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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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## VIEWES AND OPINIONS

### About Religion

WHAT is religion? To look at some people it would seem to be something that is very troublesome, but that we ought to make the best of it. With others it is certain that it is something that everyone knows—and very few understand. One large dictionary says that "religion" is something that brings people to God. Well, we might believe this if we knew how many times people stood with God. The dictionary also gives "To gather together." That may be true but, historically, Christians gathering together often meant a devil of a row. Consider, for example, the gathering together with half a dozen of Christians from different beliefs, and what would follow with different creeds and other things, getting together is rather a dangerous practice. Another book tells me that "religion" is "a state of mind." That again is very vague. A state of mind may be insanity. Prisons and homes for lunatics. A state of mind is true of Shakespeare. So are the followers of it the greatest fools that ever breathed. A very common explanation is that "religion" means devotion. Maybe, but it is vague. A man may devote his energies to poisoning his wife. It looks as though religion may mean anything, and lead men to doing everything.

Let us try another method. The modern fashion is so to define religion that it becomes inexorably confused with ethics, or with various aspects of social life. It is, we are told in the cant phraseology of the pulpit, a life. It is what we do, not believe, that is important. This is quite wrong. Morality, if not anterior to religion, is certainly independent of it. Of course, what we do is to some extent affected by what we believe, and sometimes powerfully affected; but this is true of religion, not as religion, but only as one of numerous ideas. And essentially religion centres in an idea. There is a religious life only as that idea expresses itself in conduct. If we can conceive man never coming to any definite conclusions about the nature of the phenomena around him, never forming any idea as to their causes, we should be unable to conceive religion coming into existence. He would have developed as a creature of instincts only, gregarious as some of the lower orders of life are gregarious, and with habits that, although unreasoning, would preserve life; but he never would have been religious.

Religion commences when man arrives at certain conclusions concerning the causes of phenomena. If these had been conceived as modern science conceives them, then religion would never have arisen. But in the circumstances of the case this was a sheer impossibility. Early mankind finds itself faced with questions to which some answer must be found, and this answer is given by what is generally

known as animism. Not that this philosophy of things is worked out as a modern theory is elaborated. The philosophy that represents primitive man speculating on the nature of things is quite false; the attitude of a domestic animal in the presence of unusual sights or sounds probably gives us a fair picture of the earliest type of mankind confronted with anything that roused his fears or awakened his curiosity. It is the accumulated pressure of experience that generates belief; a consciousness of their existence is in the nature of a discovery.

But a conclusion was reached by man. The world was alive, or rather it was made up of a number of living forces with which man must come to terms. This conclusion we now know to have been a radically wrong one, but it was one of the most important in the history of the human intellect. It meant that the first steps had been taken to attempt to understand the world, and to give a rational account of phenomena. In reality it was the beginning of scientific thinking. Later ages have corrected the error made by primitive man, but in the beginning it had its use. It codified experience and so paved the way for future corrections of experiences. But the great thing was that the world should be conceived as being amenable to a plan, whether the plan accepted was right or wrong was really a matter of secondary importance. The religious hypothesis was the most important, the greatest and yet the most necessary blunder ever made by the human mind.

Had religion, that primitive science of nature, been held as later scientific theories were held, the history of mankind would have been very different to what it became. The older hypothesis would have yielded place as later and better ones were framed. We should then have been able to treat religion in the same spirit that we treated the early and discarded theories of the scientific investigator. But there were two factors that made this impossible. One was fear, the other self interest. All the early religions are based, more or less, on fear, and fear has remained the ingredient of all historic religions. Man began to worship the gods because he feared their malevolence. Nor was their anger of a discriminating character. If one person offended, the whole of the tribe might be punished; to guard against offence from the gods was one of the most important of duties. It was in this way that the main road to improvement was blocked. Heresy was the greatest of crimes. Thousands of generations have passed since, but the feelings generated in this matter persist to-day.

Next, there is the feeling of self-interest, sometimes of the individual, sometimes of the tribe, but most often of a group. The real thinkers among mankind have always been few, and there is no reason for doubting that the earlier priesthoods included many of the best thinkers, and that there was every effort to prevent intelligence becoming common. But this policy of not enlightening the whole of the people was to be found in all parts of the world, and

in all human groups. It is thus that a priesthood conceals its knowledge by magic, by trickery and by the fear of God. In this way the two factors, fear of change, and love of power and possession, have combined to prevent in religion that process of modification, rejection and addition which has been so gratifying a feature in the history of science.

Whatever utility religious beliefs possess can, therefore, only exist in the very earliest stages of culture. At every subsequent stage they act as a drag upon the mind and an obstruction to progress. This is observable even amongst savages, with whom deviation from the customary rites is the most difficult of operations. In all the early civilisations we can see how senseless customs were perpetuated, from the same fear of offending the gods. Even freethinking Greece and Rome felt the weight of the same incubus, although the restless intellect of the one, and the practical genius of the other, reduced the obstructive influence to a minimum. A change came when various causes combined to place religion once more as a commanding influence in life, and Christianity became the established religion of the Western world. The primitive blunder was re-established, and how repressive that influence was can only be gauged by those who are sufficiently acquainted with the history of scientific ideas to know how much had been discovered in pre-Christian times. It is simply beyond question that, whatever the precise responsibility of the Christian Church, its undisputed reign coincided with the most ignorant and deplorable period of civilised history.

After Greek and Roman thinkers, Christianity. After light, darkness. After civilisation, barbarism. Starting from next to nothing, the ancient world had built up a huge fabric of actual knowledge and suggestive speculation. With this to hand as a possible foundation for further development, Christianity gave us—the Dark Ages. Against this solid fact all the apologists for the religion of the Dark Ages struggle in vain. On the most favourable view, a Church that could allow freedom of thought to be stifled, civic life and sanitation to decay, learning to die out, and the arts of civilisation to disappear, ought not itself to have survived. With such a condition of things, mere survival is little short of a disgrace; it argues, at least, passive acquiescence with what occurs. But to be in a position of power right through this period of degradation argues more than acquiescence; it is proof of participation.

There is no real escape from the conclusion that the blighting influence that rested on Europe for so many centuries was its religion. Other causes may be found, but this is the dominant one, and it sheltered and strengthened others. Consider that the death of the ancient civilisations meant not only a loss of actual knowledge; it meant also the loss of a mental habit—of the habit of facing the world as something to be studied and conquered, and its replacement by habits of mental servility and credulity. Who would trouble after knowledge when its acquisition might mean imprisonment or the stake? What was the use of considering social improvement when the Church sat enthroned above all, sucking from society its very life-blood? Europe was palsied by its religion; robbed of initiative by its belief. Ranke, a fairly cautious writer, calculates that the reign of the Catholic Church cost Europe over ten millions of lives. All these were not, of course, thinkers, but many were, and their fate offered little encouragement to others. And in the end it was the little of the Greek and Latin writings that survived the storm which enabled

it to partly liberate itself from the cramping influence of Christianity.

Religion commenced in a blunder. Of the truth of that there can be no doubt. It was only one of a host of blunders that man was bound to make before he reached truth; but it became the most fatal of all. It hangs over primitive life like a pall. Having created the gods, man finds them everywhere in his path. They demand continuous sacrifice in this world; they threaten him with penalties in the next. Every attempt at improvement meets with the same obstacle. In uncivilised and in civilised times the consequences of the initial blunder persists. It persists not alone in direct suppression, but in the perpetuation of a frame of mind that is all but fatal to orderly progress. The race has been taught to look to religion for guidance, a religion that is permeated with fear; and fear perpetuates ignorance, as ignorance in turn perpetuates fear. In earlier times the gods demanded human sacrifices. We have outgrown that, but we still continue to sacrifice the mental and moral freedom of man to the gods called into existence by the stupid blunder of our savage forefathers.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## A PLAY FOR OUR DAY

THERE is a play now running in a London suburb about which more should be heard. "Dark Summer" is a simple yet telling attempt that succeeds most admirably in relating the story of a refugee Jewess—a qualified research chemist—from Vienna, who is employed during the autumn after the war as cook in the house of some upper middle-class English country folk. The owner of the house in this small provincial town is a deeply religious woman of strong character, who is possessed by an over developed protective instinct for her son. The latter, who before the war was a promising young architect, is now blind as a result of the war, and consequently unaware that the unprepossessing middle-aged refugee is desperately in love with him. To complicate matters there is a young and attractive American girl of the boy's own age who is engaged to marry him, but who has not seen her fiance since his return to England as a blind man. When she enters the story it is not difficult to see that she has the strength to draw the embittered fellow from his state of melancholy, and the power to neutralise his mother's smothering tendencies. Comes the clash between refugee and fiance over the man's dependence upon the woman he is yet to see, and who in a fit of compassion he has asked to marry him. The play moves relentlessly to its tragic climax when Boy sees Refugee, but not before Fiancee is fooled into attacking Refugee who she thinks has instigated a Jewish plot, and finally our Ugly Duckling makes supreme sacrifice—a novelettish set-up, you may think, and perhaps a rough résumé of the bare plot does something to confirm this belief. But there is one important character in the piece who by her machinations lifts it out of the rut of conventional melodrama into the realm of large, if not high, tragedy. This character, a "Miss Loder," is a narrow-minded spinster who is staying as a paying guest at the house. By the constant expression of anti-Jewish sentiments she insinuates that the refugee is incidentally scheming to marry the blind man in order to acquire British nationality. It is a supporting part, but tightly written, and played as it is on a high vocal register in a minor comic key, it assumes, in view of the present wave of anti-semitism sweeping the country, a pivotal role in the play. For Miss Loder, who talks about "having an eye to the main chance like all Jews," "that smarmy Jewish way" and "you're not exactly ugly, but rather Jewish, of course," actually gets applause from theatre audiences when

she utters the opinion that "the Jews do cause an awful lot of trouble." This is surely a symptom of our unhappy day. Clearly it is the duty of the Theatre, as this play shows, to hold the mirror up to life; to act as a medium of encouragement for a better life to come whilst we are alive—decent human conduct between man and man, as well as between nation and nation. Miss Rebecca West, writing recently in the "Evening Standard," expressed the opinion that the loathsome sentiments uttered by the Jew-baiters in our midst could not be given any prominence if people stayed away from street corner meetings. But Miss West forgets the Miss Loders of this world, who do not frequent the street corners, but the country houses of the land. "Dark Summer" has been described, mistakenly I consider, as the story of a wounded ex-service man's effort to accustom himself to post-war life. I would prefer to think that the author was not writing *only* about a subject which has already served a score of books and films, as well as quite a few plays. Although admittedly an important part of the whole, it is incidental to the larger one; that concerned with the persecution of a perfectly harmless human being by nice civilised country folk in England to-day.

The British at the trials of the Nazi war criminals developed the conception of crimes against Humanity. They held that there are certain rights which belong to all men everywhere. One of these is man's right to live in peace and dignity regardless of his race. Violate this right and you violate the Law of Nations. Since the war ended England has been one of the few places where anti-semitism has been openly carried out. We shall be failing as a people if we do not insist that action to suppress it is taken. In this matter action by the authorities and eternal vigilance by the man in the street are imperative. We cannot stop Fascism by stopping up our ears." Thus Major Elwyn Jones, M.P., one of the Prosecutors, at last year's War Crimes Trial, when he replied to Miss West's contention, the other day. And it is to "Dark Summer" that I would like to take Miss West, and our present Home Secretary also. Mr. Ede pleads his inability to prohibit free speech by the thugs who, making a mockery of the right of free speech, and actively advocating a dictatorship which aims at driving freedom out of this land, instil their poison into the ears of all those who'll listen; these British nazis, who brashly proclaim their intentions to bully, boycott and beat up, make the way easy for the Miss Loders of the world, who favour the sly deed, "paul prying" and a technique for planting the malicious innuendo. Miss Norah Nicholson's little spinster type in "Dark Summer" holds the mirror up to life—the horrid senseless callous life of those idle people who keep far away from physical violence in East End streets, but who play the Fascist game equally well in their country towns, seaside resorts and cathedral cities. Miss Loder has her allies all over the country and she is worth noting because it is through her tongue that the rot starts in the first place. She who supports the worst right-wing papers, worships superstition in all its various guises and explores the death of Hitler when the moment is propitious. Whatever his crimes against the British Commonwealth of Nations, he, at least, knew what to do with the dirty Jew!) Even Mr. Churchill is not spared for "he also is in the pay of the Jews". The shopping queue is a favourite halt and Miss Loder is to be heard, by all who care to listen; some with resentment, but most with awakened interest on such fertile ground that "the Jews are to blame for the scarcity" of what ever it is they are being kept waiting hours to procure. Now, as to the credit of the author of "Dark Summer" that Miss Loder has been put so boldly upon the stage. Usually such a part is glossed over and even in realistic plays by radical writers, the author often appears unable to go "the whole hog" and on the stage the same nasty story that we are always nowadays hearing in country houses, public houses and railway carriages. Sometimes an author throws discretion to the wind in a propagandist work like "Professor Mamlock." But, to

many, that was just a political tract, and though a fine film, I never saw the play from which it was taken. Even in "The Merchant," Antonio was a bigoted fool; too fatuous an ass to be taken seriously by anyone but Bassanio and Shylock. Certainly Portia regarded him with good natured contempt side by side with the love she bore her husband. Galsworthy got nearer than most to the truth with that wonderful capacity he had for stating a case fairly, through a big heart and an honest pen. His Dancy behaved so crudely in "Loyalties" that one felt sorry for De Levis who was not, after all, a very pleasant character himself. But Galsworthy wrote this play some years before anti-semitism was legitimised by being fashionable. Mr. Browne's work is the first English play written since "Loyalties" in which to my knowledge the Jew-hater abandons the last attempt at retaining dignity when in the act of hounding a fellow human being. Even in Schnitzler's masterpiece, "Dr. Bernhardt," his anti-semites had a dignity which was lacking in De Levis's persecutor, and because the act is degrading it is properly lacking in Miss Loder: the same quality absent in Sir O. Mosley as much as in his late companions, Herr Streicher and Mr. William Joyce. Miss Loder is in the same section of this vast human family and her primitive behaviour in our midst should be carefully noted by all students of social conditions on the stage of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

Mr. Wynyard Browne, whose first incursion into the Theatre this is, has written a play with a heart; an immature, "bitty," at times, barely audible heart, but one which nevertheless beats harder than most dramatic works written for the Theatre in these days of "personality" Shakespeare, "queer" drawing-room trifles and "corny" Farce. Moreover, it is a play to be seen, not only by those unimaginative right-wingers in our present Labour Government, but by all Freethinkers who will be warmed by the courage of an author who realises that every effect must have a cause and that the power of a reactionary Church looms largely in the background.

As for example:—

GISELA: *Your mother is wonderfully kind but she is so religious, always she want to make me a Christian. She does not understand I do not want to be a Christian, I do not want to be a Jew. I do not want to be anything.*

STEPHEN: *Just a human being, eh, do you think it's worth it?*

GISELA: *Of course it's worth it.*

And now Gentile and Jew are talking:—

MRS. HADOW: *You must see that it's wrong. I know you're not a Christian, but your own religion . . .*

GISELA: *My religion! I have no religion.*

MRS. HADOW: *You must believe in something, surely!*

GISELA: *Yes, yes, I believe in freedom. I want people to be happy and they cannot be happy if they are not free, but that is not religion, Mrs. Hadow, I hate religion.*

MRS. HADOW: *I cannot bear to hear you talk like this.*

GISELA: *No, but it is true. What has religion done for me? If it were not for religion perhaps my father and brother are still alive. Oh, if you have lived in Vienna you would know. Always it was because of religion we are persecuted, long, long before the Nazis come, hundreds of years ago.*

Apart from Miss Norah Nicholson's astute performance there is most accomplished acting from Miss Jean Cadell in the part of a good religionist, who, in her efforts to maintain what she considers a Good Christian Household, opens the flood gates to a tide of reaction, loathing and tragedy. It would be churlish to end this article without mentioning a performance which must rank as one of the very best to be seen in the London Theatre since Mr. Wolfitt's phenomenal "Lear" first burst into our consciousness one wintry black-out night at the Scala Theatre during the first years of the war. I refer to Miss Loder's principal victim, "Gisela Wallsteen," the tragic Jewess, who is portrayed by Miss Joan Miller with a depth of feeling so powerful that it is usually *read about* rather than seen, and is most frequently associated with the great tragic actresses of

the last century, who, with the passing of Mr. Agate, we hear so much less about to-day. Miss Miller plays the part like a poem, a dreamlike—a hurricane. It is terrifyingly good, and because of its goodness, terrifyingly frightening; with sympathy, keen intelligence and a towering grandeur it succeeds in making the play-goer realise that the dignity of the victim of persecution must always appear greater than that of the victor. A type like this persecuted Austrian, who remains a thousand times more impressive and endearing than her nationalistic persecutors; whether they be the whip-cracking sub-humans of Belsen, Germany, or the mean-spirited spinsters of Derby, England. I beg all those who demand a play of ideas in the Theatre and the elation derived from really great acting, to see this play.

PETER COTES.

## NOISES ON AND OFF—AND MERE WORDS

CHURCHILL as a war leader needs no comment. Churchill as an orator is still another personality. To be an orator requires the most artful use of words, skilfully conjured up to tell a story. He told quite a lot of stories in his time did that one. It is only a fraction of time since—don't say that you have already forgotten—since the very same man was exercising his oratorical powers in his faultless belligerent manner. How glib, how impressive he was in the way he mouthed and made noises from his throat.

What was it that he announced? Oh yes! He said that the very first item on the Tory programme would be "TO DEFEND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AGAINST ALL ASSAULTS!" If, as we can safely assume, there were, here and there, some Tories who are Atheists or agnostics and who naturally would not lift a single finger to defend religious belief, for whom, we may well ask, was the great ex-war-lord speaking? Also, what does he mean exactly by "defend"? What, for instance, does he mean by "assaults" and from where?

And again, what does he mean exactly by "the Christian religion"? His notion of it? The T.U.C.'s? The B.B.C.'s? The religion of Protestant party members, or Roman Catholic ones, or Baptist ones? The Christianity of Christian Scientists or Spiritualists, or the Greek Orthodox Church, or Jehovah's Witnesses, or even the Plymouth Brethren? The Christianity of J. Pierpont Morgan? The Pope? The Metropolitan Archbishop of Moscow? Adolf Schicklgruber? or the true and great Christian gentleman "Franco"?

Churchill's phrase, you will come to realise, was entirely meaningless, and nothing but a sheer piece of verbal tomfoolery, or in other words a piece of mere noise magic.

Noise, noise, noise, nothing but noises. A hell of a babble of sound and fury! "Blood, sweat or tears!" Whose blood, whose sweat, whose tears, yes—and whose profits?

It is to be doubted whether many freethinkers realise to the full how often and how skilfully the use of words, many of which are quite without a scrap of meaning, can be made, in expert "hands" to sound and react in divers expedient ways, many of which conjure up myths, and being quite meaningless, yet manage to "sound" good. The powers-that-be know nicely that noises, mere noises, dexterously selected and judiciously repeated from time to time, can and do enslave millions of people. To see a little of what can be done in this direction, some of you might read carefully through that appalling cold and brutal epic, Serge Chakotin's "Rape of the Masses," and after reading through this you should be pretty well propaganda-proof for life.

(The above condensed from Eric Frank Russell's illuminating article "Jon Doe's Body" published by "Tomorrow.")

E. H. S.

## MY EXPERIENCES AS A PRIEST'S HOUSEKEEPER

AS a "good Catholic" there was a time when I felt the loftiest pinnacle of achievement was to become a priest's housekeeper. My qualifications (since improved) then consisted of two years at a domestic science college, and a few "refresher courses" in High Class Cookery, but, not having achieved the "Cordon Bleu," the dream could not be realised during the Peace years when priests were more particular.

However, during the war housekeepers were scarce, and, despite my low qualifications, I was recommended by an Edinburgh Convent to one Father M. G. The good nun in charge of the negotiations refused to give me the name and address until the last minute—she was apparently very anxious to prevent an interview. I was told that he was entirely without domestic help, and it was therefore urgent that I should report for duty without delay, which I did at considerable inconvenience.

The presbytery was a large house in a small country village, and when I arrived, a housekeeper and a kitchen-maid were already installed. I received a rich quota of black looks from both of them. Apparently the housekeeper had only been discharged since the engagement of me, which was enough to make any woman wild; and she told me quite plainly that she intended to get rid of me as soon as possible. The maid (whom we will call "Kitty") a cheeky and untrained girl of fourteen, was apparently to remain, but she told me frankly: "I'm not going to take any notice of you, and I'm going to get her back as soon as possible."

Then I was shown in to interview the Holy Man. He was sprawled in an easy chair doing nothing, according to his custom. A short, dark, unhealthy-looking man with shifty eyes and a selfish little "button-mouth." It was clear from the start that he expected plenty of hard work. He required his final supper between 10.30 and 11 p.m. but actually I found that I was often required for duty up till midnight, and even then he would often knock me up for matters which could very well wait. If he had a sick-call during the night, he would knock me up for moral support and tea-and-toast. Theoretically a priest is supposed to remain "fasting from midnight" before "saying Mass," but in actual fact, this one used to go down in the night and make snacks for himself. I caught him at it several times but he said he was sleep-walking.

The first meal I cooked for him was a complete nightmare. He had demanded an omelette as soon as I arrived (they have "high tea" in Scotland) but the other two were determined to frustrate me. Twice I completed an omelette and the maid snatched the pan from me and threw it on the floor! However, I got my chance when they had to go and fix the black-out. I was then able to produce a very third-rate omelette and to carry the tray upstairs. Of course, Kitty tried to trip me up on the stairs but I was already becoming wise to her. The housekeeper departed that night breathing threats which she amply fulfilled.

I found the books in a rather suspicious state. The expenditure struck me as enough to feed two families rather than one priest and a few friends. In the course of a month I had brought down the expenditure to a fraction of the previous figure, but the "good father" was not pleased. He had so much money that a difference of fifteen pounds or so meant nothing to him, and the local shop-keepers were mostly parishioners and frequent communicants, whereat he would rather pay up than have any falling off from the altar rails!

I had to get up about six for house cleaning. Then the "good father" had to be called several times for his eight-thirty "Mass." Even so, he generally managed to be from ten to twenty minutes late for this, and always blamed me because his shaving-water was cold.

His midday meal, which had to be up to pre-war standard despite rationing and short supply, was scheduled for one o'clock,

but actually he seldom turned up much before two-thirty, so that it was nearly four before I was finished in the kitchen. As he required "high tea" at five or five-thirty there was often no time to have a wash and change after the heavy "chores." Through everything Kitty did her best to make my life a misery. She caused hours of extra work by maliciously hiding everything I needed for the cooking of the next meal, but when I reported the matter to my employer I was told to "offer it up in union with Calvary" or "she's a daily Communicant." (That seems to cover everything).

The first thing she did was to steal all the loose change from my handbag so that I was literally penniless for a while. Twice she threw pepper in my eyes, and once, when I was busy preparing a luncheon for several visiting priests, she pushed my hand into a pan of boiling fat. Sometimes I reported these things to the Holy Man, but it was quite useless. "Don't bother me with small details" was the usual response. The girl herself told me that she could do what she liked with him as their relations were of an immoral nature. How true this was I do not know. She certainly had head-nits and I certainly found these same entities in his bed. Weighed against which, Father M. G. was not fond of soap and water, rarely took a bath, and was positively allergic to clean clothes!

Well, as I have said, I was still hard at it by 11 p.m. and sometimes had no time to eat. This was partly due to the perpetual sabotage of Kitty and partly due to the fact that the good Father, having very little to do, was frequently given to interfering in the kitchen, and, being almost uneducated, would sometimes call me off to compose a letter for him!

Fortunately, Kitty went home at six (in theory) and I had some chance to get on with the work unmolested. I was supposed to have a "half day" but in actual practice I was due back to prepare his "high tea" almost before I'd had time to start. Most priests agree to look after themselves for one evening a week, but this one believed himself to be too well-bred.

Father M. G. was a perpetual cigarette smoker. Unfortunately, he discovered that I suffered from asthma and sinus trouble, and that cigarette smoke is painful to me. From that time he frequented the kitchen still more taking a spiteful delight in puffing smoke in my face so that most of my nights were spent in choking and fighting for breath. He would not allow any asthma relief as he disliked the smell.

The reader may be wondering why I stuck it out. I did not want to lose the honour (!) of being a priest's housekeeper, neither did I wish to own myself beaten by two spiteful females both, by the way, daily communicants. Also, I kept hoping for some money. Actually I gave him notice several times, but he begged me to stay because he liked my cooking and I was taking good care of his health.

Another very grave difficulty I had to face was a more personal one: the "colour prejudice" in the Catholic Church is very marked, although the faithful deny it hotly. I happen to be half Chinese, but except for my name the parishioners need never have known, except that Kitty read my private letters and documents and told the whole village. I had a certain amount to put up with from the "Man of God" himself: he was not too well-bred to sneer at my "little yellow face" and my "Chinese hair-splitting" (by which he meant my Chinese honesty). But the real trouble started when "the faithful" started throwing pebbles and shouting "heathen Chinese" when I ventured out. The "heathen" part was unfair. I was a "good Catholic" in those days, but was seldom allowed any religious facilities. Apparently the faithful had not approved of my receiving Holy Communion—conversely, they objected to the priest's housekeeper not being a daily communicant! So they had me on toast either way! Finally they sent a deputation (probably engineered by the ex-housekeeper) demanding my instant dismissal, and the Holy Man, being absolutely at the mercy of his parishioners agreed to get rid of me without any question of justice. I had been there two months and he gave me a cheque for £6 which just about

covered what was stolen from me but did not re-imburse me for various expenses I had met for him. He also wrote me an open letter describing me as "strictly honest" but not long after my departure I was accused of having stolen his bath towels and handkerchiefs. Actually, I had replenished *his* stock with some of mine!

Whether these experiences are unique or typical I have no means of knowing, but I give them merely as a matter of interest.

The life of a priest himself is, according to my findings, a lazy and self-indulgent one. Rising at eight-thirty to say Mass, he was very often free for the rest of the day. After Mass he had a large breakfast by a good fire, after which he sometimes went back to bed. At twelve he had hot milk and biscuits. After his midday dinner there was often a rest in bed until four o'clock tea (with toast and a boiled egg) and frankly I found it much less trouble to have him out of the way. Sometimes there was an evening service, but often he would go out to various social activities, or stay at home dozing by the fire, ostensibly "saying the office" (the daily compulsory ration of Latin prayers). On the whole it is too easy a life for a normal man. The intellectual standard is very low—I never saw him read any sort of a book outside of the "Breviary" and "The Universe" and the conversation when other priests dropped in for a gossip was less than futile.

Needless to say, the previous housekeeper returned within half-an-hour of my departure, and for all I know is still a "daily Communicant."

S. KWONG.

## THE MISSIONARY AT THE VILLAGE OF AMOEIRA

(20 kilometres from Fatima)

THE usual occupation of the missionary is the sale of reliques. A missionary arrived here with huge cases of rosaries, scapulars, pieces of St. Anthony's bones, fragments of his tunic, etc., etc. But sad to relate, our missionary hadn't brought an assistant so had to be content with two supplied for him by a draper. These two able fellows placed themselves in the evening at the door of the church, in front of their planks of wood covered with an embroidered cloth, and actively carried on their business. Meanwhile our good missionary, gesticulating and thundering in the pulpit, spat Hell Fire at his audience.

But the good pious man had a great worry—he didn't know exactly the number of devout objects he had given to the two men, and unfortunately he didn't have evangelical confidence in them; therefore, he had recourse to the following strategy. Pausing after each paragraph of his sermon, he bawled: "Those who have rosaries of Our Lady to be blessed, hold them high up." The members of the faithful who had them held them aloft with fervour. The missionary then, as if absorbed in an ecstasy, counted them with his eyes rapidly. After he blessed them. He then went on to count in the same ecstatic manner the other relics. When he left the church he compared his mental calculation with the money received. The two assistants were honest, and our missionary made a good profit. May God protect him and the police not worry him.

A man here was put in prison for selling flannel shirts to prevent rheumatism, but the missionary can sell relics given him by an angel, which cure all illnesses, make unfaithful husbands return to their wives, cure sterility in women, deliver from temptation and upon all who don't buy a catastrophe will fall. The relic absolves from all sin. After a person has bought the relic he feels himself in the Grace of God. From now on he can drink and take part in brawls in the taverns, ill-treat his wife, rob, knowing that he is well protected by the relic. We have relics to prevent the end of the world, letters from Christ, letters from the Virgin Mary.

N. F.

## ACID DROPS

Canon Weeks, of Cambridge, laments that, "In this country we have allowed Sunday to become so secularised that Sunday worship has become impossible for many people." That is a very curious complaint. So far as we know there is no law in this country forbids the opening of Church doors, or the singing of Church hymns. Of course there was once a law compelling people to go to Church—it may still be in existence—but conditions have altered. There were also Sunday laws which offered to the people the choice of Church or penalties. But now people may decide themselves what they will do on Sunday—and they stay away. People are better.

In the Isle of Man, we gather from "Mona's Herald," and it is supported by Canon Stenning, Christianity is in a very bad state. The Canon says, "Our country is gradually becoming pagan, knowledge of Christianity has vanished." Of course we pity the poor man, but he may console himself that sooner or later all religions will die out. But the Canon does his best to make the old creed look as valuable as he can, but we think we may consider his saying that "morals are low and sexual sin is rampant." We may take the first indictment as something the preacher fails to see among his "own people," and also that that character which began to rot so soon, if true, says little for its curative powers.

A bewildered ex-soldier wants to know, reports a religious journal, "Why should the Church claim to uphold family life and the holy state of marriage when our Saviour was never married?" This is quite a good one and we should like to know the answer ourselves—especially as the paper concerned gives no reply.

A Lancashire man of God has explained why so many people have ceased to attend Church. He says that clergymen have not made their services attractive enough to interest people. The discovery is not very profound, particularly when we note that for many centuries the complaint that people will not attend Church is not a new phase. Those who will, so to speak, reading backwards will find that for at least four or five generations the complaint has been made by all grades of preachers. For a long time they laid down ill-conduct as a reason for scantily filled Churches. It was due to people who could not bear to meet God, in other words it was ill-conduct that made people afraid to "face God." But nowadays the non-attendants are so numerous that that reason no longer tells. With result all our leading clergy are being driven to admit that it is not conduct, but the historic knowledge concerning Christianity that is emptying the Churches, and once emptied there is no possibility of honest preachers filling them again.

Finally, one may note that this decay of religion is not merely a Church here and there, but all places of worship and in all countries. Even in the heart of Roman Catholic religion there is the same decaying religious belief. It is not the fault of the clergy; to be honest, they have done their best. They have tried threats concerning the next world, and people have just smiled. They have tried reasoning, only to find themselves out-reasoned. They have had the help, monetary and other, to keep the people "in order," to find that a better life is being demanded. In common language, man is claiming his own, not in the name of God, but in the name of humanity, against that claim the Churches are rapidly losing power.

Even God's Holiest Jewel, Eire, is not safe from the enemies of religion, wails one Catholic journal. "We Irish are too well known for our devotion to religion," said Bishop Lyons of Kilmore at some religious celebrations, "to escape the hostile attention of the goddess." Well, as the Bishop believes in missionaries, we don't see why he should object to ours. However, on this occasion "thousands lined the streets" to see a procession of the Blessed Sacrament—so perhaps the soul of Bishop Lyons went home rejoicing.

The Rev. W. S. Tuke, of Chorlton-cum-Hardy, says he does not believe that there are any Atheists in Manchester. His opinion is based on the experience that when he offered to meet unbelievers in his parish on mutual grounds, no unbeliever showed himself. If that be the truth then there must be a number of people in Manchester who regularly buy this journal just to strengthen the belief in Jesus. Perhaps some of our readers in Manchester will be good enough to tell us what has happened to Manchester. Or we wonder whether it is Mr. Tuke who is dreaming dreams.

Mr. John Garret, Headmaster of Bristol Grammar School, says he is "quite sure that God would tolerate Atheism if it came from a sincere thought." That is very kind of God. But by what means shall we get in touch with this good-minded, devil-may-care deity? We grant that God *ought* to be very kindly with regard to Atheists, because we do not ask him to do anything, and we never charge him with all the offences which by implication are saddled on him. Perhaps Mr. Garret has just failed to appreciate the stream of common sense regarding religion that is now about.

Jack Martez brought his wife and his little girl, about seven years old, to bring God's message to London. But the deed was not properly drawn. Jack trusted to God, instead of having a legal arrangement. For in America an arrangement must be drawn up in a proper manner. Martez said that the English people were hungering for God, but the results did not run that way. Perhaps if God had sent a real angel, as he does with the Roman Church, the results would be different. Jack left for the United States with £40 less in his pocket than when he arrived. God has let him down. It is said that the next time Martez sets out on a spiritual contract with God he will have payment before the show opens. We feel that even bishops would not stand that kind of treatment.

The Roman Church has always kept a stock of miracles on hand. The last miracle—not of the best class—is concerned with 20 flowers which were put on a statue of Mary. But although each rose was pierced, it remains as fresh as ever. It is pierced with wire and yet it stands there as it was plucked. The hot summer had no influences. "Divine" power has kept the flowers as fresh as they were when first seen. By simple, worldly belief we should say the thing was a fraud. But here we have the words of the priests that the R.C. saints are worthy for this display. Wonders are growing. It is said to be whispered, in Catholic places, that if a few flowers, why may it not be that the same saints will produce a million loads of indestructible potatoes. Like the feast prepared by Jesus, who with a few handfuls fed a multitude with fish and bread, may he not perform the same miracle in Trafalgar Square, and so give to the hungry the loads of food that are left.

Cardinal Griffin appears to be one of those who have been appointed to amuse the sharper members of his Church. He was watching the water of the Niagara falls, a sight that should drag out any or all that a man has for poetry. But this servant of God said to those before him, "The unexhausted fall of divine grace coming to Catholics who partake in holy communion." And that is all. It will remind some of Lamb's reply when a man said to him, "Don't you think that Shakespeare was a great writer?" And Lamb solemnly took a lighted candle and as solemnly said to the man, "Would you allow me to examine your cranium?" One wonders what kind of brain Cardinal Griffin possesses. Of course, he is a great man—with the Roman Church—but still, the man who said what he did when he saw one of the wonders of the world . . .

One often gets good news from unexpected quarters. Here is one example, and we take it from the Roman Catholic weekly, "The Universe." Here is what it says in the issue for October 3.

"Secularism in Britain has become the philosophy of the day, and Christianity—we must face the fact—is a back number . . . Christianity is going and with it will go the Christian mother and the Christian State, Christian justice and education. . ."

It is a very strong picture but, as one may expect, the real point is a warning that the real enemy is Atheism, and that is gaining ground steadily. We know that, but things must indeed be serious when a religious paper writes in that way.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

A writer in one of our provincial papers has just made a discovery. He has been reflecting and has fallen into some conclusions. It sounds earnest, but reflections and deductions, however well meant, may yet lead to wrong conclusion. For example. The writer has concluded, on what he considers good grounds, the children of Freethinkers always revert to the religion their parents have discarded. Our own observation runs rather the other way. It may be true that the children are not so strong against the religion as were their parents; or they may not be as intelligent as their parents. There are many conditions that make the children differ from their parents from religion to apple dumplings.

But what takes place is that the children of enthusiastic parents do show the same interest concerning religion that their parents did. Where religion is concerned they may just not bother. We know many of that kind. Personally we felt neither sad nor angry on such occasions. People differ, and it is only fools or rogues who try to make all children alike. Parents cannot hand over character to their children as if it were a slice of cake. Moreover, parents do save their children from religion, and being saved, the children have no further interest in it.

Mr. F. A. Ridley will have a busy Sunday on the N.S.S. platform to-day. At 3 p.m. he will speak for the Halifax Branch at 7, St. James Street, Halifax and at 6-30 p.m. he will be in the Mechanic's Institute, Town Hall Square, Bradford, speaking for the local N.S.S. Branch. On both occasions the subject will be "A Bishop Looks for Jesus." At each place the result will be known by the end of Mr. Ridley's lecture.

The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. is getting into its stride again and to-day (Sunday) the Branch Secretary, Mrs. M. Whitefield, speaks in the McLellan Galleries at 7 pm. on "Religious Influence in the Past, Present and Future." There is plenty of scope in that subject for interest and discussion, and every prospect that those who attend will get both.

In Nottingham to-day (Sunday) Mr. F. A. Hornibrook visits the Cosmopolitan Debating Society for an address on "The Vatican Menace." The subject is of growing importance and an enlightening discussion should follow. Mr. Hornibrook knows his subject and is sure to be clear and forceful. The proceedings take place in the Technical College, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, at 2-30 p.m., and all seats are free.

Besides being busy on N.S.S. platforms, Mr. J. Clayton is a frequent visitor to outside organisations where he puts the Freethought point of view. On Friday, October 24, he will speak on "Dreams" to the Women's Section of the Labour Party in the Labour Hall, Vernon Street, Nelson, at 7-30 p.m.

This is a very useful form of our work, and the N.S.S. is always ready to send a speaker to outside bodies for that purpose. No charges are asked for.

We have been asked whether the King of England could be an Atheist? Well, not honestly. His religious opinions were settled for him nearly three hundred years ago. But there is nothing to prevent him from being a dishonest Atheist. That is the beauty of legislation on behalf of religion. No one need believe in it, but everyone must look as if they do. That kind of legislation never upsets a rascal or a born liar. It only upsets a man who is honest and will not say that he is what he is not. Christian love and learning have very often patted a liar on the back, and made small inquiry lest he should discover the truth.

We think it is a matter of taking religious lights as they are and trying to think what they ought to be. For example, there is the reverend Vicar of St. Gabriel of Cricklewood declaring that some Socialist Party preaches "envy, hatred, and malice," and others say, "Be my brother or I will knock your bloody head off." We expect he is bent on getting people to come to his Church. If he keeps on at that rate we should expect an increase in the worshippers present—for a time. It is quite possible that the parson will get several people to come who have never come before. Still we think that one day his Church will be put to better use. Cuss-words and prayers may bring a few extra attendants for a time, but the Church will come to an end.

## TOLERATION IN ANCIENT AND CHRISTIAN TIMES

THE late Professor Bury's "History of the Freedom of Thought" is a masterpiece in miniature. Although restricted to 251 pages, it records the long bloodstained struggle which has preceded the now acknowledged right, not only of free thinking, but also of free expression, however much one's convictions may run counter to popular prejudice and theological tradition.

When we recall the magnificent literary, artistic and scientific achievements of the Greeks we are apt to regard these as antiquity's greatest gifts to civilisation. And it was on the Ionian coast in Asia Minor that Greek science was born. In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., early philosophers, using their unfettered reason, strove to discover the origin and structure of our planet.

Among these pioneers was Xenophanes, and Dr. Bury selects him for special mention, not because he was the most eminent of his contemporaries, but "because the toleration of his teaching illustrates the freedom of the atmosphere in which these men lived. He went about from city to city calling in question on moral grounds the popular beliefs about the gods and goddesses, and ridiculing the anthropomorphic conceptions which the Greeks had formed of their divinities. 'If oxen had hands and the capacities of men they would make gods in the shape of oxen.'"

Xenophanes derided the representations of the gods in the Homeric poems, where their malpractices were those of which decent citizens would be highly ashamed to be suspected. Fortunately for freedom, Homer's writings were never regarded as divinely inspired like the so-called Christian Bible. Secular and not sacred compositions, they were venerated for their poetical power and they contain far less savagery than the Jewish Scriptures. As Bury observes: "Their authority was immense; but it was not binding like the authority of a sacred book, and so Homeric criticism was never hampered like Biblical criticism."

Heraclitus and Democritus were other outstanding philosophers of early Greece. The first of these declared that the world around us is constantly changing, while the second elaborated an atomic theory of the universe which still retains its influence

over contemporary chemical and physical concepts of matter and energy.

The absence of an organised priesthood in Hellas partly explains the liberty enjoyed by philosophers in their studies and speculations. It is true that later, Socrates was a willing martyr to freedom of thought and expression. He might have gone free, but he preferred death to dishonour. The attack on Anaxagoras again, in the days of Pericles, was largely inspired by political envy and spite. The philosopher was an open Free-thinker in company with the illustrious Athenian statesman himself. So Pericles' political enemies by appealing to the passions of the superstitious mob, sought to sully the reputation of the statesman by charging his intimate friend, Anaxagoras, with blasphemy. Pericles saved his friend from death, but he was fined and banished from Athens to Lampsacus where he was held in the highest esteem. Although Aristotle, when accused of impiety left Athens, other thinkers were unmolested. Epicurus was an uncompromising Rationalist who, like his later disciple, Lucretius, in Rome, seemingly expressed his opinions unchecked. Still, the great dramatist Euripides was prosecuted for impiety by a self-seeking demagogue.

The customary toleration of Greece was later extended to Pagan Rome, where innumerable divinities were popularly adored, but most educated Romans disclaimed the cults of the crowd. Toleration was almost universal, and even the orthodox Jews, despite their arrogant pretensions as Jehovah's chosen people, were free to worship in the temple, until the advent of a heretical Israelitish sect, utterly alien to the prevailing intellectual hospitality of official Paganism, obtruded itself in Rome.

The early Christian sects were for a time regarded as Jewish whose anti-social activities soon aroused suspicion. Unlike Judaism, however, primitive Galileans made many converts, especially among the dregs of the population. And as their thoughts were ostentatiously directed to their well-being in the next world, they were consequently neglectful of their civic duties in this.

It is significant that most of the laws which penalised them were issued by enlightened Emperors who disliked the infliction of death. As Dr. Bury testifies: "Trajan laid down that Christians were not to be sought out, that no anonymous charges were to be noticed, and that an informer who failed to make good his charge should be liable to be punished under the law against calumny. Christians themselves recognised that this edict practically protected them."

Christians certainly suffered death in the second century, but not nearly so many as is usually supposed. Some, indeed, in sheer fanaticism deliberately sought martyrdom, while many under arrest contrived to escape, for the authorities were far less disposed to prosecute than the populace "who felt a horror of this mysterious Oriental sect which openly hated all the gods and prayed for the destruction of the world. When floods, famines and especially fires occurred, they were apt to be attributed to the black magic of the Christians."

Still, if a Christian was accused of disloyalty he had merely to offer incense to the deities in order to be set at liberty. For this observance symbolised the complete integrity of the Roman Empire, which embraced a multitudinous array of cults and peoples. But it must be noted that no Roman subject was compelled to participate in this ceremony save servants of the State such as soldiers and public officials, and this obligation excluded Christians from military and administrative careers.

Dr. Bury notes that pronouncements of leading Christian apologists of the period plainly implied that as soon as the Church assumed authority pitiless persecution of all dissenters would be the order of the day. "Any reader of the Christian literature of the time," declares our learned historian, "could not fail to see that in a State in which Christians had the power there would be no tolerance of other religious practices. If the Emperors made an exception to their tolerant policy in the

case of Christianity, their purpose was to safeguard tolerance."

During the third century the Church enjoyed a long period of repose and its organisation was openly developed in which ecclesiastical councils, however turbulent in themselves, were held without outside interference. One serious persecution only is recorded in this century that under Decius and Valerian. But if the Church later "invented a whole mythology of martyrdom," few executions took place at this time, although certain Emperors were accused of atrocities during whose reigns the Church was never molested.

As Gibbon proves, a prolonged period of civil strife supervened, and the Roman State seemed in danger of extinction. But the stern enactments of Diocletian, designed to restore the State's stability, included the Church's suppression and an attempt to revive a dying Paganism. The claim that the requirements of Christian conscience rose above those of civil obedience was rejected as inimical to law and order and, as the Church refused to admit this contention, persecution became inevitable. Still, it was not pursued systematically and it failed, although Diocletian's secular legislation sufficed to sustain the Empire for another century.

Once more we find that while the Christians clamoured for freedom of expression and worship for themselves they consistently denied it to others. Theirs was an exclusive claim, as Bury observes, "from a non-Christian government; and it is hardly going too far to suspect that they would have applauded the government if it had suppressed the Gnostic sects whom they hated and calumniated."

After Diocletian's abdication the Emperors who succeeded him issued edicts of toleration (A.D. 311 and 313). While rebuking the Christians for their contemptuous disregard of the rites and ceremonies of their ancestors, the Emperors announced that: "We permit them freely to possess their private opinions, and to assemble in their conventicles without fear of molestation, provided always that they preserve a due respect to the established laws and government."

When, a decade later, Constantine adopted Christianity as the State religion, the Church soon assumed a dictatorial authority, and in the succeeding generations, save during the brief reign of the illustrious Julian, the Church exercised with ever increasing intensity its power to persecute heretic and Pagan alike.

With the Catholic doctrine of exclusive salvation for orthodox believers, and eternal damnation for all others, persecution of heretics logically followed. Indeed, freedom of thought virtually disappeared for a millennium, for the Church Fathers all favoured religious compulsion. As Dr. Bury pertinently observes: "No father of the Church has become more esteemed or enjoyed higher authority than St. Augustine (died A.D. 430). He formulated the principle of persecution for the guidance of future generations, basing it on the firm foundation of Scripture—or words used by Jesus Christ in one of his parables, 'Compel them to come in.' To the end of the twelfth century the Church worked hard to suppress heterodoxies. . . There is reason to think that in the pursuit of heresy the Church was mainly guided by considerations of temporal interest and was roused to severe action only when the spread of false doctrine threatened to reduce its revenues or seemed a menace to society."

T. F. PALMER.

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## HYPNOTISM

THE B.B.C. put off a proposed demonstration of hypnotism by television, for fear of possible complications. Are we to assume that the B.B.C. is trying to befool the public, or are we to infer that they and their experts are intellectually confused themselves? Are the B.B.C. ignorant of the fact that they have been demonstrating hypnotism for years? Why not explain hypnotism? Perhaps then the listeners would understand that hypnotism is not a mysterious mystical influence that can be demonstrated, but a common fact of their every-day life. Does the B.B.C. want to retain the atmosphere of mystery? What is wanted is an explanation and not a demonstration. Why does not one of the B.B.C. "experts" explain? Is it that they cannot, or is it that the B.B.C. would not allow it?

Bernard Hollander once gave a lecture in the Conway Hall on sound and unsound mind; after which the question was put to the speaker, did he believe in hypnotism. His genial round face beamed as no other face could, and his mouth broadened into the broadest of smiles. "Do I believe in hypnotism? Why, I use it," he said. Pulling a small electric torch from his pocket he explained his favourite method. The patient was asked to look closely at the pin-point of light, and the torch brought closer to his eyes. Hollander then explained that hypnotism is simply mental fatigue. Hypnotism was the effect of the strain. The fatigue arising as a consequence of the effort loosened the control of the patient's mind. We can appreciate physical fatigue and can associate the same idea with the physiological structure we call the nervous system. We should understand how the nervous system operates.

To take the case of vision first, we need to understand Young's theory of vision, expounded by Helmholtz. According to this theory the eye responds to the three colours: red, yellow and blue, and if the part of the eye that responds to one of these colours is in any way affected, the observer is deficient in the power to observe that colour: that is, is colour-blind; cannot see shall we say, red. If we observe a bright light for a few moments and then turn our eyes away to a light background we then see the shape of the bright light as a dark spot in the vision. The theory is that the part of the eye that responded to the bright light has become fatigued and does not respond for a time afterwards until the nerves have recuperated. Young's theory explains many facts and the only objection to it is that no threefold difference is observable in the structure of the eye. But against this we may say that there is no threefold separation in the spectrum. The colours in the spectrum blend into one another and the eye responds to the spectrum as a whole. The theory can be restated so as to accommodate this fact. Now, the explanation operates both ways. For just as when we turn our eyes away the dark spot is there, so also when we are concentrating our attention upon the bright light, we are hazy about surrounding objects. The fatigue is there throughout. This explains what is called focus, that is, the blurred and indistinct vision of objects outside the centre of vision. The clearness in the centre of vision and the haziness beyond is relative, so that the indistinctness is due to the fatigue which is consequent upon the effort of concentration; and is directly proportionate. What needs to be realised is that the eye operates as a whole and the degree of fatigue is relative to the reaction to stimulus.

The same principle operates in regard to the nervous system as a whole. The first thing is to get rid of the old superstitious idea that the brain is the seat of the soul; that messages are sent through the nerves to the brain and that the brain is the thinking and willing faculty; that thinking is the function of the brain.

H. H. PREECE.

(To be concluded)

## THE FREETHOUGHT MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

IN 1905, twelve members founded the organisation of the German Freethought Movement (D.F.V.) In 1915 the number of members was about 834; 1922, the number rose to 261,656; 1925, to 372,997, and in 1929 the number rose to 590,033. In 1933 there were over 600,000 members in the movement, which was one of the biggest Freethought societies. To these could be added about 200,000 members of the Left Radical Proletarian Freethinker's Society, and if one counts the members of the Monist Association, the Free Religious Communities, and various other dissident groups, there was at the beginning of 1933 over a million people who had broken with the Church and openly proclaimed themselves Atheists.

This remarkable result which was achieved by decades of intensive work and propaganda, fell and was destroyed in the first few days of the Nazi onslaught. The most important representative of the Catholic Church in Germany, Franz von Papen, together with Baron von Schroeder, and that arch-reactionary, Hugenberg, "who thrust open the door of the Reich's Chancellory for the monster Hitler," declared, at that time, "A beneficent God has presented Germany with a Leader who will, with sure statesmanlike instinct lead the German people to a happy future." The Nazi rulers knew how much they owed to the clerics for their decisive help in establishing the Dictatorship.

The entire Freethought Movement was banned, their property was sequestered, their literature was burned, officials were placed under police surveillance, or were arrested and thrown into concentration camps, tortured and maltreated. All further Atheistic activities were forbidden under threat of the death penalty. Despite this, however, the "Freidenker"\* was published illegally abroad.

The numbers arrested rose more and more, thousands of Freethinkers, Socialists and Pacifists were murdered by Hitler, and this at a time when Hitler had received 32 million dollars to finance his re-armament scheme.†

Very few Freethinkers could escape the persecution by fleeing abroad for even here the Gestapo were on their trail. In 1944, the distinguished Chairman of the German Freethought Movement, and Reichstag Deputy, Max Sievers, was arrested in France by the Gestapo and brought to Brandenburg Prison, where he was executed by the Nazi hangmen. Meanwhile, many of the minor officials of the D.F.V. were treated in like manner, or were martyred in the concentration camps of Buchenwald or Oranienberg, and even when the relatives received the urns of the cremated ashes of the executed, as was the Nazis' practice, they were found to contain, after examination, the mixed ashes of other bodies.

After the capitulation of Germany, some of the old Freethinkers commenced immediately to endeavour to bring back to life the old Freethought Association, and despite the many difficulties—due in some measure to the uncertainty of the attitude of the Occupation Forces—and due to the personal zeal and ardour of these old Freethinkers, the many difficulties were overcome, and on November 30, 1945, the German Freethought Society gained recognition by the Military Government in Hamburg. Meanwhile all over the whole of the occupied zones new branches and "outposts" are being formed, and it is hoped that at the next Congress all these branches will be amalgamated. From all parts of Germany Freethinkers are registering, but it appears that in the American zone, and similarly in the Russian zone, permission to organise the movement is very difficult to obtain.

It is difficult to get a clear picture of the whole Freethought Movement because of the breakdown of communications following

\* "The Freethinker" official organ of the German Freethought Movement.

† See "Rote Revue," No. 15, November, 1945, monthly organ of the Swiss Socialist Party.

on the splitting up of Germany into the four zones, it is however, widely known that the greatest advances have been in the British Zone. This year at the first school leaving ceremony, more than 1,300 children left school to face the future without the usual Communion and Confirmation service, but were instead feted at a public meeting at which Freethought lectures, Humanist homilies and Secular lessons were the order of the day. It is hoped to make this school leaving ceremony a regular feature, albeit slightly irregular, but for a real and essential widening of the activities of the D.F.V. the conditions are not very favourable. The material to hand is infinitesimal, our property is non-existent, the legal position of the Movement (as formerly constituted) is not yet known. The Nazis handed over the considerable property, bonds and assets of the former D.F.V. to a capitalist organisation "The Vaterlandische Versicherungs-Gesellschaft" (The Fatherland Insurance Company). It is obvious that the present D.F.V. must demand a return of their property, at least insofar as the assets are realisable. This proposal is meeting with all sorts of obstacles. Many problems still have to be settled, not the least is the fact that the many offices of the Insurance Company are scattered all over the four zones, and the problem is to ascertain which is the competent authority to deal with the legal aspect.

At the moment there is very little Freethought literature available. The little that individual Freethinkers were able to save before the Nazis seized all, is not yet in circulation. The reprinting and publishing of new books is virtually impossible because of the shortage of paper and the many regulations governing publishing. This is to be deplored for we note that there is a great thirst for knowledge and a hunger for reading material after the many years of oppression. If there was enough paper for Freethought writings and propaganda Freethought would again soon become an important movement in Germany.

We cannot yet estimate the propaganda value of the public meeting, for one thing the majority of the old Freethought speakers and orators are no longer living—they fell to the Nazi Barbarians. Further, the psychological appeal of the meetings and lectures is still unfavourable. The German people, who throughout the era of the Nazi cult and the bombastic displays have been conditioned by measures that we Freethinkers in our arrangements could not possibly offer. Just as the Church, National Socialism did *not* appeal to the reason or the understanding, but rather to "Faith and Belief"—the "Faith in Germany"—the "Faith in a Leader" and as the people were told "Faith in the Almighty" or in the "Future," etc. Such beliefs could not have fallen on such fertile ground had not the German people been conditioned and made receptive by centuries of myth and superstition.

It will require endless laborious work under the existing circumstances to carry the Freethought message to the people, and the labour is not lightened by the fact that hunger stalks the land. The nourishment in war-torn Germany is unspeakably grim. It is to be deplored that those who reap the benefit from these circumstances are the Churches. Many people believe that the conditions of the aftermath of the war can be borne only by seeking the consolation of God—and the Churches. Obviously, the Church has clearly assessed the situation, and the age-old lesson of profiting from miserable conditions has not been forgotten. Never has it been so clearly seen how the Churches exploit these epochs of misery to strengthen their position, or to make capital out of Man's striving for truth and light. How well we understand now why the clergy continue to bless the "murder weapons," how war and post war conditions are used to consolidate their position, and there is always the bombast and display over their "charitable works" which are always so well advertised. There are Church communities that have even advertised a gift of herrings to all people who attend their Church services. During an Election in the South of Germany recently, it was announced from the chancel that

a gift of 50 grammes of fat from the Pope would be made to every "believer." Food parcels from abroad are often distributed as from the Priest, or even as a "gift from Heaven" and with these presents goes a continuous flow of anti-fascist propaganda. To-day, the Church steers clear of Nazi-ism, to-day the Church does not want it to be known that she had ever had anything to do with such things. At the moment—the Church would have us believe—no one has ever fought against the "Brown Pest" as did the Churches. Had it been actually so, had the Church with its great organisation really opposed the Nazis, Mankind would have been spared the Third Reich and the Second World War.

How was it in fact, however? We Freethinkers have not forgotten that Priests long before 1933 officiated at Field Church Services at Nazi parades, or that innumerable parsons conducted S.A. (Brownshirts) marriage ceremonies and considered it an honour to walk through a Guard of Honour to the altar. We do not forget either, the Catholic Centrum (Centre) Party and the "holy Willies" of the other bourgeois parties who made it possible for Hitler's Authoritarian decrees that paved the way for his absolute Dictatorship, nor how the Churches, here, as always, have been ready to co-operate with those in power.

During the evening of July 20, 1944, millions of Germans clenched their fists in powerless wrath as the disappointing news was received that the attempt to assassinate Hitler had failed, many were stunned as they realised that the burden would have to be borne to the bitter end. Others, for example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, published in Vol. 11, July 21, of their Official Gazette the following:—

"We are deeply shocked by to-day's news that an attempt was made to assassinate the Fuehrer and we order that prayers in every church be said in the following form: 'Holy merciful God, from the bottom of our hearts we thank Thee, that Thou hast preserved our Fuehrer from the criminal attempt on his life, that Thou hast safeguarded his life and health, and that Thou hast preserved him for our people in their most dangerous hour. Into Thy hands we commend him, take him into Thy most gracious defence, be his strong helper and saviour, now and in the future, watch over the men who by his side are working strenuously for the People.'"

(Signed) BISHOP DR. MAHARENS.

For the Church Council: VON STALMAN.

To this Dr. Maharens—who, in 1944, was still begging God's blessing for the greatest criminal of all times—Adolf Grimme, Minister of Education for Lower Saxony, dedicated the following words:—

"My first message goes to you Herr Landesbishop (Dr. Maharens); it is a message of thanks; I know that you will accept these thanks only in order to pass it at the same moment to One who is above all Governments and Church Authorities. We have never used our position to poison public life, nor have we ever broken confidence with the People . . ."

The Bishop need not complain about "broken confidence" for this led him to the Dictator Hitler. It is the old story of kow-towing to the Church and what our secular representatives overlook is that contact with the Church must be made with particular care. Our modern scientists do not give a lead to the people, leaving them to wallow in metaphysics. There has scarcely been a Church Service that has not mentioned the *god atom*.

All this should prove how necessary it is to again revive the Freethought Movement in Germany, and we Freethinkers will not rest until we establish the movement as formerly.

G. LAUMANN.

Translation by John Seibert from the "Freidenker," organ of the Swiss Freethought Movement.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS

Sir.—Your expectation, expressed in a recent "Freethinker," that the record of Mr. Gray's association with you since 1905 could be equalled by others, prompts me to say that I first listened to you about the year 1889, when I was 15 years of age. It was in a London park—Victoria, I think. The Christian Lack of Evidence Society was in full blast. Their periodical, mis-called "Lux," was disseminating darkness, and the "Freethinker" light amongst the crowd. Young Mr. Cohen was to speak and excitement ran high. He had spoken disrespectfully of Cherubim the previous week!—and the Christians were out for his blood. Egged on by their exuberant and ill-educated leaders, they made more than one attempt to storm the platform. I remember mixing with the band of stalwarts about the rostrum and enjoying the scrimmage that followed. Finally, with linked arms, the opposition was completely screened off and a quiet hearing obtained for the speaker.

The lectures at these park meetings were my usual Sunday morning fare for some years; evenings being spent usually in the old Hall of Science. There I occasionally "sat under" Bradlaugh (what a noble iconoclast!), Mrs. Besant (before her regrettable embrace of Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy had darkened her brilliant horizon), G. W. Foote (that great and cultured orator), Watts, Standing, Heaford, and many other sincere and self-sacrificing pagans.

They were great days for Freethought. Disputants from the clerical ranks were then more bold than discreet, and common informers were still active in putting the law in motion against "blasphemy." But the brilliant band of heretics that headed the movement could not be suppressed and suffered fine and imprisonment, and bore poverty and contumely bravely for their spoken words and outspoken publications.

And amongst that brilliant band, you, sir, shone conspicuously; young, clear-thinking, hard-hitting. There was never a doubt amongst the rank and file who was the man destined as Foote's successor, and my own enthusiasm for the choice was very vociferous as the official gavel was handed to you.

Well, sir, you have carried the flag of Freethought for many years now, and although it still streams against the wind the army of freethinking folk has grown tremendously since you assumed editorial responsibility and issued your numerous convincing pamphlets and volumes on religious and philosophical subjects. Particularly important, I think, has been your contribution to the questions of Determinism and Freewill. A copy of the 1912 edition is one of my valued possessions, and remains unanswered and unanswerable. Why Dr. Davidson, in a work entitled "Freewill or Determinism" should entirely overlook the existence of this admirable exposition and content himself with a feeble criticism of your "God and the Universe" remains one of the mysteries of authorship. Or is your position so impregnable as to have forced a detour? Anyway it is difficult to understand how cases of parallel evolution, which the Doctor calls upon you to explain, support the doctrine of Freewill; the whole course of physical evolution having been deterministic.

I have noticed with pleasure in the "Freethinker" lately a few short anti-religious poems. Such contributions deserve encouragement. It occurs to me that there must exist many such verses in the work of both major and minor poets, from which a useful anthology might be compiled. Such verses as Fitzgerald's quatrains from "Omar" spring at once to the mind, and no doubt from Shelley, Swinburne, James Thomson and many others, poems could be culled. Amongst your large circle of friends one may perhaps be found competent to undertake the collection and publication of such an anthology.

I must not be tempted to expand this letter further, and so close with my warmest thanks for your successful efforts to emancipate the human mind. May they long continue.—Yours etc.

W. HAWES.

## 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).—Tuesday, October 28, 7 p.m.: "Some Theories of the Nature of Life," Mr. J. S. D. BACON, M.A.

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Wednesday, October 29, 7 p.m.: "Aspects of Evolution." 4th Lecture—"The Biological Evidence," Dr. M. BURTON, D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Work, Pay, and the Good Life," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Colour and Racial Relationships," Dr. J. MITCHELL, B.Sc., Ph.D. (League of Coloured Peoples).

## COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Burnley Branch N.S.S. (Burnley Market).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Enfield.—Saturday, October 25, 6 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

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

## COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S.—No meeting—see World Union of Freethinkers on back page.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute, Science Room).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "A Bishop Looks for Jesus," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (Author of "Julian the Apostate," etc.).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, 270, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Immoral Influence of Religion in Past, Present and Future," Mrs. M. I. WHITEFIELD.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (7, St. James Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: "A Bishop Looks for Jesus," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Censorship and Social Progress," Mr. A. J. STATHAM.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen's Square, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Materialist Position To-day," Mr. COLIN MCCALL (Manchester).

Nottingham Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The Vatican Menace," Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK (N.S.S.).

Women's Section of the Labour Party (Labour Hall, Vernon Street, Nelson).—Friday, October 24, 7-30 p.m.: "Dreams," Mr. J. CLAYTON (N.S.S.).

World Union of Freethinkers.—See back page.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—October 26, 3-30—4-15 p.m.: A Film Show. Every Tuesday: Old Time Dancing; every Wednesday afternoon: Women's Social Hour.

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Saturday, October 25, 3 p.m.

Medical Theatre (The University, Edmund Street).—“The Secular Basis of Morality.”

Chairman: Prof. P. SARGANT FLORENCE.

Speaker: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

Saturday, October 25, 7 p.m.

Medical Theatre.—“The World Policy of the Church of Rome.”

Chairman: CHAPMAN COHEN.

Speakers: AVRO MANHATTAN, CHARLES DUFF.

Sunday, October 26, 10.30 a.m.

Society of Artists Gallery.—“Where Rome Rules.”

Chairman: To be announced.

Speakers: ILSA BAREA, AVRO MANHATTAN.

Sunday, October 26, 3 p.m.

Society of Artists Gallery.—“The Humanist Contribution to Civilisation.”

Chairman: To be announced.

Speaker: JOHN KATZ.

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