and do things. Do Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts believe in all this silly superstition?

Faced with the idiotic outburst against the Pharisees made by Jesus, the two writers think "it is pretty plain speaking" for a "meek man." Exactly how this legend that Jesus was "meek" can be gathered from the Gospels is beyond me. He seems to be always cursing somebody or something—even a fig tree—and is about as angry as the average medical practitioner gets when he finds a patient he was unable to cure was cured by an unqualified herbalist. The truth is that the legend that Jesus was "meek" comes from the chapter in Isaiah which was used by the forgers of Christianity when they pretended Jesus "was despised and rejected of men" and "a man of sorrows" who "opened not his mouth." Thus was Jesus "prophesied" in the Old Testament—and our two authors are no doubt in full agreement.

But it is time we had a look at some of the "philosophy" of Jesus, and I propose to do this in the next article.

H. CUTNER.

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