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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Religious Struggle for Existence

TO say that the principle of the struggle for existence was one of the most fruitful products of modern thought is to repeat something that is now almost a cant phrase. Unlike many cant phrases, however, it happens to be profoundly true. Not even the law of gravitation had a more profound influence upon thought than the principle of Natural Selection. And, unlike the law of gravitation, the principle of Natural Selection is one that defies disbelief once it is properly stated and clearly understood. There is nothing in the nature of the human intelligence that makes the rejection of the law of gravitation impossible. Whether atoms of matter do attract one another as described by Newton's famous formula is purely a question of proof. It may or may not be so. But once it is understood what Natural Selection means, dissent is impossible. People talk of the proofs of Natural Selection! The thing is proven when it is stated. To say that a particular form of life survives, and to say that it survives because it is the fittest, are, properly understood, identical statements. For the only proof of its fitness is its survival. It survives because it is fittest; it is fittest because it survives. There may be discussion as to the *adequacy* of Natural Selection to do this or that. There can be no question of its truth. That is self-evident.

The bearing of this principle was quickly seen by both friends and enemies. In the first place it struck obviously at those explanations of the origin of the world, beginning with its fauna and flora, which were identical with current religion. What was called the the carpenter theory of creation was put hopelessly out of court by the hypothesis that variation and survival were the really active forces in nature. Instead of admiring the ingenuity of a mechanician designing the inhabitants of a colossal Noah's ark, we had to work out all the details of a single, self-adjusting principle. Instead of applauding the goodness of deity whose care for animate life was evidenced by the adaptation of organism to environment, we were taught to see how a synthesis waits upon all maladaptation, that each case of adaptation is a register of myriads of failures that preceded it.

The theory left God with nothing to do. The statement made some half century since, that evolution turned God out of his own universe was only incorrect so far as it assumed the ownership of the universe by Deity. If he existed, it certainly turned him out. True, it was said there might not be a God behind the evolutionary process. But a God who is merely behind things, a God who, so far as man is immediately concerned does absolutely nothing, is not likely to trouble mankind for long.

One influence of evolution on religion was seen in the production of essays and sermons dealing with what was

called the preparation in history for Christianity. These productions took, on the purely intellectual side, the religious ideas existing before Christianity, and argued that inasmuch as they resembled in some respects doctrines afterwards known as Christian, this was an evolutionary deity's way of preparing the world for Christianity itself, much as the eye in its present form is preceded by less perfect organs of vision. On the historical side it was argued that the widespread Roman Empire, the growth of one language as a vehicle of literary communication, the development of means of communication and transit in the empire, and the feeling of a common citizenship, was God's method of preparing the way for the conquest of Christianity. Of course, this was reading things backwards; but religious reasoning always proceeds in this manner. Scientifically, these people were unconsciously explaining the origin and development of Christianity. They were showing that the ideas and beliefs known as Christian were blends of religious beliefs current long before Christianity, as such, existed, and that the triumph of Christianity was a sociological phenomenon no more demanding a supernatural explanation than does the development of the British Empire.

Certain of the more acute champions of Christianity soon based an argument in favour of their creed on Natural Selection itself. We admit, they said, the principle that it is the fittest which survives. But we are faced by the indisputable fact that Christianity has survived all those Pagan religions with which it was once in conflict. Its survival, therefore, argues fitness; at least, it was fitter to survive than other creeds, otherwise it would have disappeared long since. The evolutionist is, therefore, on the horns of a dilemma. Either he must disown his own philosophy, or he must admit the superiority of Christianity.

The issue is not so simple, nor is the victory so decisive as these controversialists imagined. In the first place, there is some confusion of terms. When they speak of "fittest" they really mean "best." But the two terms are not identical. "Best" implies a moral superiority; while "fittest" is a bare statement of fact without any necessarily ethical implications whatever. That Christianity—or to be accurate, the synthesis of pre-Christian beliefs that came to be called Christianity—survived is a fact, but its survival was no more a proof of its greater worth than the growth of the consumption bacilli at the expense of the human organism is proof of its greater human value. It was the disintegration of the old Roman civil life that gave Christianity its chance. It survived, not because there was no better ethical teaching in the field, but because it was better suited to the mass of the people to whom it appealed, to the few who wished to utilise it for their own ends, and because the social conditions were favourable to its growth.

In the next place, the Christianity that survives to-day is not the Christianity that survived some fifteen centuries

since. Apologists pretend that the two are identical, but this is a mere conventional trick. Not only have various doctrines been considerably modified and others rejected, but the whole religious atmosphere has changed. What now has become of the belief in demoniacal possession, in witchcraft, or cures by relics or miracle? How many of the questions that then divided Christians into warring camps survive now? Most of these questions would now sound to Christians—even if they understood them—like matters that belonged to another religion altogether, if not to another world. As a matter of fact, if worthiness is to depend upon survival, the verdict against Christianity is clear. All that has really survived the centuries is the name and a certain number of qualities of a not altogether admirable description. But as a body of doctrines or beliefs we are not faced to-day with the Christianity of the fourth century, of the fourteenth century, or even of the eighteenth century. The pressure of civilisation would not be denied, and its influence has been shown clearly enough in the continuous "trimming" of Christian teaching to meet contemporary culture.

But in spite of modifications and rejections, it must be admitted that Christian teachings have shown some degree of persistence, often for lengthy periods, and this brings to view an important feature of Christian history. Life, whether it be a question of the organism itself or of ideas, is always a question of adaptation to environment. But in social life there is such a thing as an artificially maintained environment in order to give beliefs, that might otherwise die out, a lease of life. On the positive side a system of education to a given end with elaborate ceremonials, and on the negative side the careful exclusion of knowledge and of all influences calculated to shake the security of certain opinions, are all so many efforts to create and maintain an environment favourable to a particular set of beliefs. This policy is not confined to religion, but it is in connection with religion that we see it in its clearest and most evil aspect. And it is a simple statement of historic fact that by far the larger portion of the energies of the Christian Church has been spent in creating an environment without which Christianity would have passed away with the disappearance of the conditions that gave it birth. The control of education by the Churches, the tabooing of certain scientific and ethical and social teaching, the suppression of heresy and Free thought, the guarding of the young both in the home and in the school from influences that would disturb their religious faith, are all examples of the means by which organised Christianity has striven to create an environment favourable to itself.

It is this that always placed the Christian Churches in opposition to progressive thought. Instinctively it realised that every new idea, every progressive movement was a disruptive force in the environment it sought to maintain. Every change—social, moral, or intellectual—represented a modification in the environment which, if it persisted, necessitated a corresponding modification of Christian teaching. In many directions, and for considerable periods of time, the Churches were successful in their efforts; but in the end the teaching has had to give way, with the result that Christian history represents a series of losing engagements with developmental forces, destruction and wasted energy being the only results that could be placed to the credit of the Christian faith.

So far, then, as Christianity has survived, it does not argue that it survived because of its superiority over competing forms. There has, indeed, been no competition worth speaking about. A group of animals fighting against climate or difficulties in the way of getting food, survive because of some genuine natural advantage. In the contest of ideas and systems certain of them survive because they are, for the time at least, more in harmony with contemporary intellectual conditions. But the survival of Christianity was due entirely to the accident of its possessing power enough to crush its enemies with weapons that were really alien to the contest. In the early ages the criticisms of cultured pagans were not removed by adequate replies or by superior reasoning, but by the civil power of the Church ruthlessly stamping out their writing. A little later the dungeon and the stake served the same purpose still more effectually. And, later still, legal imprisonment and social boycott has enabled Christianity to secure a passing victory over its enemies. Tried by any reasonable application of the principle of Natural Selection, the survival of Christianity proves nothing—except how great an evil the accidental possession of power may be in unscrupulous hands. And if there is one thing more than another that clearly demonstrates its intellectual and moral unworthiness, it is that, in spite of all that has been, and is being done, Christian belief represents a declining force in the life of civilised mankind.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ON JESUS AGAIN

HOWEVER scarce paper may be for newspapers and other journals, and however short is the supply of absolutely necessary school books and the works of standard authors, there seems to be no end of books about Jesus Christ. So long as they do not attack him, and the approach is religiously reverent, a new book about him is always welcome; and even if not bought in a huge edition like "Forever Amber," it can nearly always be found in our public libraries. It is far better for the Church that Jesus be talked about and the Gospels discussed than that they both should be ignored.

Even if Jesus comes in a work of fiction, that is better than nothing, especially if the romance shows him as a Wonder Worker (with a capital "W") or a Man (with a capital "M") and depicts him with his heart almost torn to pieces at the sufferings of the poor. As the poor actually form the greater part of our population, by showing Jesus as one of themselves, never thinking about such materialistic dross as money, and giving them for nothing (through miracles) plenty to eat and drink, and also advising the idle rich to sell all they have and give to the poor (depicting the poor in this way as always wanting something for nothing is characteristic of the Gospels and Jesus), it is considered that the poor will be his greatest supporters—indeed they are, especially the poor in spirit. If they did a little independent thinking for themselves instead of allowing theologians and Reverent Rationalists to think for them, the popularity of "our Lord" might well be on the wane.

However, we must take the world as we find it, and there can be no doubt that all sorts of people, even if they do not believe in God, will enthusiastically "follow" Jesus as the Master (with a capital "M"). The other evening, for example, an "unbelieving" scientist discussed Christianity with a divine, and the first thing the scientist said was that he swallowed practically the whole of the "Christian ethic" and regulated his life entirely by the teachings of Jesus. This did not, it is true, placate his opponent, who thought he ought to swallow the miracles.

the Virgin Birth, and the Resurrection, as well, and the discussion became most hopelessly boring. I suspect that if the scientist had insisted on saying that he opposed both the "Christian ethic" and the miracles, the B.B.C. would have said "no"; in any case it was a most useless debate.

Then here we have the Bishop of Chelmsford delighted because an English prisoner-of-war wiled away the dreary months of captivity by writing "The Christ of All Nations." The author, Mr. Paul Guinness, is a complete believer—nothing too stupid or absurd in the life of Jesus he is not prepared to swallow, like the Bishop—and he set to work to make of the four Gospels one comprehensive whole, a sort of harmony, but better than any previous harmony.

Needless to say, both the Bishop and Mr. Guinness have not the slightest sympathy with such absurd theories as the one that Jesus is as much a myth as Osiris—and as he is supported by hosts of Rationalists, most of them very reverent, they can afford to laugh at ignorant Atheists or blatant materialists like myself.

Then there are the fiction writers who "reconstruct" the story of Jesus from the Gospels and, when hard up for ideas, never hesitate to call in the Apocryphal Gospels or any legend to fill in gaps. The most striking example of this is George Moore's "Brook Kerith," certainly a masterpiece, as indeed one would expect from the author of "Esther Waters" and other famous novels. Not so well known is the particular story dealing with Jesus in Eugene Sue's "Mysteries of the People." Sue's "Mysteries of Paris" almost rivalled Dumas' "Count of Monte Cristo" in popularity, and can still be read as a great thriller which few modern writers can equal. His last years were spent in writing a series of short romances dealing with the constant struggle between the "aristocrat" and the "worker" beginning with the conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar, and finishing with the revolution in France of 1848; and whatever may be said of the place in literature Sue holds, no one can deny his being a great story teller. The "Mysteries of the People" caused a tremendous furore and the author and publishers were haled before the courts, the French Government doing its best to suppress the book—or books, for it was in 16 volumes. In one of the early volumes, Jesus is depicted as fighting for the poor, thus rousing the hatred of the governing classes, Roman and Jew, and being put to death as a troublesome agitator. Sue died while the case was being tried, but his publishers were condemned to heavy fines and imprisonment. All this in the France of not quite 100 years ago.

But the story of Jesus is by no means exhausted. Once again we have him portrayed in fiction in "Now, In This Time," by Leon de Sousa (Watts and Co., 10s. 6d.). Needless to say, almost any novelist allowing his imagination full play can construct a very readable romance from the Gospels and work in everything he agrees with, and boycott everything he does not like, and Mr. de Sousa is no exception. It is true he only deals with Jesus during the last fortnight of his life, and so avoids many awkward stories. I should have liked his opinion of the beautiful account of Jesus being carried about by a devil—but no doubt he would say he does not believe it. Like so many of the previous writers, Mr. de Sousa calls in the Apocryphal Gospels, and tries to excuse the contempt the Gospels show Jesus has for His mother by the well-worn excuse in one instance that "there is good evidence to show that the apparent rudeness of Jesus' expression is due to a mistranslation."

The hero of "Now, In This Time" is an Anglo-Catholic priest who injures his head in an accident, and imagines he is transported to Palestine during those 14 hectic days when Jesus was making history. There, he is a young Alexandrian Jew called Demetrios, and he meets all the Biblical characters made famous by the Gospel story, and a goodly number conjured up by the author's vivid imagination. The background of all this is most graphically sketched in—not unlike that very fine story by Anatole France, "The Procurator of Judea"; and in addition Mr. de Sousa gives his own account of the incidents which led

up to the crucifixion of Jesus. For this, I suspect he partly follows Dr. Eisler's "The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist"—a book which Sir Michael Sadler said "had done for the twentieth century what Renan had done for the nineteenth." If I remember aright, Dr. Eisler claimed that Jesus really was the King of the Jews, a robber chief with 900 brigand followers and, when he wasn't fulfilling his kingly duties and robbing people, he was discussing the Pentateuch with Talmudic rabbis. The Gospel writers had got the dates all wrong, for Jesus was really crucified about the year 21 A.D.; in which case, by the way, he could not have "suffered" under Pontius Pilate—as claimed by Mr. de Sousa.

For those who like their "history" served up in the form of fiction, I can heartily recommend "Now, In This Time"—and particularly to all Reverent Rationalists who are determined to preserve Jesus at all costs. The picture of him there shown is the well-known "Man of Sorrows" without a spark of humour, nor a single smile, his face often convulsed in agony—exactly why is not particularly clear—contemptuous of money, never doing a scrap of work and, except for the Passover Supper, never bothering about food either. I have often wondered what would have happened to Jesus and all these Divine heroes if, just when they were about to deliver one of their famous harangues or parables or marvellous ethical teachings, they were suffering from a violent cold and therefore had to punctuate what they said with most unromantic sneezes or coughs. Other things which never bothered these Gods, or Sons of Gods, or Masters, or "Crucified" ones, were violent extremes of heat or cold. What would have happened to the Sermon on the Mount or Plain if the day had been oppressively hot, or a thunderstorm had taken place? There were no umbrellas then, or municipal shelters, and the clothes the "poor" wore in those days must have been pretty poor stuff. Would Jesus, for example, have bravely carried on while the audience rushed helter-skelter for any possible shelter?

Mr. de Sousa has nothing to do with miracles except in a few cases of healing by "touch"—I expect he simply hadn't the heart to deny this attribute to his most melancholy Master. And as almost all works of fiction must have a villain, Judas Iscariot is retained to fill that dishonourable function. Judas, of course, looked exactly like a villain, and he was always trembling—"No need to wonder what the Gospel writer meant," comments Mr. de Sousa, "when he said the devil had entered into Judas—the devil of lust." Most of us, when young, of course, used to think it was his unending greed for money which made Judas betray his Master; but after all, the devil of lust or the devil of greed—what does it matter? The story of Judas had to be invented anyway as a contrast to the saintly and God-like Hero, and I should not be surprised to learn that some reverent believers would rather give up Jesus than Judas. What about our Fascists?

One could say something about the book from the theological point of view, but after all no one ever takes a work of fiction literally as history. For myself, such books only confirm my unshaken view: that the story of Jesus, Judas, Peter, Andrew, James, Mary, and all the others, is myth and legend, and that there never was a Jesus of Nazareth at any time. Not only is Mr. de Sousa's book fiction—but so is almost the whole of the New Testament. And to that view most sensible people will eventually come.

H. CUTNER.

THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES, to which is added THE LAW OF NATURE. By C. F. Volney. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an introduction. Price, post free, 3s. 2d.

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ACID DROPS

Bishop Barnes has been very much to the fore of late. The reason is that he has published "The Rise of Christianity" which gives away a great deal of the historic quality of Christianity. The Bishop of Birmingham has indeed given so much away that his brother Bishops and the Laity are beginning to ask him why he does not give up the Church. Many non-Christians are asking the same thing, but to date, no satisfactory answer has been given. Of course, by ignoring some of the essentials of real Christianity, and retaining others, Jesus may yet be turned into a red-hot Atheist. We prefer Dr. Barnes to our pair of Archbishops, but we must point out that the latter are the more faithful to Christianity.

As we might have guessed, Dr. Barnes hangs on to a Jesus that never existed. We do not mean that at some time, somewhere, someone introduced himself as a son of God with a special message from his Father, this sort of thing is very common indeed, it began thousands of years ago. Gods are very plentiful and they flourish in proportion to the development of the people. The god Jesus is more or less identical with other gods, kind and terrible, wise and foolish. They are all of the same mould, because all gods are more or less portrayed by human ideas and feelings. That is why sooner or later gods follow the course of humans.

The fact is that if Jesus ever existed, and if he taught mankind how to behave, we can thank him for so doing, and then forget about him as we forget the myriads of men and women who have also done the same thing. Jesus came to us as a god, and gods are mere phantasies—blunders that man has made in his search for knowledge. Jesus came as all gods have come and their burden increases the longer they live in the human mind. When we are dealing with the Jesus Christ of the Churches we are no longer in the realm of commonsense but in the realm of "Fe-fo-fi-fum."

We all know that, given the opportunity, the Catholic Church does not hesitate as to the quality of the methods it uses to benefit the Papacy. The methods are sometimes underhand, it depends entirely on which way the wind blows. The latest exhibition of the Vatican is in connection with the "pictures." We agree that some of the "shows" are very poor, but we doubt very much whether the Catholic Churches are the only ones capable of giving and uplifting criticism of the "movies." There are, of course, certain things that are "unshowable," but for an organised body of Catholics to regulate which films are fit, and which are unfit for exhibition is sheer impudence, and can only lead to larger doses of religion and less art. With the Roman Catholic Church dominating the tone of the "pictures" a lower level is almost certain to be reached.

We have no knowledge concerning the Rev. Quentin Morris, Vicar of All Souls, Hampstead, but we understand the disgust of one priest when another declares he does not believe in miracles. Evidently this is not playing the game. The Rev. Morris is angry with Bishop Barnes because he laughs at the idea of miracles, yet the Christian religion simply teems with miracles of one kind or another. Mr. Morris thinks, first, that a religion without a miracle is very dull, second that it is not playing the game to laugh at something that has brought multitudes to the feet of Jesus.

The Rev. Mr. Morris then proceeds to tell us that he knows of a woman who had lost the use of her limbs and prayed to the Lord, whereat she rose from her knees and was cured. Now, we do not think the priest is telling a lie; he may have stretched the facts a little. For first, he did not see the Lord, he just heard about him; second, he does not know exactly what was wrong with the lady, or that there was anything materially wrong with her limbs. In many cases, illnesses have, on examination, been found to be a matter of self-deception. Any doctor will tell Mr. Morris that such cases are well known, and many people have died with all the symptoms of a disease they never had.

The Roman Church still stands by the miracle of a few years ago which occurred in Fatima, Portugal. It was the "number one" of all miracles, it was better than Jesus being born without a father. In this case "Our Lady" came down from Heaven and talked to three children, but the greatest trick of all was when the Sun left its place in the heavens and danced up and down, and twirled round and round. The "Universe" puts it thus: "To the dazzled eyes of the people, whose attitude carried us back to Biblical times, and who with pale faces saw the Sun tremble and make a sudden move, the Sun danced, to use the typical expression of the peasants." The original yarn was published in England only a few years ago, and as it stands, it is the most impudent story one could imagine.

We can quite believe that during the war those men who were on active service appreciated the kindness of many of the clergy who accompanied the forces. Human nature being what it is, we should expect that the majority of clergymen did many services to the men who were far from home and human decency. But it was not only the Clergy who helped the men in their tasks and in their loneliness. After all, soldiers were humans before they were soldiers, and the clergymen were humans before they were padres in the army. Why, then, should the religious press, and the parson in his pulpit, lay stress on the fact that parsons in the forces behave themselves with humanity? And further, in what way is kindness expressed by a priest different from the kindness expressed by a non-religionist? We are not surprised when a priest turns out to be a "man." We expect a proportion of preachers to be men. It is the religious press and the official preachers who are surprised when decency is to be found in a Church. If these religionists would forget their religion and examine human nature they will be surprised at what they will find.

There is some capital material for a joke in the study of religion, and the more profound, the more important, the better the material. For example. Someone has been asking the "Universe" why at a religious service at which wine and water are used, wine only is blessed. The "Universe", with real humour, replied that wine is a symbol of divinity, while water is not. That really displays a sense of humour in a situation where joking is almost a deadly sin. We take it that the distinction is that water needs praising, but there is a rush for wine of a good quality. We may note that when Jesus found the wine running short at Cana, he turned the water into wine, and the people said the last wine was better than the first. The followers of Jesus apparently knew the difference between a good and a bad drink.

Another interesting question is whether Jesus ate flesh. We are inclined to believe that Jesus not only ate flesh, but that he preserved some of it to be used by the restaurants of to-day. There is a good deal of humour in the New Testament if it is read with care.

More trouble over the Jews and Palestine. This time it is the Archbishop of York who is dismayed over the possibility of the "Holy Places" being handed over. He says that "to hand over directly or indirectly these sacred places to the Jews would result in an outcry of indignation throughout the whole of Christendom." But surely if we follow the fantastic course of Christianity, we note that Palestine belonged to the Jews before it belonged to Christians, it also belonged to others before the Jews, and it seems ridiculous that there should be any other nowadays. It is expected that a question may be raised in the House of Lords. In that case the tragedy may end in burlesque in which the Archbishop will play a leading part.

Public opinion is a bully, and like all bullies it is often cowardly, it threatens only so long as the object of its threat is weak. When that object gains strength, public opinion fawns. It fathers no children and few friends. It never hurts a liar, it never angers a hypocrite. It can only vent its spleen on the comparatively honest few who are daring enough to tell it to go to hell.

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SUGAR PLUMS

We see that someone is striving to re-create the belief in the end of the World. That was indicated in the New Testament and has never been completely dropped. Jesus gave some indication that he would come back, but up to date, he has not carried out his promise. The superstition reached its greatest point about the twelfth century. The belief has never died out, but there is one good feature about, when Jesus comes back he will take the Christians with him. Our sympathy flows to the angels.

The Rev. Mr. Willcocks says in "Reynolds" that Christianity is "A way of life." What a profound consideration. We have heard many of our leading Christians say that Christianity is "A Way of Life." We agree; but so is the profession of the professional burglar, the forger of bank-notes, the bookmaker on a racecourse, and the man who is struggling for a job in the House of Commons, etc. We all have a "way of life." The question is: what is the right way? The parson does not say.

Not quite so many as in earlier days, nevertheless still interesting, are the rapid outpourings by chaplains to the Forces on the way in which they helped the "boys" with their letter writing—many were published in the daily press—with particular emphasis on the assertion that the "boys" were always delighted with the Church services, and how much the "boys" relied on the ministers of religion. We, however, know better from those who were on the spot, and also judging from the large number of "Freethinkers" that were sent from our premises to the Forces. This makes the latest utterance of the new Bishop of London, Dr. Wand, rather strange when he says that "to-day if a soldier wishes to attend Church he has to take his moral courage in both hands and face the surprise, and sometimes the sneers, of his comrades." The idea of the soldier whose sole and only comfort is found in church and prayer is, if not already dead, then at least dying out. It is rather a pity even though we do not expect that the Bishop does not face the facts and admit that there is a steady decline in church going.

After striving with might and main to prevent Sunday entertainments some Christian preachers have thrown up the sponge. The Entertainment Committee of Liverpool have decided that cinemas may open on Sundays and Good Fridays. A lawyer, representing the Churches says that the Churches do not oppose Sunday entertainments as such, but that their complaint and opposition is concerned solely on questions of decency. The

change in opinion is very marked, and it should be noted that the Churches give way only when there is no hope of preventing a free Sunday. We would be pleased to hear what power, or judgment, justifies the Churches' interference with amusements of any kind.

A Gallup Poll has been inquiring from a number of people casually selected as to whether the birch should be used in schools. Opinions were equally divided. Had, however, the answers been classified, we believe that it would be found that those in favour of the birch in schools, had themselves been birched, and it would be a case of "What was good enough for me, is good enough for my son." We ourselves are satisfied that the use of the whip is more illustrative of the inability of the teacher rather than the "wickedness" of the pupil. Many teachers fail to realise that when the whip begins to flash, the only weapon of self-defence the pupil can use is to fail to learn the lessons put before him. Almost anyone can rule a class with a whip, it takes skill for the teacher to induce a pupil to work together for a common purpose.

The Government still abides by, its decision to abolish the petrol ration. We wonder whether that decision will operate for all members of Parliament? Consider how much petrol will be used for "Parliamentary duties." We see no reason why Members of Parliament should not be subject to the same rules that apply to ordinary folk, it would do our Members of Parliament some good to have a taste of the inconvenience that troubles ordinary folk. If "late hours" are to be given as an excuse, we would suggest commencing their work earlier. Working at midnight is an old practice. It should be ended.

THE CHILD IN SOCIAL EVOLUTION

OBSERVERS have frequently noted the extreme precocity of mental development among the children of primitive peoples. The faculties seem to ripen prematurely as compared with those of the children of historical and literate peoples. This is probably caused by the exigencies of life that surround the primitive child. The bareness and meagreness of the culture . . . forces the youngster to bestir himself immediately for self-support. Self-reliance, rather than reliance upon the social heritage and accumulated surplus means, sharpens the senses and provokes the mental faculties. There is also evident a marked tendency to learn to grasp things that are newly presented. The capacity to learn seems more highly accentuated than in the modern child. The potentialities for mental improvement and advancement, we are told, are as great as those of the modern child. Thus, in New Zealand it has been found that Maori children, when they can be induced to work, are quite equal to their white school-fellows. Fijian boys educated in Sydney have been proved to be equal to the average; Tongan boys who have never left their islands write shorthand and solve problems in higher mathematics. Of the Bantu youth it has been said also that "in mission schools children of early age are found to keep pace with those of white parents. In some respects they are the higher of the two." The Australian children "learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, more easily than white children." It does not appear, therefore, that an essentially different type of mentality is necessary to comprehend a developed culture with its language, ways, customs and social processes. A body of culture is a veneer which must be acquired anew, and must be transmitted artificially to each generation.

The perspicacity of the primitive child comes to a dead halt, however, about puberty. On this a unanimity of opinion also exists. The declaration is made of the Africans that, "after the native reaches the age of twelve or fifteen his faculties, which are at first fairly quick, grow blunt and dull, his understanding becomes sluggish, he withdraws into himself, the childishness of his primitive nature crystallises, and henceforth he will never exceed the height to which the swift progress of his early days has carried him." Torday believes therefore

that "the highest period of the intellectual life of the negro is between the ages of ten and twelve."

. . . Many reasons have been assigned to explain this "mental ossification," and decay of the native child at puberty. The physical exhaustion consequent upon excessive lubricity is offered by Maughan as an explanation of the lethargy of mind. Torday contends that "the highest period of intellectual life of the negro is between the ages of ten and twelve; after that age he falls into a slough of sensibility, and his powers fall off." . . . In speaking of the Baholoholo of Central Africa, Schmidt offers a summary of the problem. "Undoubtedly extracted from his milieu, he would become an intellectual machine of the first order, a factor of great progress. Unfortunately, abuse of the pipe, intoxicating drinks, sexual indulgences and the fear of sorcerers rapidly stifle all his nascent talent. At twenty years he is nothing but an ignorant savage whose promise has been forever destroyed." All this excessive over-indulgence is apparently, therefore, an aspect of the culture of the folk so that it is well to say that the falling-off in mental development is caused by the limited powers and extent of the folk-ways and the mores of the group.

The development of the individual is bound up securely with the give-and-takes of the social contacts. The child of any culture, however well elaborated this may be, is born an utter stranger to these ways, customs, institutions, and beliefs of the folk. There is no reason to suppose that a more marked disposition toward the approved conduct in life is the endowment of the modern child than it is of the child of the simpler society. Children of all races start on a practical plane of equality, biologically. Culture, like clothing itself, must be fastened upon the child making for an early conformity. Social pressure inevitably tends slowly to attach to the child those marks as in the system of naming, mutilations, reception to the folk and its attendant spirits, which make him typical and recognisable as a member of the tribe. In this way the cohesion of the folk is reaffirmed by conferring upon its new arrivals the insignia of membership in it.

Until the child has assumed these preliminary marks and forms of group-fellowship, he is hardly considered human. Without the benefit of the ways and modes of his people he is an "infant." Infancy, in the social sense, is the period in which the child waits upon his society to be slowly drawn within its portals. During these years each child relearns afresh the technique of the ways of self-maintenance and grasps unwittingly the system of sentiments which make for the preservation of the coherence of folk-lore. These years are fewer in the societies of simpler culture as there is less to be learned. As society progresses, infancy is prolonged and the process of socialisation becomes necessarily more systematised, more tortuous and more specialised. At the same time a larger and larger part of the efforts of the group—a larger number of persons and a more extensive material equipment—is reserved for this process.

We have mentioned also the observable signs by which the child attains worth and semblance of maturity in the cultural sense. Growth is punctuated by definitive ceremonial observances as the child first assumes clothing, takes up hunting, begins to speak intelligibly and the like. Without a written language, notice of these significant steps can be brought to consciousness and retained in the memory of the tribe's fellows by the most direct methods of bombarding and striking the senses through feasts, bodily disfigurements, and ceremonies. It is not long, however, before the child is independently bestirring himself by the side of the physically adult; he is socially mature, and has acquired the culture of the group; for the child in its development generally recapitulates the culture history of its folk. In the more developed societies, by virtue of cultural aids alone, for example, and elaborate language-apparatus, the recapitulation may be appreciably telescoped and many steps of culture history omitted. Where this is not extensive, however . . . it is not long before the infantile dependency is dropped, a care-free childhood left behind, and the child becomes the man. At the

same time the mental development follows the same path. The repressive weight of a harsh struggle for food and shelter with the aid of a thin culture-stratum confines the individual early to a stagnated monotony and interests.

The child . . . is heir to a culture which has been wrought by the efforts of countless individuals that have preceded him, fused into a type or organic consistency. This is as real an inheritance as the aspects and elements of the geographical environment itself. It is necessary for the child to acquaint himself with this heritage. To accomplish this there is no need to recapitulate the trials and struggles of the evolution of the folk's culture history *in toto*. The set-backs and failures are omitted, and the child is granted the net results of his long history of trial and error in the efforts of his forbears to accommodate their lives to the environment of nature and of other men. Each generation is indeed a stranger to its culture, but this crystallisation of the culture-history of the folk handed down soon elevates it into a social setting from which to start the life-activity of a new day.

The Child in Primitive Society,
by N. MILLER, pp. 124-30.

HYPNOTISM

II

THE Behaviourist school of psychologists have conducted many experiments; perhaps those on Helen Keller, the deaf mute, are the most important. These experiments show that there is a movement of the larynx, if not of the lips and tongue, when we are thinking; that thinking is talking to ourselves. They also show, in the case of the deaf mute, that she was thinking with a twitching of the fingers. Thinking then, involves other parts of the nervous system as well as the brain, and even of the whole organism. And so we can say with J. B. Watson, the whole man thinks. The nervous system operates as a whole and as part of the whole organism. In endeavouring to understand the function of the nervous system we can go further. Paracelsus' analogy of magnetism does not seem so far fetched now that we realise that light, heat and sound, like magnetism, are electro-magnetic. But he was too much of a mystic to realise the physical aspect of his idea. And Mesmer's mystical idea of a magnetic influence is really the reverse of the case. We know now that nervous action is also electrical. Even without the evidence of electro-encephalography, or of experiments in the psycho-physiological laboratory; the fact that Galvani used the nerves of a frog's leg as the first galvanometer is sufficient to show that the function of the nervous system is electrical. And we know that electricity operates in a circuit. A break in the circuit or a short circuit will upset the operation. It operates as a whole. We can then the better appreciate the character of both structure and function of the nervous system. We might also consider the electro-magnetic fact of hysteresis, or time lag; and see a relation not only between the structure and function, but also to the stimulus applied. If we want a fanciful analogy we might think of the nervous system as like a National Electric Grid System and of hypnotism as nature's way of shedding the load to avoid saturation.

In connecting hysteresis, or time lag, with hypnotism, or mental fatigue, we can also connect it with both memory and hysteria. And if we consider this as forces operating one upon the other, we also realise that we have not only forces operating as between organism and environment, but also within the organism itself. And if we conceive these as feelings or desires, that is subjectively, the character of the operation is seen from another angle. We realise the physical necessity for sleep, and see a connection between this and fatigue. We also see the necessity for food, and also a connection between this and fatigue. Now, if we

go to bed to sleep, but we are hungry, the desire for sleep is counter-balanced by the desire to seek food. The craving for food keeps us awake, the two desires are incompatible. We cannot satisfy both desires. The fatigue is both physical and mental. Our mind is fatigued and we lose control. The visions or thoughts become jumbled up. We dream and see in this jumble the object of desire, the desire for food. Thus, in this mental fatigue or hypnosis, we gain the satisfaction of wish-fulfilment, and are able to sleep. The two desires cannot both be satisfied, and the fatigue is an example of hysteresis, or time lag; so that the exercise of the desire for food is postponed. The fact that we cannot do two things at once necessitates the suppression of one, and hypnosis is its mechanism.

As in our dreams, so also in our waking moments. In concentrating our attention, shall we say, on a piece of work, we are often oblivious of our surroundings. In concentrating our sense of sight, we may be unaware of someone talking to us; that is, oblivious so far as the sense of hearing is concerned. Just as in our observation of the bright light, other things were hazy, so also here. The degree of oblivion being proportionate to the effort needed in our concentration. The brightness of the light would normally make us turn our eyes away, the concentration needs effort. So also does our piece of work need effort; and persistent mental effort may even lead to complete oblivion. The peculiar thing about psychology is that we usually get hold of the wrong end of the stick. We think that in concentrating on the bright light or piece of work, that we are fully conscious, conveniently forgetting all else. We are conscious of the effort required and not of the oblivion of the fatigue, which is consequent upon this exertion. In concentrating our attention on the trees, we fail to see the wood. We see what we want to see and we do not see what we do not want to see. We take the line of least resistance, or of least effort. We are oblivious even of the character of the desire that is being suppressed. We forget painful experiences which should, if remembered, act as warning; and we are unaware of the character of the stimulus to which we respond, or of our own response. The complexity of incompatible desires is accentuated in the complexity of social life, for man is both an individual and a social animal. We speak of the power of words, the charm of music, and the magic of the arts. But these are not mystical influences acting upon us. There is no mystical "power" in theological shibboleths or political slogans, nor is there "charm" in a series of sounds. The "power" lies in our reactions to these things; in our own reactions; the force is our own.

Hypnotism is not a mystical influence acting upon us, but the mental fatigue which we display. And understanding of hypnotism is necessary to an understanding of psychology, for it is a function of the nervous system.

H. H. PREECE.

CORRESPONDENCE

LEGAL MARRIAGE.

Sir,—Being a regular reader of your weekly I was interested in your paragraph relating to marriage. I would ask for information relating to the following expression of opinion; the words concerned are:—"A parson has to carry his secular licence before he can give a legal licence that a couple are married."

The only authority for performing a marriage in a Church (of the Church of England), is the authority given at his ordination by the ecclesiastical person performing the ceremony. The law governing the ceremony is: "Any Clergyman marrying persons without Banns of Licence, or any person falsely pretending to be in Holy Orders and solemnising marriage according to the rites of the Church of England, is guilty of felony, and liable to Penal Servitude for such offence." The Act of Parliament (19 and 20 Vict., c.119,s.II) orders that "A civil Registrar's Licence is not available for a church marriage." As you, I feel sure, would

wish to be accurate, would you explain what is meant by "A parson has to carry his secular licence before he can give a legal licence that a couple are married."—Yours, etc.,

FREDERICK H. E. HARTITT,
Secretary, C.E.S., Rector: St. Mary-at-Hill.

(What we mean is that no Clergyman as a Clergyman has the power to sanction a marriage. There is only one legal marriage in England and that must be performed in a building licensed by the Secular State and carried out by one who is licensed by the State.—C. C.)

CHALLENGING GOD.

Sir,—You will no doubt have noticed how the Lord struck a man dead in Torquay just "when he had been saved". see "Daily Mirror" of September 23, 1947.

One would think that that Myth would look after His sheep, especially during their worship.

It has often been my pleasure to hear Mr. H. Day, on the Bradford Car Park, challenge this famous God to strike him dead within five minutes, and I am only wondering what the godite's press would look like if such an unfortunate incident as a collapse at that particular moment were to happen.

I have been in Cumberland now for 18 months and, strange as it may seem to you, the "Freethinker" was utterly unknown here. In fact, all people, or rather most of them, are the same in all these out of the way places, but I am awfully glad to be able to report that I have several people now who are looking forward every week to read my copy.—Yours, etc., H. CEHA.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.).—Tuesday, November 18, 7 p.m.: "Fear, Conscience and Society," Dr. RANYARD WEST.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Heresy—Yesterday and To-day," The Rev. F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Jewish Problem in the Post-War World," Mr. D. COHEN.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Accrington (Kings Hall Cinema).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Religion and Morals," Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Saturday, November 15: "The Threat of World Domination," Mr. TOM MILLINGTON.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Man," Mr. J. M. THORNTON, B.Sc.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Conflicting Concepts of Democracy," Mr. W. S. EVANS, M.A., Ph.D.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Science and Morality," Mr. H. WOODHEAD.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Story of Leicestershire," Mr. BERNARD McQUILLEN.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "A Political Theory of the State for Englishmen," Mr. F. J. RIDDEN. (Ruskin College).

HOW AND WHY I BECAME AN ATHEIST

THE more I studied the religions (vide my six articles on the older faiths in "The Freethinker," April/May, 1947), their prehistoric origins and history, the more fascinated I became with the general philosophic research for knowledge, and truth at all costs. Sir James Fraser's "Golden Bough" particularly interested me with its research into primitive superstitions, so obviously the origin of all religions. Sir James shows us primitive man wonderfully and fearfully engaged in creating gods and devils in his own image and likeness to account for all the fearsome mysteries—sun, death, dreams, thunder, fire, etc., etc.—by which he found himself surrounded. I read all the R.P.A. sixpenny reprints, a liberal education in themselves. For these I owe the Association my lifelong gratitude. I was now beginning to have suspicions as to why such studies and inquiries had never even been mentioned to us at school, though so clearly of the first importance; the reason for the complete blackout regarding the real original sources of religious beliefs. Anyway, it all began to look very fishy to me.

It had always been tacitly understood that the Christian god was practically a white man, and the illustrations in my Bible certainly pictured him as an English gentleman, though in native rig. And yet I knew that the American plantation negroes always figured him as a black man. Why, indeed, should any particular colour have been honoured above the others?

I was at this time making perhaps the most momentous discovery of my adult life, namely, that WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OPINIONS ARE WORTHLESS. I was also, almost imperceptibly, coining for myself another apothegm, to the effect that reading without thinking is sterile and thinking without reading is futile. Such ideas seem obvious enough, of course, when pointed out to one, but they sometimes need this pointing out. The latter epigram I kept in mind when critically reading the philosophers, from Socrates to Nietzsche.

I had found out, *inter alia*, that every one of the characteristic acts and encounters of the Christian Saviour god had already been related in the Holy Scriptures of one or several of the previous Saviour gods (why hadn't I been told about them?) centuries before Christ. That some of these stories and customs such as, e.g., the virgin birth, the sacrificial death and resurrection, and the rite of Holy Communion (symbolic partaking of the flesh and blood of the god) were thousands of years older than our New Testament. All the moral precepts in the New Testament still current I found in the life and works of one of the greatest and best of teachers in the history of mankind—Confucius, 500 B.C., and many similar, again, in the Holy Scriptures of Egypt even 2,000 years before him. I noticed that both Confucius and Buddha (about one-third of the human race worships Buddha) strongly advised their disciples to have nothing to do with supernatural beliefs, "which lead men into foolishness." I found our "Sermon on the Mount" almost word for word in the Buddhist "Beatitudes" 500 B.C., and so on, and so on. In fact there did not seem to be one single original act, miraculous event or ethic in the whole Christian set-up.

Travelling in the polyglot East one soon observed how every worshipper is utterly convinced that salvation depends on belief in the particular god or gods that he was as a child made to believe in; that all the other gods are false, and that salvation therefore is governed by geography. Whether you're saved or damned depends on which country or which side of the frontier you were born and brought up in. Had the Pope been born in Thibet or Africa his religious "convictions" would have been fanatically for Buddha or for Ju Ju. I remember being very much impressed by this idea of belief "by-the-map." I was struck by the very puerile nature of what all the religions offer, and accept, as evidence for their supernatural claims; and also by the fact that every Believer can see

at once the absurdity of the beliefs of the other godites but firmly shuts his eyes to exactly the same absurdities in his own!

My study of the Lives and Miracles of the Christian Saints, which reminded me of some of the primitive old Brahman legends, and in which the raising of people from the dead is treated as a quite normal stunt for a saint, left me absolutely flabbergasted at the colossal credulity of the religious mentality. I was told that Catholic children are actually made to believe these fantastic tales, the idea being, of course, to deliberately train their young minds in credulity, so as to prepare them for the still stronger instalments to follow!

An authoritative (Papal) message says: "With rare exceptions it is obligatory that aspirants to the sainthood should have performed at least two miracles after their death" (I have a printed cutting of this order.)

Zola's (unbowdlerised French) books, "Rome" and "Lourdes," in conjunction with what I had already observed for myself in France, Italy and Malta, led me to suspect that the Vatican was nothing more or less than a vast power-grasping, money-making racket, only thinly disguised under a hypocritical cloak of religion.

M. C. BROTHERTON, ComDR., R.N.
(To be concluded)

TWO NAUGHTY NUNS!

Alas, two Nuns have come unstuck—
What fun for Nuns to run amok!
So dodging Customs pleasure gives
To Nuns as well as Drones and Spivs!
How handy, too, that flowing robe
Which no Collector dares to probe.
Who knows what might be hidden there—
A chest of drawers or an old armchair?
A chiming clock or a string of pearls—
Nice presents for the other girls.
Some nylons, too, or nifty briefs
To brighten up their dull beliefs;
Their winnings from the Roulette Wheel—
Yes, quite a lot could they conceal.
For, after all, it's harmless fun
And such a bore to be a Nun.
So spare a tear and chide them not,
Just bad-luck put them on the spot.

Two Naughty Nuns—Three hearty cheers—
And better luck next time, my dears!

W. H. WOOD.

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