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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Why God?

I LIKE to oblige a man, or a woman, when he, or she, as a Christian, offers to put me in my place. I am sure that the picture of being put right must be a great sight—seeing it so seldom occurs. In this instance I think the questioner is a man; and he asks, with that kindly air a thief would wear when he is about to steal a watch, whether I could tell him how an Atheist can account for the existence of a “natural order.” I will try, but I would inform him that the question is put in the wrong way. It is possible the Atheist may not be able to answer the question—particularly when the question is not properly put. After all, an Atheist is a very simple kind of a “cove,” and he may be simple enough to wait for more knowledge before he answers what he may not understand. The Atheist has much to learn, while the Christian gives his superstition in the place of understanding. We may, for example, be quite unable to explain the motion of a glacier, but we should be fools if for no other reason than that we accepted the theory that it was caused by the wriggings of an imprisoned giant. And whether the Atheist can or cannot explain natural order in no way affects the validity of his position. The explanation of Nature is part of the function of science; and where that is compelled to proclaim ignorance, the rest of the world must follow suit. It is enough for the Atheist to show that no evidence exists to justify the Theistic hypothesis. That the Atheist cannot explain does not prove that the Theist can. You do not prove the possession of knowledge by demonstrating the ignorance of your opponent; nor are you justified in building an affirmation on what is no more than a negation. After all, it is the Theist who claims to explain; it is the Atheist who rejects the explanation; and all that he is called upon to do is to show that the explanation offered neither fits nor explains the facts.

What is it that is meant, or what ought we to mean, by such an expression as “Natural Order”? In this connection Natural Law and Human Order are fundamentally identical—the only difference being between a fact and a description of it. But as it happens that most of our words are, as Wendell Holmes said, polarised, it follows that these words are confused in their use by their application to another and a different sphere. We speak of natural law and social law, of natural order and of social order; and a similarity of sound is taken as an equivalent of meaning. This is certainly not so in this instance. Social order is not something that is discovered; it is something that is established. Social law is not something observed, but something decreed. God did not make the common virtues, it was man who forced them on their particular gods. What we have before us is the fact of

existence. All else is inference or assumption. The solid and indisputable fact is that what we call the *order* of nature is the observed succession of events and the relations we note as existing between them. To say that it is part of the *order* of nature that iron should sink in water, and wood will float, is saying no more than what we see occur. But if exactly the reverse happened, and had always happened, it would not in the least interfere with our speaking of natural order. The mere fact of there being an order is of no particular value to anyone. It is certainly of no value to the Theist. So long as things exist, order there is bound to be, and in saying that, we are only saying that things occur. How things could be and not secure, is a question that no one has succeeded in answering in an intelligent manner.

But it may be said that this will not account for the regularity we observe in nature. Things not only exist, they exist in an orderly manner. The same cause always produces the same effect, and this regularity calls for some confusion. We agree to the need for an explanation, but the difficulty is more apparent than real. We will start afresh.

Atheist and Theist are at one with a desire for understanding. We start again. The existence of *something* is admitted. On that point Atheist and Theist are agreed. The sole question is one of explanation and understanding. And there are at least two ways in which one might account for the regularity of nature. It might be a purely mental product. There is no doubt whatever that to some extent the human brain is a selective instrument, that is, what it can think is determined by its capacity for knowing. That much is true of both animal and human. We know that the colours of the world, what they are to us, are due to our perceptive capacities. If our capacities were different the colour of the world would be different. In the case of colour-blindness we have evidence of the truth of what has been said. The same is true of all our senses.

Now, assuming that the universe, apart from our consciousness, is really chaotic, that all sorts of things happen in all sorts of ways, and that the happenings of to-day bear no resemblance to the happenings of to-morrow, we should never know it. Our consciousness is a selective thing. The things it sees are dependant on the human structure. There is every reason for believing that the human is selective, ignoring many things and recognising others. A blind man would know nothing of colour, a deaf man would know nothing of sound. On this theory the human brain would be like a sieve which, caught within it meshes, events of a certain kind of quality and allowed all others to fall through unobserved. Also, on this theory, the universe might be in itself complete chaos. But so far as we are aware of the existence of a universe it must be one that is “orderly.” A universe that was not “orderly” would be one that is non-existent.

The second theory proceeds from a different point of view. Existence, as we have said, is common ground for all. We assume it in all our reasoning. But if we must take existence for granted, regularity or order follows as a prime condition of thinking about the universe. Indeed, so far as the Theist is concerned, it is not regularity but irregularity that would establish a presumption in favour of deity.

Suppose that we take existence for granted, and symbolise it by A B C D and its manifestations in consciousness as E F G H. In that case all phenomena will present themselves as varying combinations of these latter factors. And so long as we are thinking of these factors we cannot think of any alterations of E F G H unless we think of the corresponding alteration of A B C D, just as we cannot think of H and O producing water unless we think of some alteration in the nature of the factors. From this point of view regularity is a basic condition of human thought. But suppose that within such limits as did not destroy the possibility of recognition there were to occur certain irregularities—for example, that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen did not produce water. The immediate inference would be, not that the quality of the elements had undergone an alteration, but that some disturbing force had intervened and had thus prevented the appearance of the usual phenomena. Thus, not alone does regularity in nature follow from the character of human thought, but an irregularity at once suggests the possibility of external interference. So far as any legitimate inference can be drawn from the regularity of nature, it establishes a presumption in favour of Atheism rather than in any form of Theism. Just as scientists inferred the existence of Neptune long before that planet was actually seen, so the absence of identical effects from identical causes, leads us to infer the existence of some external coercive agency.

Finally, it may be pointed out that a genuine science is only possible on the assumption—constant assumption—that all one can deal with is the play and character of constant determinate forces. If there is a god he does not, he must not, interfere with the calculations of a verifiable science. Mankind may for many many generations work without mastering, or even understand, the nature of the forces around him, but he learns nothing from his appeals to God. Of all the gods that have ever existed not one has ever given to man a better understanding of the world around him. Far from helping, the gods, ancient and modern, have been nothing but a drag on the development of the human race. If there is a God he must not interfere. Like our constitutional monarchs, he is mainly ornamental, but under penalty of extinction he must toe the line and refrain from dictation. Prevision is of the very nature of science, and that would be impossible if at every stage of calculations, scientists had to come to some supernatural authority. Whatever scientific men may profess, they have to set the idea of God aside in all their experiments and decisions; for unless natural forces themselves possessed the capacity for producing the results we see around us, no amount of "Divine guidance" will be of avail. "God" explains nothing and does nothing. The function is not explanatory, it is a narcotic. "God" does nothing but add difficulties to those who already have plenty to face.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

WHAT HAS PRESBYTERIANISM DONE FOR SCOTLAND?

I WONDER if my own experience will be that of some reader, and thus in their own way answer the above query? My own experience with it and the Bible, started in a small school in a town in Scotland, and a part of our education was the reading of the Bible, where we strung down the schoolroom and each of us read a verse aloud. In this manner we went through it from Genesis to Revelations, and with no evasions, and I recall some rather embarrassing situations arising from such reading.

On one occasion, a sweet and innocent little girl stood above me in the class, and the verse which fell to her lot can be found at Ezekiel, iv-15; verses above this fell to the lot of boys who did not hesitate to read them aloud. Was not this The Word of God? When the poor girl saw what she was expected to read aloud, she burst into tears. I relieved the situation by slipping behind her, and gently pushing her into my place, where I read the verse under it, and in this manner we escaped reading the filthy passage, as was frequently done.

On going back to my desk, I pondered over the incident that had taken place, and the chapter which we had just read, and directly across the page from this verse I read in chapter v-10 "Therefore the Fathers shall eat the sons, and the sons shall eat their fathers, and I will execute judgment in thee, and the whole remnants of thee will I scatter unto all the winds," and I thought can this possibly be the word of an Infinite God, or is it that of a Devil?

This incident made a deep and lasting impression upon me. Ever after this, I read the Bible with a suspicion and dread, and I was less than nine years of age. An innocent little girl had been shocked into tears, and I a mere boy had been nauseated by its filth. Today I can trace my infidelity as having begun in the Bible Class in that little schoolroom, where I was shocked into thinking for myself, and if I succeed in shocking someone into investigating, instead of taking the say-so of some interested party, I shall feel that in writing this, my efforts shall not have been in vain.

Many of the boys, and I presume the girls also, were familiar with most of the obscene passages throughout the Bible from this manner of reading it. But lest there be some who doubt my reference to its obscenity, just let them take the trouble to look up a few of the many I could quote for their edification, the insertion of which is totally inexcusable in a book supposedly given us as a moral guide. And for writing them out in full, I could be sent to jail for sending obscene matter through the mail. Genesis xix. 30, xxx. 16, ix. 20, xxxviii. 9, xxxix. 12, Numbers xi. 19, 20, Judges xvi. Ruth iii., 1st Samuel xxv. 34, 2nd Samuel vi. 20, 2nd Kings xviii. 27, 1st Kings 1 to 4.

Such was the beginning of my investigation of Scripture, and which still continues, "Be ready at all times to give a reason for the faith that is within you."

I never could forgive Jehovah for having allowed men to palm off upon a credulous world such a book as having been inspired by him as his Holy Word, wherein he pictures himself as cursing or coddling, threatening or promising, in almost every chapter. And I have never excused in him what I have condemned in man.

Many Christians are anxious to have the Bible read in our Public Schools here in America, but only in spots, certain passages would be carefully avoided. Just as we see in Burn's "Cottar's Saturday Night," wherein the Father "wails a portion with judicious care," as does every preacher in Christendom today. By all means let us have it read aloud in every school throughout the land, I know of nothing that would destroy the sacred influence in which it is held as would its being read. The fact that not one in a thousand has the slightest conception of

what it contains, accounts for the reverence in which it is held. Rather a bold assertion, someone may say. Well, dear reader, how much do you really know of what the Bible contains? When did you last read anything from its pages? Like thousands of others, you no doubt believe it to be a good book, not from personal investigation, but from the minister's say-so. Who on Sunday "wails a portion, with judicious care," and in this manner uses it for a background to his sermon, not one of whom would dare to read aloud to his congregation the chapter and verse I have just quoted to you.

Some good passages can be got from any Dime Novel by using such a method. But, reader, don't you think it about time that you took it upon yourself to become better acquainted with what it really teaches, considering the part it has played in shaping the lives of so many. Do you feel in any way indebted to this book for what knowledge you may possess? Or is your ignorance of worldly affairs due to the influence it has had upon you, and that your brain seems numb regarding matters of a religious nature? You will, no doubt, be amazed at a few quotations I intend making at the close of this article from Holy Writ which forms the very foundation of Presbyterianism in Scotland.

ROBERT HOWDEN.

Oakland, California.

(To be continued)

THE BREAD AND BUTTER QUESTION

WHETHER sainthood is economic or eclectic, an article in Picture Post, the "Farmer Saints of Ireland," was of interest as an example of how history can be rationalised. These people, living in remote and desolate spots, gained an almost miraculous livelihood, cultivating their little plots and keeping a few chickens and animals. They had their own forge where they made their agricultural implements, and they found time to keep a library where they studied the Scriptures.

It is true the illustration of the hovels in which they lived was not impressive. It is true also that we know next to nothing about them and that our inferences are drawn from different times, places and peoples. It is true also, as Eileen Power has said, we have to search very diligently through thousands of documents to discover an atom of evidence, but on this we can, with plenty of colour, paint quite a pretty picture.

How different from the modern world, with its tractors, combine harvesters, and its electrically heated greenhouses; and its food shortage! But seriously, it is interesting to reflect on how men live and have lived. Harold Peak estimated that agriculture is certainly not more than ten thousand years old, and possibly not more than six thousand, and the progressive amelioration of recent years is remarkable. The Roast Beet of England is legend, and it took generations to popularise the potato. We might reflect on Draper's remark that in the time of Henry VIII the mass of the people lived on peas, beans, and the bark of trees; and that hogweed, used at one time for feeding pigs, was until fairly recently an article of human diet. There are men in this country, possibly running four-furrow tractor plough, who learned to plough with an old wooden beam-plough; and across the channel, even just before the war, one could find many a wooden plough drawn by oxen, and threshing still done with flails. Yet it is difficult to think of men scratching a living from the soil with a roughly hewn bough of a tree.

But the way people think about it is as important as the technical development of implements and methods. To-day we have the use of synthetic artificial fertilisers; even natural fertilisers goes back no more than a generation or so. The ploughs of our countryside go back no more than about two

hundred years and the systematic rotation of crops not much more. Although it does not now pay to keep sheep on land fit for anything else, only two or three generations ago the golden hoof was the mainstay of English farming, for it was the enclosure of land and sheep folding that taught us the value of animal manure. Before that agriculture was just magic. The countryside abounds with superstitious ideas and practices and folklore is a link between ancient and modern. During the Middle Ages a ploughman would, with a magic incantation, put a piece of bread shaped into the figure of a man, in the first furrow so that it was covered in the opening of the second furrow.

We can find much in Frazer to take us back from this to the original human sacrifice. Of course, the man would be in danger of being considered a magician; the fertilising of Mother Earth by the husbandman was a marriage ceremony needing the blessing of a priest. To Marcus Aurelius, fertilising the soil with seed was like that of fertilising a woman by her husband. Husbandry was a fertility mystery. The seed was a mystic seed and involved sacrifice; the sacrifice of the toiler. In the words of the Epistles, except the seed die there is no life; ye are the seed; ye are the sacrifice; ye were bought with a price. God's gift of life must be paid for. Sacrifice was a duty and duty was sacrifice. The early Gnostic Christians were much concerned with sacrifice and its connection with the customs of the times. The writers of the Epistles were concerned about eating sacrifice to idols and the question of conscience in the purchase of meat at the Shambles, as well as communal feeding customs.

But why should a Christian eat in a Pagan temple? The answer is in the customs of the day, for the cooking of food and the slaughter of animals was sacrifice. What we call the kitchen was the temple of Vesta, Goddess of Fire, on whose altar the burnt offering was prepared; and the dining room was the temple of the Lares and Penates, the household gods. The statues of gods and the floral offerings were the table decorations. To celebrate an occasion a Roman citizen would offer a sacrifice to some god such as Ceres; this did not mean that he sent it round to the local Tin Tabernacle for the ministers' enjoyment. The apparent absence of an organised priesthood lay in the combination of sacred and social functions. He was the host; giving of his substance in a social function; in communal festivity. The glorification of the heroic paterfamilias made the ostentatious display of power and affluence a sacred and moral obligation, and a vomitorium was provided where the guests unloaded in order to eat more. It was in a religious atmosphere that Marcus Aurelius needed to remind himself that here was the carcass of a fish and here the mortal remains of a bird.

Louis Coulange traced the subsequent evolution of the mass in which the substance of the host is partaken spiritually. Despite the vow of poverty and humility of the priest who drinks the wine from a golden chalice, in front of a glittering altar, with candles and statues, in an ornate cathedral or church; the ostentation parallels that of a civic banquet at which a toast is drunk to a guest of honour; in the one case accompanied by a homily or sermon, and in the other by panegyric eulogy. With the distinction between physical and spiritual came the separation of religious and civic ceremonies. During the Middle Ages the Lord sat at the head of the festive board, but with the widening of the social sphere the menials were relegated to the kitchen. The development of the homely practice of cooking can be seen in the Menagier de Paris, in which specific foods are cooked in specific ways on specific Saints days. The idea still lingers in the eggs and buns for Easter, pancakes for Shrove Tuesday and the Michémas Goose. Sunday dinner is still the fashion but this has more to do with pay-day than religion.

The tainting of food in storage gave value to seasonings and preservatives. Hence the old trade routes; to the salt mines

of Hallstatt, and the Indies for aromatic herbs and spices. The expansion of trade, the discovery of the New World, the internal combustion engine and the canning industry brings the world's produce to our door. We may think of the countryside as a holiday camp and the tin opener as the only essential implement. If production and distribution is becoming a science, so also is food adulteration. The menials have been promoted to palatial factories; the mysterious spices of the East have become colouring and flavouring; food has become calories and vitamins; the flowing bowl has given place to the cup that cheers. Will this lead to a more sober consideration of the bread and butter question?

We still play to the gallery, for the applause of the gods; enjoy the ostentation of respectability: but entertaining, like the slap-up funeral, is no longer a moral obligation; though we still enjoy a celebration. Grace before meat has gone, though the harvest festival still survives. The carnival and the country fair still lingers, but the commercial fair is run on a grand scale. The patron of the arts of advertising is the man in the street.

Food is a social question, but we now select from a menu; a matter of personal preference. But there is a difference between needs and wants; the luxury of one age are the needs of another. The question now is, we can if we want but why don't we?

H. H. PREECE.

CATHOLIC EXPERIENCES

II

SO, at the end of 1914, I came to Stamford Hill, to board (a single man of 29) with a Catholic family, and I associated myself with the congregation of the influential Jesuit Church or St. Ignatius. A few remarks on the Jesuits may be of interest, though in general their history is well known. They were, it is supererogatory to say, founded by Ignatius of Loyola (a Spanish ex-military officer who had been wounded and turned his attention from fighting for "an earthly" to fighting for "the heavenly" King), in the sixteenth century, and became amongst the most strenuous opponents of the Protestant Reformers. They are bound by the monastic vows of chastity and poverty, but add a special one of their own—absolute obedience to the Pope. A Jesuit must be ready to go at any time to any place whereto he may be sent. When I was at Stamford Hill, the then rector (Father Killion) of St. Ignatius had to do that. He had been at Stamford Hill many years, and was highly popular; but the order came "go to the West Indies." Some grief-stricken parishioners got up a petition to have the command revoked, but of course it was useless. Off he went, never to return. A year or two later we heard that he had died, and was buried in a grave "without a headstone." Such is Jesuit discipline. The individual, as such, is merged in the Society. Jesuits are highly trained, and cannot be ordained priests till they are aged 30 (ordinary priests can at 24, or even in special cases, a year or two younger). They devote themselves especially to the education of boys, to controversy, and to preaching—but, indeed, they are the "guerrilleros" of Catholicism, ready for any task. There is a Jesuit Sodality (Confraternity—"Brotherhood") for laymen, and I joined the Stamford Hill branch. Its members attend monthly special services and are expected to be particularly zealous in Catholic work. One of the features of Catholic life at Stamford Hill was (no doubt, still is, though I believe it was unavoidably suspended during the war of 1939-45) a great Procession of Our Lady round the streets environing the church.

As remarked, I went to board with a Catholic family. As it sadly happens, they are all dead now, and so it is needless to

suppress names. Moreover, I have no harm to say of them, on the contrary, my memories are pleasant. The Flanagans were Irish, as the name shows. There were Mrs. Flanagan, the recent widow of a major of the British Army in India; Tom, a son, Aubrey, another son; and Mona (Monica), a daughter. There had been another, eldest, son, Leo, but he had died before my coming. The Flanagans were ardent Catholics and equally ardent Irish Nationalists. They were zealous members of St. Ignatius congregation. Mona was very specially enthusiastic for the cause of Erin's freedom, and she gave me a little book (I still have it) entitled "Sinn Fein," advocating the cause in vehement terms. Unfortunately, she died in Westminster Hospital of goitre. It was a pity! A gay, happy, good young girl, full of energy and zeal, cut off! Aubrey was also enthusiastic, but he took up "Left Wing" (even Communistic) propaganda, and got its literature from the revolutionary "bomb-shop" book store in Charing Cross Road. When I came first to the Flanagans, he told me he would be a priest, and predicted confidently that the time would come when he would preach in Westminster Cathedral. It never did however, for he married a charming young lady. As to his "Leftist" doctrines, he combined them with his Catholicism as many Catholics do. As Communism and Socialism are condemned in many Papal Encyclicals, it may be asked how that combination could have been made. The answer is simply that many Catholics made a distinction between "What is laid down as articles of revealed faith, binding on all as part of Revelation," and what is sent forth as "opinion on politics." By stretching this distinction very widely, many Catholics disregard much of Papal political teaching—but, it is a dangerous practice. Others simply "do not know" what that political teaching is, as they never read Encyclicals. In short, there is much variation amongst Catholics on the matter. Anyhow, Aubrey became quite a keen "leftist," while remaining a Catholic. He held a good position, nevertheless, in the commercial side of the film industry, and was "the successful man of the family." Alas, he died suddenly in 1945, quite a young man. As to Tom, he suffered from a nervous disability which made him a cripple, and he could do only light work. He was however (he was older than Aubrey and Mona), a brave fellow, and did his best. He had a rough sense of humour and was fond of practical jokes. He also is dead, as is the widowed mother. So the whole family is gone! I remember them with pleasure. As remarked, they were loyal Catholics. In the living-room they had "a shrine": a small bracket with a holy picture and candles. Over the lintel of the front door of the house was a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the picture having been blessed by a priest.

Whilst with the Flanagans I had an ill-fated "love affair." Poor Bunny!—she also is dead. Florence Rouse was a daughter of Thomas Rouse, a widower and former Irish member of the House of Commons. He was not often at home, being a great traveller. "Bunny" (Florence's pet name) was in sole charge of his large house in West Hill, Stamford Hill, and looked after two invalid sisters, one of whom ("Deda"—Teresa) had to be wheeled in a bath-chair. I used to do the wheeling to and from the church, several times a week (the Rouses were ardent Catholics), and thus got very friendly with them all. "Bunny's" sweet and deeply religious character attracted me greatly. When, however, after several months of this charming association, I put the question of an engagement, I found she was far from such ideas! She thought of herself as "called by God" to a devout, single life. This ended our friendship—and I became for a time very depressed and morose. Well, they are all dead now! A quaint incident. During our friendship when we parted in the evenings, Bunny used to point to the lofty towers of St. Ignatius and say: "Say 'Good night, Jesus!'"—alluding to the Blessed Sacrament reserved on the altar.

J. W. POYNTER.

(To be continued)

GENTEEL VISIT

I

ONLY on special occasions, great occasions, State occasions, was the front door of North Malvern Church of England Boys School opened. We pupils had been warned the day before to prepare for a ceremony; to come clean and well dressed, and to do so.

Rarely had I seen my schoolmates so nearly unrecognisable, such washing and towelling to shining redness had there been of faces, ears, necks and hands; such combing and brushing and parting of hair; such polishing of boots; such donning of stiff clothes, hard collars and neckties.

The Headmaster also was refurbished. Usually a trifle shabby, though never untidy, Edmund Alberry had carefully combed his beard. He had on his newest frock coat, the suggestion of a crease down his trousers, and a fresh black bow. This uniform, with a black, low-crowned soft hat like a parson's, fitted his office. As Headmaster of a Church School he was really a sort of lay curate, preliminary propagandist of the Church; to catch the young so that the priest might continue his bias as they grew older. Old Bug-Whiskers, for such was the schoolboys' secret nickname for him, had evidently been seen that Mrs. Cleaner did her work uncommonly well last night and this morning. The whole school was spotless, in proper order, smelling faintly of soap and polish. The cane, usually hung prominently on the central cupboard in perpetual warning to offenders, was locked away inside, while an accustomed bunch of roses, the Head's pride from his own garden, stood on his desk.

The Staff too was arrayed in—not splendour, but the two Pupil Teacher youths had on their Sunday suits. The two women had attired themselves in what was regarded locally the height of fashion.

For the first hour normal school procedure was followed. Lessons and prayers succeeded by Scripture Lesson continued for ten minutes to ten o'clock, according to Time Table. Then we were dismissed to the playground, with orders not to get dirty or play violent games. To ensure this the two Pupil Teachers came out with us.

That playtime was delightfully long, it being half-past ten before the Headmaster came with his whistle to summon us to our lines preparatory to marching into the big schoolroom.

There for a few minutes we sat idle, till the door opened, drawing our attention, but it was only the Reverend Dickie Brown, curate of Holy Trinity Church. He was handsome, and a gentleman, so the two women smiled at him, as did all Church ladies.

He and Edmund Alberry talked together for a few minutes in low tones, then the curate went and opened the front door under the tower, and the doors between into the school.

A mild sense of thrill began to infect us hundred and sixty boys. Surely something was going to happen at last!

About eleven o'clock it did. By then the Headmaster was sitting visibly nervous and the curate fidgety. As footsteps and voices sounded outside both moved towards the inner door, and stood expectant.

II

Entered two people. One a lady, dressed in a voluminous and elaborately made gown of light purple satin, black sealskin frock coat, and black bonnet with white osprey plume nodding from it. Her hair was silver, intricately coiffured. She wore slender silk gloves. Her face was lined and creased with age, but her eyes were bright, her lips set, though drooping a little at the corners, and she had a beaked nose. Not unlike the reigning Queen Victoria, but better-looking.

Her hand rested on the arm of the Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, North Malvern. We could see it was a great moment in the life of the Reverend Haden Cope. Though he leaned

a little, in chivalry to the lady and to accommodate his height to her shortness, he walked with pride in his port, but no defiance in his eye.

Standing six feet tall he was heavily built, with a hemispherical belly. His massive ostrich-egg head was bald and he was clean-shaved, a veritable "bladder of lard" as was often said. His pale blue myopic eyes and child's mouth revealed the innate simplicity of the man, as did his sermons, all about the pretty flowers God had given us.

Haden Cope worshipped aristocracy as sincerely as he did his God. To bring Lady Emily Foley on his arm into the presence of a crowd was Paradise. Shakespeare summarised him: "He was a man of an unbounded stomach, ever ranking himself with princes."

By the Headmaster's desk stood Edmund Alberry's best arm-chair, brought from his house, and a green hassock for footstool. Having been bowed to by the Headmaster, and having bobbed in return the Lady was enthroned, the Reverend Haden Cope's handling of the performance being a picture of deference which any flunkey might envy. The Headmaster and curate hovered each side as if to assist in case of mishap.

Lady Emily Foley being safely installed Edmund Alberry made a little speech of welcome, saying how pleased we all were. We having applauded he explained we had covered ourselves with glory by winning several Bibles and Prayer Books in the Diocesan Prize Scheme, this being an annual examination in Scripture.

These bright lads were called out by name and presented to the Lady. She congratulated them on their success, advising them to read the Bible and Prayer Book all their lives. Her voice was clear and not affected, except for being punctuated by a little throaty "Ech" which we adopted into our own speech for weeks afterward.

Several boys who had made perfect attendance for a year, and a few who were leaving soon were also presented to Lady Emily Foley, each making a hasty salute, a forelock pull.

Felicitating them the Lady said: "You must—ech—continue the good habits you have—ech—acquired at school, and—ech—remember the excellent instruction you have—ech—received here."

III

All this while the Reverend Haden Cope stood still and solemn, revelling in the luxury of his sensations at being in the presence of titled gentry, though only a baronet's wife.

After the last boy had departed to his desk the reverent gentleman made a little finishing speech reiterating his joy at having Lady Emily Foley to visit the Church School and the honour it was to them all, a day to be remembered by every one. It has been acutely by one.

The concluding ceremonial was a delicious puppet show. The Vicar gently took the Lady's left hand and helped her to her feet. She then languidly extended her right hand to the Headmaster, who bowed over it and put his right fingertips underneath it, being as near as he dared to shaking hands with such eminence.

Next the Reverend Haden Cope bent his left arm and looked down with benign appeal upon Lady Emily Foley, who placed her lavender hand upon his sleeve. Thus they walked out, Dominic Edmund Alberry and the Reverend Dickie Brown walking behind as far as the Lady's pair-horse carriage at the front gate.

Teachers and pupils lapsed into a buzz of gossip.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

"A hostile critic might say that the leader of the Tai-ping Rebellion, who was a Christian convert, and as such was hailed by many of the missionaries as the herald of a new dispensation, succeeded in nothing better than in devastating thirteen out of eighteen provinces of China, and in sacrificing the lives (at the lowest computation) of 20,000,000 men."—Lord Cruzon.

ACID DROPS

Rev. T. Wigney, Secretary of the Free Church Councils, says "People do not believe in God, the Church or the Bible." That is rather exaggerated. It is true that the number of non-Christians, non-believers in the Bible, etc., are increasing rapidly. But it is paying too great a compliment to the public to say that Christianity is dead. And even if Christianity in its set form had decayed, there are the frames of mind that remain. Religions, as a whole, do not die in that complete manner. Civilisation is of slow growth.

But Mr. Wigney does believe that it is the duty of the Christian Church to develop the social consciousness of the people. That statement is quite in line with priesthood and duplicity. The Churches will not get themselves free from the idea that the control of society rests with them, and that if they fall, everything falls. We remember that when Ruskin was told by a clergyman that the only friend poor people had was the clergy, he retorted that no other consideration could damn the clergy more than that statement; for the clergy had wielded power for many centuries, and to say that the poor had no friends but the priests was the greatest indictment that could be brought to the Churches. Ruskin scored heavily. No single body of men have had so much control as the Churches. This is true of the whole of Europe. And the value of their guardianship is seen in the state of the world at present. Of course, the aim of civic development was never part of the Christian creed. It was forced on the Churches by the development of civic life.

If a revival of religion could be brought about by prophecy the Christian Churches in this country might look forward to a great increase in power after the War. For despite the more generally admitted neglect of religion during the War, and the many confessions that among the soldiers themselves for one that has had his religious beliefs strengthened a dozen have had theirs shattered, there is still plenty of talk about the revival of religion that is ahead. True, most of these prophets are careful to inform us that this revival is contingent upon certain happenings. If the Churches drop their sermonising upon subjects that are without interest to the mass of the people, if class distinctions are ignored in Church, if more attention is paid to sociology and less to theology, if the Churches interest themselves in the state of the cities and cease troubling about the new Jerusalem, if, in short, the Churches cease to be Churches and throw their Christianity overboard, there will be a great revival of religion. Only in that case it doesn't seem that there will be much—from the point of view of the Churches—left to revive. Attempting to revive a corpse is never a profitable operation.

Dr. M. Edwards, Methodist, we see has written a book on "The way a Christian views the world." The more striking thing, and what is causing most trouble amongst the god-ites is, "The way the world is viewing Christianity." Never in the history of Christianity is the Church so hard pressed as it is to-day. The earlier position was "How much can we take?" Now the problem in the Churches is "How much shall we have to give up?" Their wealth is still great, and their power—hidden mainly—is still great. But one day they may bring a devil of a crack, and then where shall we be?

The history of the Christian Church is very curious. Beginning with a very, very old superstition, it was forced on a people who had plenty of superstition but knew it not. Then it was adopted by a Roman King who thought he could see a plan by which he might stem enemies to his throne. Then Christianity grew strong and destroyed the greatest literature of the time, it flourished in what is called the "Dark Ages," until a revival of the ancient learning, coming from a non-Christian development; and ever since it has been fighting for its life. A very, very curious history, but important.

A wave of many coloured cases of burglaries, and even murder or the robbing, is sweeping the country. A long war with all the house breaking down from the "higher" citizens to the lower is responsible for the situation. There is nothing new in what has occurred; the existing crime and dishonesty is the normal consequence of wars. The natural character of man is brotherhood,

But war, whether it be righteous or unrighteous, the same disturbance of common human life occurs. What the world war has done is, not to make war different in essence, but to break the qualities of justice and brotherhood. War may be inevitable in a given situation, but human nature, with its gains and losses, remains the same. The part played by religion in war is to hide it from being recognised for what it is. The hypocrisy established only illustrates the truth of what was said over and over again.

The leaven of heresy is slowly creeping into even Catholic journals, and we note what a priest says of the Flood with heavenly relish. The readers of the "Universe" are told that the Flood "did not affect the whole human race." In the heyday of Catholic strength many a poor chap would have been martyred for saying it, for God's Holy Word records God himself saying that "I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die," except, of course, Noah, his family, and the "living things" in the Ark. Unfortunately, infidels have so far prevailed that we can now get a Catholic priest either implying that the Lord didn't do what he set out to do, or that, if he says he did, he is a prevaricator of the truth. What would the Pope say to this?

We know nothing concerning the ability and general character of the Bishop at Eastbourne, except that by the grace of God he was previously to raiding England, Bishop of a Church in Bloemfontein. Then either God was tired of him being in South Africa, or he thought it would serve the people of Eastbourne right. Anyway, the double-dyed Bishop came to England, and on a certain day he "hied" himself to St. Mary's Church, Nottingham. Whether the people came to Church that day to see the Bishop, or God sent him to get level with some of the other preachers who said a number of silly things and made God liable for them is not quite clear.

Thus did the relic from South Africa in England display himself. To the people he saith: "Some Christians go about in fear and trembling of Agnostics," but God had not called the Bishop in vain, and he assured his audience: "Those are half-wits who can see no purpose in nature." Also to talk about the "happy heathen" is "just ordinary tosh, they live in fear," also "the clergy of England are so meek and mild that they imagine the work of a diocese can run without their co-operation." "What we want in the Church is guts," etc., etc. Really it is great. It reminds us of our early days when the Church said every Atheist ran away from his wife and children, robbed the till, and finally called on Jesus to save him. "Them were the days" when really Christianity lived. Bishop Cary is the type out of which true religion comes. We should like to hear him again. He has earned his crown.

It is not easy for an official Christian to lay down a thesis of what is sound. For example, if a parson, or a minister of religion, sets to work to describe the position of Christianity he is certain to make the situation too rosy or too gloomy. We are told either that the Christian religion is dying rapidly, or else there is a rapid development in the direction of Christianity. Of course, neither of these pictures is correct. That the Christian religion is steadily diminishing is true. But that there are large masses of people who believe in the Christian religion is also true. So we are not surprised to hear the secretary of the Free Church Councils saying that "People do not believe in God, the Church or the Bible."

Well, that is not true. There are huge masses on each side—religious and non-religious, and as "non-religion" is another name for Atheism, and as Atheism is hidden behind all sorts of fantastic names, the result is that the religious section plays hot and cold, and the Atheistic section has a stock of names that prove Atheism does not in necessity stand for mental courage and straightforward conduct. On each side we should like to see more pluck. One day we hope to see this common want of courage replaced by stern self-respect. A set-back for the more honest section of unbelievers is not beyond possibility. We should remember that Greece fell before a religion of the most superstitious character, and it took many centuries for an awakening.

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Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Newcastle Branch of the N.S.S. opens its season's work with a meeting to be held in Newcastle on October 12 in the "News Theatre." The speakers are G. L. Colebrook, J. T. Brighton and Chapman Cohen. Mr. Cohen had decided that with so much to do in other directions he would cease to take long journeys which usually mean three days out of a week. But many of his old friends pressed him at the Annual Conference last Whitsuntide to change his decision. A good "house" is expected. Freethinkers should see what they can do to bring a Christian friend with them.

In addition, a dinner has been arranged on Saturday, October 11, at 6-30, in the Douglas Hotel, Grainger Street, Newcastle. We are looking forward to meeting new and old friends from the Newcastle area. Will all who wish to join in the dinner (tickets, 7s. 6d.) please get in touch with Mr. J. T. Brighton, 23, Brown's Buildings, Chester-le-Street.

We are sure that many Freethinkers—and, we hope, potential ones—will welcome a reprint of the famous "Bible Handbook for Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians." This is the second issue of the ninth edition of this ever fresh book. It is interesting to all Freethinkers and should serve as an eye-opener for Christians. Hitherto editions have gone very rapidly, and we expect this will be the case again. It is the only book of its kind. Price 3s., postage 2½d.

There are limits—even with parsons when they are treated badly. Jesus told his followers that when hit on the cheek he should turn his face to receive another. But there are limits, and we see that fact illustrated in the case of a servant of God in Falmouth. He is reported by the "Evening Standard" as writing in the Press:—

"Positively no more baptisms in my pasture. Twice in two months my gates have been left open by religious people, and before I will chase my heifers all over the country again all sinners can go to Purgatory."

Signed, C. A. APROUT, Falmouth.

Now what will God think of that? A parson who counts the loss of a heifer or two as of more importance than paying homage to God!

We are often reminded that humility is the chief Christian virtue. A Christian's first duty, it is said, is to cherish a very low opinion of himself. As a matter of fact, however, the disciples of Jesus are the most bombastic, egotistical, and boastful people on the planet. They speak of themselves as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Had it not been for them the world

would have perished long ago. A man of God bragged the other day that God spares the world only for the sake of the Church. It never occurs to such people that boasting is a sign of weakness, that self-praise is indulged in only by fools, and that the self-righteous are, as a rule, conspicuous only by their lack of righteousness. Deep and strong character needs no artificial advertisement, has never to blow its own trumpet.

Manchester Branch, N.S.S., after another very successful open-air season, begin indoor work to-day (Sunday) in the Chorlton Town Hall. The General Secretary, N.S.S., Mr. R. H. Rosetti, will be the speaker, with the subject, "From Jesus to Atom Bombs." The lectures this year will be in the evening, beginning at 6-30, and admission is free. The branch is very active and well managed and deserves the support of all Freethinkers within range of its work.

Just a reminder that in the Picton Hall, Liverpool, the Merseyside Branch, N.S.S., will open its indoor session with a lecture by the Branch Chairman, Mr. Geoffrey Thompson, on "Why the Gods Must Go." The lecture begins at 7 p.m. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each. The branch is getting back to its pre-war stride and the support of old friends and new will be welcomed.

Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, B.Sc., will open the indoor session of the West London Branch N.S.S. to-day (Sunday) in "The Laurio Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, London, at 7-15 p.m., with a lecture on "The Organisation of Freethought Abroad." Mr. Bonner is well equipped to deal with that subject and an instructive evening should result. Lectures will be held every Sunday evening and a complete syllabus can be had from the Branch Secretary, Mr. C. H. Cleaver, 29a, Dunraven Road, Shepherds Bush, W.12.

On the second Saturday in each month commencing on October 11, the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. will hold a Whist Drive at 38, John Bright Street, Birmingham, at 7 p.m. Tickets 2s. each includes refreshments. Local saints seeking good companionship and a pleasant evening should make an early application for tickets to Mr. C. H. Smith, 93, Willows Crescent, Cannon Hill, Birmingham 12.

Of all the foolish things connected with religion "Days of prayer" take the cake. Of course, prayer may please some people, but so will getting drunk, or going off to the pictures, or swallowing some of those packets of magical things that prevent illness, etc. We once came across a woman who was thrashed by her husband, but she enjoyed the thrashing every week. There is no end to this kind of thing. But Cardinal Griffin must have been very hard up for something that will please those who are foolish enough to follow him, when he ordered a special prayer for the conversion of England. But that has been done ever since the Roman Catholics lost power in England. We dare say many will pray—and forget about it directly. At the present time a prayer for more food would be more welcome. But the preachers are very knowing, and with that prayer people might measure results. After all, religious people are not all fools.

We see that a school history book is being circulated in the German British zone. Ten thousand copies have been circulated. We cannot say what the book is like, but as Roman Catholics are angry at it being circulated, it would seem there should be some truth in it. The book calls the priests "loafers," which is true of all priests more or less. It would have been better if the plain truth of German history had been told, and religion left outside. We should like to know who arranged the book.

It was said of one of our Prime Ministers about a century ago that to his followers it mattered little if they told lies, but they should all tell the same lie. That, of course, is not a forgotten rule to-day, and it is active. But, in view of the present state of affairs, our clergy ought to consider the rule. In one religious paper we read that things are working well where religion is concerned. The Bishop of London says that what is required to-day is a "great spiritual campaign" to bring people back to the Church. Really, these people ought to make up their minds one way or another. The political rule seems to be the only safe plan, and even that may be exposed.

REVERENT RATIONALISM

V

ONE of the silliest stories given a place in Lord Horder's and Dr. Roberts' "Philosophy of Jesus" is the one in which Jesus is sitting by a well and a "woman of Samaria" comes along to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me to drink." The lady, rather surprised that Jesus, a Jew, asked her to get him water to drink, reminded him that Jews and Samaritans had "no dealings" with each other, and to an ordinary heretic like myself, it does seem that even a God like Jesus might have helped the woman instead of expecting her to do the work. Nowadays, a girl would promptly say, "Who the heck do you think you are talking to—get a drink yourself." Jesus, however, thought it was a good opportunity for declaiming one of his "symbolic" parables, so he told the woman it was "living water" he meant. As she didn't understand what "living water" meant—neither do I, by the way, and I wish Lord Horder had told us—he plunged into a rigmarole of meaningless words. If you drank the water Jesus gave you there would be in you "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," and because the unlucky woman did not, and indeed could not, understand him, he went into another rigmarole about her having five husbands and added: "He whom thou now hast is not thy husband." Of course, the Samaritan lady was hopelessly bewildered and was ready to drink any water that gave her "everlasting life"; and Jesus followed up with more nonsense about God as a spirit, and "true worshippers" would "worship the Father in spirit and truth"; but what all this has to do with water from a well I do not know, and I am sure that the two distinguished medical men don't know either; though I do hope they will tell us whether they worship the Father in spirit and truth and expect all Rationalists to do so.

Although more than half the book consists of quotations from the Gospels, they are no doubt carefully selected, and it is quite possible that I may have missed two very famous stories in the quotations. But if they are omitted, it would prove interesting to know why? The first is the one in which Jesus curses a fig tree so that it withers and it surely is not unfair to ask whether Lord Horder and Dr. Roberts (as well as Reverent Rationalists in general) regard it as something which all mankind should note as a wonderful example of the Philosophy of Jesus?

The second is the story about Jesus's refusal to wash his hands before dining at a Pharisee's table. This story is of special interest to doctors who always wash their hands with scrupulous regularity in their aseptic surgical operations. No one has ever attacked the Pharisees with such bitter invective as "gentle" Jesus, so it comes rather as a shock to find him accepting an invitation to dine with one of them. Jews are always expected to wash their hands before a meal—which gives point of course to their being called "dirty" Jews. It is a religious obligation, probably dating from early times, for the scarcity of water in the East must have made personal cleanliness very difficult; God had, therefore, to be brought in and, to avoid making him angry, Jews wash their hands. So we can quite understand why the Pharisee "marvelled that he (Jesus) had not first washed before dinner." He only "marvelled" and made no attempt to lecture or reprove his Divine guest. But to show how well he deserved the epithet, "gentle" Jesus turned on his host with a terrific stream of invective calling the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites and fools, full of "ravening and wickedness." This beautiful outburst astonished another guest who was a "lawyer," and he asked the Son of God whether lawyers were also "reproached." So Jesus turned on a further stream of invective this time overwhelming the law and lawyers. In fact there appears to have followed almost a riot with outsiders taking part.

Again a heretic like myself would like to know what Lord Horder would say if any of his guests sat at his table unwashed,

and whether he would like a similar scene for the same reason to take place—not forgetting that the innocent party is the host? I do not expect a reply, but I doubt that even a Reverent Rationalism is particularly proud of this delightful incident in the life of Jesus.

There is another story told of Jesus—it is considered by some critics to be one of the most beautiful stories in literature though I am not discussing it as literature. It is the story of the woman taken in adultery. Readers of the Revised Version will have noticed that it is there considered as an "interpolation," as it is not found in the most ancient copies or versions of the New Testament. But of course no believer in Jesus would ever give it up for such an absurd reason—it is so like our Lord, don't you know, so perfect an example of his mercy, justice, and love. Be that as it may, it would be again interesting to know whether Lord Horder would allow all women taken in adultery to go their way literally unpunished? Whether adultery should be no longer regarded as something morally wrong but should be properly allowed because as no one is without sin no one can throw stones?

And what about the way Jesus treated his own mother? His father, according to Lord Horder, was Joseph, and we all know that Joseph is such a nobody in the Gospels that he disappears very early—and for that matter very little is actually said about Mary. But from the little we do get, is it not a fact that Jesus had the utmost contempt for the poor lady? I do not know of one kind word to her by Jesus reported in the Gospels. Is such filial piety given us for our guidance?

There is no need to tell the reader, I hope, that I do not believe a word of all this going about "doing good," this ridiculous ministry in which the "common people" heard Jesus gladly. The whole story is myth and legend dealing at first with a Jesus in Heaven, a Saviour God beloved of and born of pagan Gnosticism, quite probably first emanating from an epileptic like the writer of Paul's letters, and brought down to earth by Marcion writing in the second century. People who believed that Jehovah could talk to Adam and Moses, or believe the Greek stories of Jupiter and his love affairs, would have no difficulty in swallowing the story of the Son of God, who was God himself, coming down on earth and "doing good."

The writers of the various biographies of this God, which have survived, added their own frills and fancies and no doubt the various communities of Christians each championed their own pet version or Gospel. When at last the early Christians had to join hands to fight a common enemy—possibly the strongest and most formidable was the religion of Mithra—they had to make a choice of their literature and thus the present "Canon" of the New Testament came into being. There was never a Virgin Birth, nor a Mary and Joseph; there never were any miracles either. Miracles are quite absurd and quite impossible. There never was a "Crucifixion" or a Trial or a Passion. The story of Jesus is that of a God, and Gods do not and never have existed.

I can quite understand that religious people exist and must have a religion, and no doubt Christianity, or a Reverent Rationalist version of Christianity, is just their "cup of tea." This is still a free country (I hope) and these people have a perfect right to express their views. And so have I, and I think a little forthright speaking is necessary—even to Reverent Rationalists.

H. CUTNER.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AGAINST THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. By Avro Manhattan. Price 18s.; postage 5d.
LECTURES AND ESSAYS. By Colonel Ingersoll. Price 6s.; postage 4d.

PATHOLOGICAL PIETY

II

[The following excerpts from the "Life of the Blessed Henry Suso" (1300-1365), translated by T. F. Knox, 1865, published 1913, with an introduction by Dean Inge, illustrates one of the methods by which a consciousness of religion has been kept alive in certain cases, and accepted as proofs of piety by the people.]

Chapter XVIII.—He made a wooden cross, "in length about a man's span," with thirty nails and seven needles in it. He wore it on his back, and took two "disciplines" a day with it. A discipline consisted in striking the cross to drive the nails in. When he had been "too indulgent with himself" he took a third discipline. For instance, once "he had been so much off his guard as to take into his hands the hands of two maidens, who were sitting beside him in a public assembly, tho' without any bad intention." He took thirty disciplines for this "inordinate pleasure."

Page 53.—After scourging himself with a leather thong fitted with three pointed brass tacks on both sides, he rubbed vinegar and salt into the wounds. Once when he was doing this on St. Benedict's feast, "the day on which he was born into this miserable world," the scourge opened a vein: the arm swelled and turned so blue it scared him. "Now, at this very time there was in a certain castle a holy maiden named Anna, praying, who seemed to herself to be carried in a vision to the spot where he was taking the discipline." She seemed to intercept the blow on her arm, which was long black-wealed and painful.

Page 56.—He slept eight years on a bench with all the above-mentioned nail-belts, etc. "Thruout all these (25) years he never took a bath, either a water or a sweating bath, and this he did to mortify his comfort-seeking body." "For a long time he only ate once a day, both in summer and winter, and he not only fasted from meat but also from fish and eggs. . . He strove to attain such a high degree of purity that he could neither scratch nor touch any part of his body, save only his hands and feet."

Chapter XX.—He also allowed himself very little drink, and became so thirsty that "when he stood in choir at compline, and the holy water was sprinkled around, he would gape wide towards the sprinkling brush, in hope that a little water might fall on his dried-up tongue." The Virgin came to him in a vision and said, "I will give thee to drink of that healthful drink which flows from my heart." "When he had well drunk there remained something in his mouth like a little soft lump. It was white, and of the nature of manna, and he kept it in his mouth for a long time as a voucher for the truth of what had taken place."

Page 64.—He left off these extreme austerities in his fourtieth year, with God's leave.

Page 76.—When he ate meat for the first time after many years a "monstrous hellish figure drove an auger into his mouth, and his chin and teeth swelled so he could not eat for three days."

Page 78.—He suffered for ten years from a conviction that he must be damned.

Page 97.—He was nearly murdered by people who thought he was bribed by the Jews to poison the wells.

Page 127, Chapter XXXV.—The letters he exchanged with his "spiritual daughter," Elizabeth Staglin.

Page 155.—A woman whom he led to God went back to her evil life, and said he was the father of her child. He provided for the child, because the true father would not.²

² I expect he was the father. A man whose visions were so realistic, and who so often kissed "Heavenly Wisdom" in them, might easily indulge in a physical embrace and believe quite sincerely it had been a spiritual bliss granted by the Virgin Mary.—C. H.

Page 177, Chapter XCIII.—A certain nun "had steadfastly fixt her heart upon a perishable affection, of a kind which is called Sponsiden." Suso could not persuade her to break it off, so he prayed God to do it, and took a "discipline." Then on the nun's back grew "a hump which made her look hideous, and thus necessity obliged her to give up what she had refused to renounce for God."

Another "young beautiful noble maiden" was in the same "devil's net," and refused to see Suso. He objected when she went out with the other young sisters into a field to pick flax, and "stole after them, and went round the field, and thus managed to come gently up to her." But she cried angrily, "Sir monk, what mean you by coming out here to me?"

C. HARPUR.

KINGS AND GODS IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

THE idea that the King was simply the strongest and bravest man of the tribe is utterly false. Like most purely rationalistic speculations concerning the origin of society, it takes no account of the fact that primitive men are devoid of any conception of an essential rational order, and hence are subject to superstition, a force which exerts an immense influence on the development of social organisation.

In the early stages of society, men who are ignorant of the processes of nature arrogate to themselves functions of a super-human or divine character. The order and uniformity of nature, recurring events in the physical world, such as the cycle of the seasons, impress the primitive intelligence and delude man into the belief that he can affect them. He foresees them, and mistakes their recurrence, if desired, for an effect of his own will; while any departure from the regular order, if dreaded, is ascribed to an effect of his enemy's will. He fancies that the forces of nature are within reach of his power, and that he can touch them and work good for himself and evil for his foes.

Thus arose magicians and medicine-men. They are the most ancient professional class of which we have any knowledge, and sorcerers are found in every savage tribe of which there is any record. In the course of time men become differentiated into more specialised classes, such as the healers of disease, the makers of rain and so forth; while the most powerful member of the order wins for himself the position of chief and gradually develops into a sacred king. His old magical functions fall more and more into the background, and are replaced by priestly and even divine duties as magic is slowly ousted by religion. So long as men regard their gods as being akin to themselves and raised to an unapproachable height, they conceive it to be possible for outstanding members of the community to attain divine rank after death. Not only does the King possess divine powers, but he is very often regarded as a veritable God.

Human gods have been found all over the world. The King of Sofala, a French missionary observed in 1843, is a woolly-headed Kaffir, a heathen who . . . esteems himself a god of all his lands, and is so looked upon and revered by his subjects. . . . The Peruvians formerly believed that their Inca was descended from the Sun, whence he united within himself the civil and religious power, and was regarded as perfect. . . . The laws of Manu lay it down that the King is created by eternal particles of Indra, of the wind, of Yama, of the sun, of fire, of Varuna, of the moon, and of the Lord of Wealth. . . . In Japan the Mikado is regarded as a divine and mysterious personage descended from the sun-goddess Amatarasu Omikami. . . . In a recent treatise on the Japanese constitution (1930) the learned Dean of Nihon University informs us that the Imperial line is eternal, co-eval with heaven and earth. . . . We keep the name of the Emperor sacred and do not mention it in ordinary conversation. . . . No Japanese dare doubt the

divine origin of the Mighty Ruler. He is in our eyes the Son of Heaven. He is in our politics utterly sacred. . . .

The most thorough-going manifestations of human godhead were those which existed amongst the ancient Egyptians. In the course of his existence the King of Egypt exhausted all the possible conceptions of divinity which the Egyptians had formulated for themselves. A superhuman god by his birth and his royal office, he became the deified man after his death. Thus all that was known of the divine was summed up in him. . . . The ancient Kings of Greece and Rome were priests. . . . The Kings of Sparta, we learn from Aristotle, had three attributes; they performed the sacrifices, commanded in war, and administered justice. Homer and Virgil depict the Kings as continually engaged in sacred ceremonies, and we know from Demosthenes that the ancient Kings of Attica performed in person all the sacrifices required by the religion of the city. An ancient King of Sicily was deposed, because having soiled his hands with a murder he was no longer in a condition to offer the sacrifices. Having become unfit to be a priest, he could no longer remain a King. . . . Tradition represents all the Roman Kings as priests.

Belief in the godlike character of princes and rulers prevailed in Europe until modern times. The Kings of England and France exercised miraculous powers of healing from the fifth century onwards. They were able to do this because they had for long been regarded as sacred persons. Their dynasties were descended from the ancient Germans, who considered Kings to be of divine origin, and hence endowed with special powers over nature with regard to such matters as harvests.

With the spread of Christianity, the temporal ruler ceased officially to be a divine person, although a belief in his sacred attributes no doubt lingered in the minds of the people for centuries. But the sacred quality of the King was soon re-established in a new form by means of the religious ceremony of consecration, and in particular through the essential rite of anointing. . . . In 1626, the Bishop of Chartres drew up a State paper, afterwards ratified by the Parliament in Paris, which declared that "the Kings are gods, not by nature, but through grace. . . . Blind obedience is a holy duty. . . ." The touching of persons to cure them of scrofula, performed by the Kings of England until comparatively recent times, clearly reveals the modern sovereign as the successor to the ancient medicine-man or magician. Pepys saw the King "healed" on April 13, 1661, and Dr. Johnson was touched by Queen Anne when he was a child. There was even a curious revival in France in 1825 under Charles X. The process of deifying human beings could actually be witnessed in India so late as the second half of the 19th century. "Not long ago," wrote Lyall in 1872, "the Bunjaras turned General Nicholson into a new god, to be added to the many at whose tombs sacrifice and worship were regularly offered."

"Civilisation and the Growth of Law" (1935)
by W. A. Robson, pp. 16-24.

A BETTER WAY

In the by-ways and the dear forgotten places;
In the fields of clover and in silent glade;
In the rippling corn-fields where the soft wind traces
Moving patterns as by sea-waves made,

In the streams like molten silver winding;
In the trees that gently stir and sway
The way of Life is found—and in the finding
Man learns to live a better way.

W. H. Wood.

AMMUNITION

RELIGION AND HEREDITY

It has been said that ignorant peasants in Czarist Russia once refused to throw water on burning houses for fear of thwarting God's purpose, and that the first man to use an umbrella in England was mobbed for his temerity in interfering with the same deity's property. To-day, however, eminent scientists cheerfully proceed upon occasion to convert God's mist into snow and ice without fearing or heeding popular disapproval. A truth-seeking chemist named Stern over in U.S.A. has recently announced the isolation from living cells of a chemical which he believes responsible for the transmission of heredity. Religious medicine men will ignore this discovery, as is to be expected. In former days such a body would have risen with the wrath of Elijah to denounce the inference of bio-chemists, that no mother-love for offspring can exist without the presence of manganese in the body of the parent!—Condensed from "American Freeman."

ORIGIN OF RELIGION'S "OPIUM"

Surely it was Tolstoi who originated the famous maxim that religion was intended as opium for the people! Now, however, the Socialistic "Modern Quarterly" seems in a hurry to assure the whole world that Socialists are not opposed to religion like those godless Bolsheviks. It even suggests that Karl Marx's use of the phrase was intended as a compliment to the faith, by declaring that the context is:—

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature; the kindliness of a heartless world, the spirit of unspiritual conditions. It is the people's opium."

They simply will not have it that Kingsley's later adaptation of the phrase was *not* meant as a compliment. Kingsley wrote: "We, the clergy, use the Bible as a sort of special constable's handbook—an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient whilst they were being overloaded." We must not forget, however that the poet, Heine, during his last fatal lingering illness announced that he had come to believe in God, and told a sceptical friend that he might attribute his conversion to "morphia and poultices!"—Condensed from "American Freeman."

PIOUS GLEANINGS FROM "THE PRESBYTERIAN MESSENGER"

A female missionary writing home from a mission school at Kwantung, China, appeals for gifts to assist the work of repairs to the school due to ravages of war. As a temporary measure teaching is done at a nearby doctor's house where young girls receive a religious education, Bible reading, and hints upon running a Christian home, so that they will be a good Christian influence when they go back to their villages. A thousand pounds is expected to do so much to uplift the hearts of all those who are anxious to share in the work of rebuilding such a noble-minded foreign mission.

Now then is the time for all good Atheists to rally to the cause and ensure that a copious supply of treasury notes drawn on the Celestial Bank or associated Heavenly body are sent out to relieve the awful distress and misery. It is hoped that God will redeem his promise to pay up, after he has first liquidated all claims on his purse by those in similar distress, here at home.—E. H. S.

ST. MARTIN'S IN THE LIDO

It is reported in the "Presbyterian Messenger" that:—

"Of all the strange meeting-places for a Presbyterian Church, the most extraordinary is St. Martin's, Saltdean, where can be seen congregations lifting up their hearts to God in converted garages, chicken-houses, and cafes, but this is the only case where the rendezvous is a swimming

pool. On any Sunday in the year you might turn in to the Saltdean Lido and, carefully skirting the edge of the swimming pool, would enter what appeared to be a bath-house or dressing-room, to find a goodly number of men and women worshipping God under the preaching of the Rev. Dewi Rhys, of Brighton, or a happy crowd of Sunday School children under the care of Mrs. Maclachlan, our infatigable Church Sister."

Is this supposed to be a guarded way of telling us that the depraved clergy, intent upon promoting the "Back to Nature—back to God cult" are now holding prayer meetings to devotees dressed in the nude? If not, why doesn't the parson don a bathing costume and hold forth from the elevated diving platform, or join hands in prayer under the water? Some of our London friends should investigate these queer goings on!
—E. H. S.

CORRESPONDENCE

CUM GRANO SALIS

Sir,—I have just come across this in a Catholic catechism:—
"Holy water is natural water mixed with a little salt and blessed by a priest."

Stories about its then supernatural powers to drive off evil spirits should also, we suggest, be received with a grain of salt!
—Yours, etc.,

M. C. BROTHERTON.

MR. GRIDGEMANN'S PROTEST.

Sir,—It is difficult to see the point of Mr. G.'s indictment of Mr. DuCann for his pleasant tale of his food experiences in Luxembourg to Freethinker readers. If he went there and had a good dinner and better fare than in England, why shouldn't he endeavour to cheer us up? Members of my family have been over in Switzerland and they are able to say the same nice things—plenty of food and wine in excelsis. The same scale of diet operates in the countries along the Baltic littoral.

France, Italy and ourselves are in a sad plight, I know, but even if I incur Mr. G.'s displeasure may I suggest to him that the talk of a world food shortage is not all "gospel truth"—it savours of propaganda with a sinister aim.

Mr. G. may be overawed by the statements of Sir John Orr, but it needs faith in abundance to swallow official utterances.

This is not the place to pursue the topic of "governmental incompetence, or knavery, or ignorance," but the subject has many facets, and an analysis of it would be revealing.

On reflection, we had better agree to defer the execution of Mr. DuCann.—Yours, etc.,
W. ROBSON.

OBITUARY

Bradford Branch has to record with deep regret the death, at 71, of William James Cubitt, who from his early days was a staunch Freethinker, for many years a member of the N.S.S. and, when his last illness overtook him, a member of the Branch Committee.

Evidence of his many interests and activities was to be seen is the presence at Scholemoor Cemetery, in company with his widow and family, of a large gathering of representative Trade Unionists, Co-operators, Old Age Pensioners and Freethinkers, all of whom knew him as a hard worker, a fearless debater, direct and forthright in expression.

Prior to cremation the final and parting ceremony, a Secular one, was conducted with dignity by Mr. Searle. W. BALDIE.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). Tuesday, October 7, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust—"The Basis of Conduct, Natural or Supernatural." Question Master, the Hon. Mrs. S. EARL.

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Wednesday, October 8, 7 p.m.: "Some Aspects of Evolution"—1st Lecture: "General Position of the Theory of Evolution," Dr. M. BURTON.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Do Soldiers Rule Us?" Mr. JOSEPH McCABE.

West London Branch N.S.S. ("The Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Organisation of Freethought Abroad," Mr. C. B. BONNER, B.Sc.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON; 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Enfield.—Saturday, October 4, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Oswaldtwistle.—Friday, October 3, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: MESSRS. G. L. GREAVES, A. SAMMIS.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Great Unrest," Mr. C. H. BURDEN, N.C.L.C.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, 270, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust. MESSRS. A. REILLY, J. MCCORRISKEN, R. HAMILTON (Chair), Mrs. M. WHITEFIELD.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (7, St. James Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Case for the Catholics," Mr. THORNTON, B.Sc. (Bradford).

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "From Jesus to Atom Bombs," Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (General Secretary N.S.S.).

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Picton Hall, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Why the Gods Must Go," Mr. G. THOMPSON (Chairman, Merseyside Branch N.S.S.).

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