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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Science and God

I AM not certain, but I fancy it was a Frenchman who pictured the attitude of Science towards God who was being led to the frontiers of the universe by Man, who thanked him for any services he had given Man in the past and was then dismissed to the unknown. I said that it must have been said by a Frenchman because an American would have been blunt and so have spoilt the wit; an Englishman would have been apologetic and would have led to nowhere; a German would have drowned the wit with words. I vote for the Frenchman. In any case it is as neat as one could wish. But as an Englishman as well as an Atheist, I must criticise the critic. For instance, "past services" implies something done, and no one has ever proved that the discarded deity has ever done anything in the interests of humanity. What Man has learned he has learned through his own efforts. What Man has learned from God, sooner or later, has had to be un-learned. The claims of God to have made the world have been proved to be just foolish bragging, or, when God told His children to kill witches, he was just talking nonsense; there were no witches to kill, and so on, and so on, through a long list of foolish and even brutal stories. Good and bad would have been recognised had the gods never been heard of. Tribal honesty and loyalty, the love of a mother for her child, etc., would have taken their place in social life had the gods and demons never existed. Ultimately, all things are recognised as good or bad in terms of human virtues. These fundamental qualities live on while the gods steadily decay. It is this process which religious people with unconscious humour term the development of religion. What we see in the history of Man to-day is as plain as it ever can be that the Churches are straining every nerve to bring the gods up to the level of decent Man. The Christians of to-day are striving hard to cleanse their creed, and it is the model of the best type of man that is put before us as the God whom we are to worship.

But in all cases where the pressure against religion is not great enough to create a purifying influence, the innate quality of the darker side of religion expresses itself. In the finest days of ancient Greece the best men could, whilst recognising that supernaturalism was strong enough to inflict much damage, easily believe in the existence of what was to come. Yet the glory that was Greece, the development of the finer qualities of Rome, the huge possibilities for the betterment of mankind, all these qualities were buried for centuries, leaving the problems of civilisation to be re-solved again, and it would be the most stupid of errors to assume that what occurred centuries ago could not be repeated. There is not one of

our first-rate scientists who would seriously set aside what we have said. Our cover of culture is great, but it is as yet only a veneer. What would it take to bring about a collapse once more? Here is one of our finest scholars who has expressed so well much of what we have been saying:—

"In civilised society most educated people are not even aware of the extent to which millions of savages survive at their very doors, or that the majority of the people in every civilised state are still living in a state of intellectual savagery. The smooth surface of cultured society is sapped and mined by superstition. Only those whose studies have led them to investigation are aware of the depth to which the ground beneath our feet is honeycombed by unseen forces. We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire to spread ruin and devastation."

This is a grave warning from one of our most brilliant scientists. Superstition begins with the Crown and reaches down to the gutter. Superstition is the one thing that takes no heed of culture. It is a force that our political leaders recognise, but there is little help from that quarter. Superstition is crippled to some extent, but it still lives in all our "civilised" nations. It would be well for us to consider whether the Christian religions, along with other forms of religion, are quite as dead as some of our people believe.

Let us examine for a while the history of Christianity. It arose and faced the greatness of Greece, Rome and Egypt, and those three civilisations fell and with them fell whatever enlightenment existed. The Western World entered the "Dark Ages," and the darkness remained for at least five hundred years. The Awakening meant mainly a return to the wisdom of the ancient world, and the inspirations from the Mohammedan Arts and Sciences. How much the world owes to that source has never been acknowledged in the revived Christian World. We should remember the significance of the Western World's Awakening; for our part, we can see a second "Dark Age," the recent World War endorses that conclusion.

Generally speaking we may say that the degree of civilisation is determined by the extent of the negation of the gods. There is a school of anthropologists that holds that civilisation began when Man learned to grow his food instead of hunting for it. To do this Man had to prepare the ground, to sow the seed, and to gather the harvest. Of course, the gods in those days were still mixed up with the known developments, but there was room for semi-magical performances in the shape of charms to secure a good harvest. But it still remains true that the man, or men, who first recognised the phenomenon of growth marked a new feature in the history of Man. It was the

beginning of the weakening of the power of the gods. Human judgment had begun to express itself, and the power of humanity began to be recognised as a factor in human growth. The world began to be a knowable world, a world that might be good or bad, all of which led to the recognition that the less Man depended on the gods, the faster was his development.

It is from these beginnings that Man's independence was born. Of course a true perception of Science was yet to come. Science implies prevision and prevision involves not only a knowledge of what has occurred but also what will not occur, and that, whatever happens, the past will fit into what is to come. Science is complete only when these things are taken for granted. The formula of Science is, "Given A then B will follow," and it makes no allowance for the interference of any supernatural agency. At most Science can only say that if God exists, Science knows nothing about Him. At least gods do not interfere with scientific calculations. Scientifically, God, if he exists, does nothing, he is one of the finest examples of Nothing. He comes from nowhere, and after generations of inactivity, enters the ranks of the unemployed.

Unfortunately there exists a number of scientists who appear to be desirous of bringing about a reconciliation between Religion and Science. All that we need say concerning them is, if these men accept God they very carefully shut Him out of their laboratory. In working hours God is not admitted. All this is self-evident to one who has noted the historic process of the march of humanity from superstition to science. The pity is that we still have men who have won respect for their scientific skill, but mar their outlook by adopting one of the oldest of superstitions. If pure Science has done anything, it is that it has swept away the existence of ghosts and gods. The statement that, "We know nothing of the gods," is often made—and that seventy years after Darwin and Tylor—and is surely begging the question. What is the meaning of this statement? Now we do know something of the gods; we have before us a full explanation of the origin of the belief in the gods and its consequences. There is nothing plainer to-day than the way in which gods came into being, and the way they die.

How then can we honestly say that we do not know whether God exists or not. The falsity of godism is demonstrated by its origin. No reasonably educated man with courage can to-day say: "I do not know whether God exists or not." Among level-headed men and women no one dreams of asserting the possibility of witches flying through the air, or turning milk sour. There is a limit to the absurdity, and that limit is surely reached when we find "educated" men and women suggesting that they cannot make up their minds as to whether gods exist or not.

Fundamentally, the issue between Religion and Science is that of a difference of interpretation of an identical set of facts. We are all, scientist and layman, living in the same world, dealing with things as all people deal with them—with terms of the language that are substantially one, and we submit that the question concerning gods and devils, heaven or hell, is now fairly settled. We know how the gods were born, and quite as interesting and important is the fact that we know how, sooner or later, they must die.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

JOHN MILTON'S HERETICAL PRONOUNCEMENT

NEWTON and Milton are commonly claimed as illustrious adherents of the Christian cult. Yet, each rejected Trinitarian belief, and, if the Athanasian Creed prove true, the scientist and the poet alike are now paying the penalty for their heresies in hell.

Francis E. Mineka's "Dissidence of Dissent" (The University of Carolina Press, 1944) is a scholarly volume (which largely owes its inspiration to the late Dr. Moncure D. Conway), that also contains an instructive account of the discovery, publication and reception of Milton's latitudinarian essay, "De Doctrina Christiana," first published in 1825.

The manuscript of this work was found in the State Papers Office and was published by royal command, the king's chaplain, the Rev. Charles Sumner, having translated the Latin into English. In these circumstances, Milton's treatise was widely read, its heresies arousing more resentment than approval in religious minds. As our author observes: "Only the long-established reputation of the poet and the acceptance of 'Paradise Lost' as second only in importance to the Bible, plus a tendency among religious folk by 1825 to pay less attention to involved questions of theology, prevented the cloud of proved heresy from obscuring for ever the brightness of the poet's renown in religious circles."

Mr. Mineka has carefully collected and studied the pronouncements of the religious press at the period when Milton's "Treatise" was under discussion, in order to ascertain how far liberal views had advanced in the early decades of the 19th century.

As that orthodox stalwart, Dr. Johnson, had vouched for Milton's religious integrity, and as Christian officialdom acclaimed him as the supreme religious poet of England, the glaring heresies contained in the newly discovered Treatise created consternation in the religious world. Previously, there existed uncertainty concerning the poet's attitude towards definite aspects of Christianity and both Arians and Trinitarians claimed him as their own. "But now," notes Mineka, "with the publication of the poet's mature views on theology unequivocally expressed and free from rancour and politics, refuge could no longer be taken in ambiguity. Milton, by his own declaration, now stood forth as an Arian, a Materialist, a Polygamist, an anti-Sabbatarian—in fact," said the "Evangelical," "an abettor of almost every error which has infested the Church of God."

It was impossible to enter into a conspiracy of silence and ignore Milton's pestilent Treatise, for its publication had been extensively advertised and its appearance approved by Parliament. So the religious press generally warned its readers against the outstanding heresies it contained while each sect sought consolation by finding the poet in general agreement with its particular doctrines, while the Unitarians alone warmly welcomed Milton's clear rejection of the triune God, all other communions repudiating the heresy.

The leading Evangelical organs—the "Christian Observer" and the "Christian Guardian" ignored the work's existence. But the chief periodicals of the High Church Party, the "British Critic" and "Quarterly Theological Review" published long reviews. While granting the poet's sincerity of utterance, the "Critic" complained that his craving for independence had impelled him into such eccentricities that his theological lucubrations were best consigned to oblivion. The Treatise is certainly a literary curio and a relic of genius but its translation is of doubtful benefit.

While graciously conceding Milton's eminence as a man of letters, and granting that some of his claims were not without merit, the critic of the "Quarterly Theological Review" deeply deplored the poet's degrading opinion of baptism. His Erastianism was of course due to his "having imbibed a portion

of the malignant spirit of the age, which subverted the altar and the throne." Contempt for sacerdotal authority had led him astray. "Though the work will not add to his reputation as a writer, scholar or theologian, his fame was already so great that even the defects of this Treatise could not tarnish it."

A Nonconformist organ, the "Evangelical," devoted six successive monthly articles to the Tractate in which the writer lamented that Milton in his old age should have reached conclusions so erroneous and unscriptural. More in sorrow than in anger, the reviewer proceeds: "How little, alas! can mere genius effect in protecting the human mind from the influence of pernicious error. . . . How affecting it is to see the most stupendous intellects falling victims to a sorcery of an ingenious though deceitful theory, while the unlettered peasant holds on in the even tenour of his way, believing what God has said, and obeying what he has commanded."

While granting Milton's possession of poetical inspiration, his critic declared that he was incapable of "patient and laborious investigation." Also, his sympathy with persecuted Socinians in Poland and with Netherland heretics had awakened a too indulgent partiality. Moreover, Milton had too readily admitted the abrogation of the Mosaic dispensation and wrongly regarded as literal. Scriptural statements of a figurative character. Still, despite all the poet's erroneous conclusions, his critic was surprised that he continued to lead a blameless life. Indeed, "The poet manifested no inclination to commit polygamy, he forgave his recreant wife, his chastity of life defied calumny, and in spite of his bad theories on veracity he maintained the loftiest integrity in circumstances of peculiar trial and temptation."

Bishop Burgess, however, was so scandalised by this posthumous revelation of the Puritan poet's latitudinarianism that he tried to throw doubt on the authenticity of the writing that expressed it. Then, although it printed no review of Milton's manuscript, the "Methodist Magazine" endorsed the Bishop's alleged doubts for if, indeed, the Treatise were truly Milton's it seemed "impossible to vindicate him from the charge of base and unprincipled dissimulation."

The Baptists were delighted by Milton's support of their leading doctrine. At first his Treatise attracted little attention in their press, but later their periodical, the "Baptist," published three notices of the work and then printed copious extracts from its pages. Milton's views on church government pleasing to Baptists and Congregationalists were highly commended and his defence of religious liberty extolled.

Yet, the most scathing review of the Tractate appeared in the "Congregational Magazine," although its earlier notice, if it condemned Milton's plea for polygamy, was otherwise appreciative. But the writer of the second review confessed himself both indignant and disappointed. He dismissed the book as dull and dreary and not likely to do any good to its readers. It might gratify Unitarians and Deists while misleading wavering Christians, and, while granting that sections of the Treatise were "not unworthy of Milton's pen," yet, in the main it must be considered as "a product of his dotage."

Another Congregationalist organ, the "Eclectic Review," was more rational in its criticism. The work, it said, was indeed a disappointment, but neither the poet's personal character nor his literary standing had been lessened. So, despite all Milton's shortcomings as a religious guide, evidenced by his dangerous materialism and his "singular conclusions concerning the creation of matter," as well as other glaring misconceptions, the poet's reviewer concedes that, "We still retain our admiration for his Muse, his greater self, and our conviction that he deserved far more than most of his contemporaries, the high name of patriot, sage and saint."

The Unitarians were naturally elated to find Milton among the elect who rejected the triune forgery in the New Testament, but, as the poet still adhered to Christ's divinity, while they accepted his mere humanity only, he was still an Arian. Still,

there was much in his teachings of priceless value, especially his eloquent advocacy of religious liberty. This, however, had been long before acclaimed as one of Milton's glories in the Unitarian periodical, the "Monthly Repository." It is also pleasing to remember that the leading literary quarterlies—the "Edinburgh" and the "Quarterly"—did justice to Milton's Tractate.

On the whole, the reception accorded Milton's work indicated a marked decline in theological rancour since the poet's death. As our author judiciously concludes: "If Milton had published his Treatise in his own lifetime, he might have been liable to extreme punishment and the work itself would probably have been suppressed. If he had been alive in 1825 to witness the reception of his views, he could not have liked it in all respects, but he would have rejoiced to see the principles of the Arcopagitica being carried into practice in the multiplicity and diversity of English religious and secular periodicals."

T. F. PALMER.

A U.S.A. FATIMA

Extract from a letter sent by Mr. John Haffert, on behalf of the Mariana Committee of the U.S.A., to the Bishop of Leiria, quoted in "Voz da Fatima," September 13, 1947.

"OUR most pressing desire is to bring the statue of the "Pilgrim's Virgin" to America, and we are very obliged to Your Excellency for having consented to bless the Image which is a reproduction of the real Image which will go in pilgrimage across Europe and which is already on order.

If it is ready for October 13, it could be blessed on that day and kept there with you till next May when a pilgrimage from America will go to fetch it. That will give us time to prepare our people for its reception. We hope that all the Marianan Societies here will participate, after having asked for and received permission from the bishop. We hope that this pilgrimage of Our Lady to America will be one the greatest demonstrations of the Catholic Faith that the world has ever seen.

On May 13, 1948, this Image will be taken from Fatima, placed in a motor car, carried to the Lisbon airport, from where it will be flown to America.

It is possible that we may charter a special airplane which will be called "The Star of Fatima" and which will carry as chaplain one of our archbishops and the principal pilgrims.

The Image will be carried in procession round our whole nation then flown to Hawaii and then, accompanied by our armed forces, flown to Japan, and from whence, as near as possible to the frontiers of Russia.

Our greatest desire is to arrange that Our Lady encompasses Russia, by approaching both her Oriental and Occidental borders, so that she will encircle Russia by extending her two great arms in a loving embrace. Thus will Our Lady of Fatima bring the Old and New World closer together. Our bishops are collecting millions of dollars for this end.

N.F.

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Did Jesus Christ Exist? Thou shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. The Devil. Deity and Design. Agnosticism or . . . ? Atheism. What is Freethought? Must we have a Religion? The Church's Fight for the Child. Giving 'em Hell. Freethought and the Child. Morality without God. Christianity and Slavery. Gods and their Makers. Woman and Christianity. What is the use of a Future Life?

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ACID DROPS

In one of his books—we think the "Praeterita"—Ruskin spoke of his disgust on hearing a preacher with a very small congregation damning all who were not listening to his preaching. And now we have before us in the shape of a pamphlet which has been pushed through our letter-box, that character which Ruskin dealt with such complete and deserved scorn. This class of Christian appears to go around with a complete contempt for decency. Their religious ignorance only serves to give point and power to impudence and egotism. When Dickens drew the character of Uriah Heep he pilloried that religious type for ever. But we think he made a mistake when he suggested that Uriah was a mere humbug. He was not, Uriah was a character, sincere in his religion, and impudent when he set forth to convert other men. That is one of the features of Christianity that has not been sufficiently treated. Uriah Heep was a real character, with the character drawn out a little to attract attention. We Freethinkers have met them in their hundreds, and we meet them still.

The fantastic "Christian Commando" business still lingers on, and the Christian leaders in high places continue to moan about the steady decline of the faith. Of course, the Christian leaders must do something just to show to a section of the country that even though Christianity is weakening it is still alive. The latest "show" we have heard of comes from Scotland. The scene is a public house. We gather from the report that the people who came for a drink were quite surprised to see the "Commandoes," but they were interested—so runs the report—when the leader asked, did any of them believe that Jonah lived in the whale's belly? After that the people began to talk to the "Commandoes." What we should like to know is what the people who were in the "Pub." thought of this gang of "Commandoes." If we know anything of the Scotch people they will have to thank them for giving them something to laugh at. These poor Commandoes!

The Roman Catholic "Universe" is seriously disturbed because "Russian leaders" are doing what they can to teach the rising generation to adopt Atheism. We expect that the statement really means "some leaders," because some of the Russian leaders are Christians and they are not likely to be trying to crush their own creed. In the State schools there is, we imagine, no religion taught, but that can hardly be a crime nowadays—save when the Roman Church has the reins, and then nothing attacking religion would be tolerated. It is no use asking Catholics to see both sides of a situation because where religion is concerned the Roman Church does not permit anyone to say anything against Christianity—Roman Christianity. At least Russia gives its people freedom to adopt whatever religion it pleases, and that is something quite unusual when the Catholic Church rules the roost.

The Rev. Russell Shearer, of Sheffield, is convinced that "the people of England show a terrible ignorance of the Christian religion." We agree. The people are terribly ignorant concerning the Christian religion. We have been saying that for many, many years, and while we have satisfied people that they should read the real Christianity, note its origins and its realities, we have never met with a Christian preacher yet who offered us thanks for our efforts. The curious thing is that the people who did go regularly to Church were those who knew least concerning the origin of Christianity. We agree with the Rev. Russell Shearer. The people of England—at least one section of them—show a very, very deep ignorance as to the real Christianity. But they are the saviours of the Church.

The Rev. Joseph Shillingham of Bath, has "explained" one of the causes of the decline of religion, it is due, so he says, to the development of Sunday lectures. We agree that Sunday lectures have done much to enlighten people's minds regarding the part played by religion in Society. The decline of religion can be traced to many sources and even if Sunday lectures were prohibited, religion would still not occupy the position it once held. Religions, Christian or otherwise, have been found out.

The "Confidence Trick" is very old. It begins with children when it is generally harmless. When adults use it, it very often means trouble. We are reminded of this when perusing a recent issue of the Roman Catholic "Universe" which reports that at Fatima, a girl, 22 years old, arrived in an ambulance and walked away cured; another case, that of a man with eye trouble who also was cured by the usual miraculous method. Numerous cures are reported week after week, and we would be extremely pleased if someone would tell us the difference between the usual "confidence trick" of the common swindler, and the "sacred" priest operating in a church or sacred spot.

The pattern of the series of talks now running in the B.B.C. Home Service on "Belief and Unbelief" might easily have been predicted. The opening session was true to B.B.C. tradition where such talks are concerned. We had the robust, confident, self-assertive Christian, knowing all the answers, and the self-styled Agnostic striving to live up to Christian ethics, conceding to the Christian that he was one step ahead, that the Christian was willing to share if the Christian could point the way. No attempt was made to get at fundamentals, and the session closed leaving the issue more or less as it began. By all means let Belief be represented by a capable exponent, but an apostle of the "I don't know" position is not the proper champion of the case for Unbelief.

The Church Army, founded by the Rev. Wilson Carlile—one must do something for a living—has been holding a Centenary Celebration. We quite believe that the boys who join in marches and games, etc., enjoy them so far, we may say "good enough." But when we find that the real aim is not the health of the boys but the hope that they will become "good Christians," we are in another situation. It seems almost impossible for Christians to advocate the commonest of things without dragging in the name of Jesus. It gets monotonous.

We suppose that if the fraud of the "everlasting roses" had been practised by laymen instead of by the Church the police would have interfered. Many people have been punished for simpler offences. The "everlasting roses" which are drawing much money to the Church is at the time of writing still in being. It would be interesting to know how much money has been collected. But no one is permitted to reach the place and examine the roses to see what is going on. How the gentlemen who practise similar ways of getting money must regret that they never worked in a Church.

This magical flower game is just one of the swindling manoeuvres that if tried outside of a Church would soon have the police down. A representative of the "Sunday Pictorial" went to Stockton to see the roses that appeared to be magical. Here is the report, and it will be noted that the man was never allowed to get near enough to see what was going on. "There was a cluster of electric lights that prevented close attention, and no one was near, except priests and Church professionals. A sacred crown of electric lights served as a light to blind, and the head of the figure was covered with a mass of brown foliage. It was impossible to get a near view." The game is very, very simple.

The man who supplied the magical crown was a Mr. Oakes. He gave his opinion that "the flowers were as dead as door nails." But the priests knew better, and the show will go on. Mr. Oakes explains that an examination of the flowers would show how the whole thing was done, by the wiring to the metal crown and the dry summer period which will keep roses for a long period. We may say that the cunning and rascality of the priests did the rest. The newspaperman regretted that he could not see a miracle. But he did see the money pour out. We may say plainly that if ordinary persons tried to play such a swindle those responsible would be in prison. One wonders, what is the difference between common swindling and the "religious" displays? The newspaperman noted that the priest was gratified when he found that the collecting box was full to the top. The priest sent for another and larger one. The journalist need not wonder what would happen if that trick was tried outside the Church? The answer is very easy.

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SUGAR PLUMS

The Bishop of Gloucester says that religion in the schools must be taken seriously. We agree it should be taken very seriously—and honestly. No man is justified to put into the head of a child something as unquestionably true when he is aware millions of people with all seriousness do not believe in the Bishop's teaching. To "seriousness" we should add honesty. But for anyone to tell a lie to a man is bad enough; to tell it to a child should be counted as one of the vilest of actions.

Here is some rather curious information that comes to us from one of our readers in the U.S.A. The National Association has decreed that radios should not be used for the presentation of controversial purposes or for the expression of partisan opinion. These efforts appear to apply to religious subjects. If that is true, the U.S.A. will have gone back considerably.

Lord Elton used to be one of the pets of the B.B.C. He suited them very well. He was plausible. He said nothing that was of great moment, but it sounded as though he had. To many expectation is better than realisation. Judging by some of his utterances one would think he was a member of one of the Christian packs. He was educated, which carried with it no guarantee of real learning. He is reported to have written in a country paper, and the only piece of writing that interested us was the comment as follows: "The only cure for a decay of morals is a revival of religion. It was Christianity that taught us morals." Now that seems too good to be wasted. That kind of talking explains why he was a favourite with the B.B.C. The scientific conclusion that action came before philosophy, or that morality was practised long before it was understood, all these and other considerations prove to the full that Lord Elton is a capital product of the religious side of the B.B.C. But it never dawned on us that our ancestors in the far dim ages managed to practise "morals" before they knew what the deuce they were doing.

We are pleased to report that Mr. F. A. Hornibrook's meeting at Newcastle was a complete success. There was a good audience, and the speaker dealt with his subject, "The Colour Bar," in his usual pleasing fashion. There was a crop of questions which usually means an interesting subject.

THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF "CHURCH AND AGE"

AVRO MANHATTAN'S very able and detailed book, "The Catholic Church against the Twentieth Century" (Watts, 1947), presented, in cogent form, the problem which becomes nowadays increasingly prominent—the conflict between modern secular tendencies and the claims of the world-wide and still powerful Roman Catholic Church. Mr. Manhattan confines himself almost exclusively to the objective presentation of facts, and does not often express opinions; but the way he states the facts makes his point of view plain. He regards the Catholic Church (he never uses the longer name, "Roman Catholic," but of course he means that Church only) as still animated by its ancient ideal of dominating social and political life—and he looks on that ideal, and its practical enforcements or attempts at such enforcements, as dangers to the progressive endeavours of our age. In short, the Catholic Church against the twentieth century is the Catholic Church against progress and enlightenment.

It occurs to the writer of the present article that it may be useful and interesting to consider what probably would be the Catholic reply to this indictment. In doing so we may begin by quoting an eloquent passage from John Henry (afterwards Cardinal) Newman. It may be found on pages 220-2 of the "Everyman's Library" complete edition of his "Apologia pro Vita Sua." Facing the question of the Church's alleged designs of domination, he says: "Supposing it then to be the will of the Creator to interfere in human affairs, and to make provisions for retaining in the world a knowledge of Himself, so definite and distinct as to be proof against the energy of human scepticism, in such a case—I am far from saying there was no other way—but there is nothing to surprise the mind, if He should see fit to introduce a power into the world, invested with the prerogative of infallibility in religious matters . . . And first, the initial doctrine of the infallible teacher must be an emphatic protest against the existing state of mankind. Man had rebelled against his Maker . . . It is because of the intensity of the evil which has possession of mankind, that a suitable antagonist has been provided against it; and the initial act of that divinely-commissioned power is, of course, to deliver her challenge and to defy the enemy."

That is to say, when an opponent of Catholicism says: "Your Church is against the age, and aims at dominating society," the Catholic replies: "Certainly; and that is one of the evidences that the Church is of divine origin. She is God's messenger to oppose the evils of individuals and of society. She is against all centuries, so far as they act wrongly. The Church is against 'the flesh, the world, and the devil.' If she were not so she would not be of divine origin."

That fairly sums up the Catholic reply. What, then, are we to make of it? In the first place, of course, the claim depends for its validity on whether or not the Church really is a messenger (or *the* messenger) of God. Anyone may say, "I am the ambassador of Deity; accept my guidance." Mohammad said so—even John Smith, the Mormon, and Joanna Southcott, said so. A mere assertion is not proof. We have to demand, therefore, the production of the proofs of the Catholic Church's claim to be of origin from Above. This raises the whole catena of questions of the facts of primitive Christianity and subsequent Church history: and, to say the least, the result seems full of doubt. The New Testament—in which are contained the words attributed to Jesus, on which the Church's claims are primarily based—is the subject of drastic criticism, and its claims to historical truth are challenged more and more. It is even said by eminent scholars that there is no proof that Jesus ever lived, and, though that theory is not generally or even very widely accepted, yet numerous scholars regard Jesus, though a real person, as having been surrounded by myths. Again, the history of the Church in early ages is one of confusion.

The supreme primacy of the See of Rome emerged into activity only by degrees. When it reached its greatest extension a result was the separation of the Eastern Orthodox Church from communion with Rome, on the ground, in the Eastern view, that the Roman claims were contrary to ancient ecclesiastical tradition. According to the Roman claim, the Papacy is supreme by divine right, and does not need its decrees to be confirmed by any higher power. According to the Eastern point of view, Roman decrees are binding only when confirmed by "the five patriarchates." (This theory resembles that which grew up in seventeenth - nineteenth century France and was called "Gallicanism": the theory that Papal definitions are binding as articles of faith only "when confirmed by the Church." Gallicanism once had powerful advocates, even beyond France—but was finally relegated to the position of a heresy by the Vatican Council of 1870). In other words, the claims of the Church, both as to origin and as to development, seem clouded with deep doubt.

Then, can it be said that the Catholic Church always has opposed evil: "protested against the existing state of mankind"? On the contrary, has she not all too often been bound up with the sinful ways of men? Have not her prelates—even her Popes—sought worldly glory and the ways of "the flesh and the world"—even if not of "the devil"? Was Pope Alexander VI, the "Borgia Pope," a very earnest zealot against wickedness? Did not, as even the Catholic modern writer, Hilaire Belloc, admits in his books, "How the Reformation Happened" and "Wolsey"—did not the wholesale "corruptions" (Belloc's word!) in the organisation of the very Church herself (not merely in individual members) provoke the Protestant Reformation?

So when we are told that the Church's claim to be divine is proved—or proved amongst other evidences—by the very fact of her insistence on combating the perennial waywardness of mankind, we seem forced to reply: "But the Church's proofs of being a divinely-accredited messenger require more than that; they need positive evidence of the actual conferment of the divine commission, and such evidence is at least dubious. Further, the Church seems not always to have been a witness against wrong, but frequently to have been herself compromised by it. Have not forgeries, false legends, acts of aggression, secular ambition, and the like, contributed much to the development of Catholicism?"

These doubts are grave. The present writer tries to state both sides fairly, and admits that he wishes he could accept (or rather, reaccept) the Church's claims. Morally and intellectually it would be a great help and solace to him, as to many others, to have a real, divinely ordained infallible guide. The removal of such doubts as those described herein, would cause him to become actively aware of a duty to submit to the Church: but *can* they be removed? This writer realises to the full the majesty of "Roma immortalis," and would abstain (though for a time after secession he did not) from irate attacks on her. In fact, increasingly, he is disposed to think "partisan polemics" rather futile, and to prefer objective, unbiassed study and exposition. "Rome" is at least a great development of human "spiritual idealism," even though having, apparently, grave defects. Also, the sociological teaching of modern Popes contains much of value, and many of their warnings against current trends have proved (after having been scorned) true. This, however, is but natural in so old and experienced an institution. As to being also actually divinely-accredited as our supreme guide, even in our communal affairs—well, "there's the difficulty"! It is one of the crucial problems of our times.

J. W. POYNTER.

HOW AND WHY I BECAME AN ATHEIST

THOMAS PAINE'S famous "Age of Reason" dealt a near knock-out to my tottering faith in the "Infallible Word of God," upon which the whole Christian edifice is built up.

Always keenly interested in Natural History, I observed, besides all the beauties, the horrors, the cold, pitiless cruelties of Nature red in tooth and claw, fresh from the hands of this "loving Creator." The universal Law of Nature—Might is Right—and all the never ceasing suffering it brings; this alone is enough to shake the faith of anyone but the most pig-headed Will-to-Believer. If a god invented and created butterflies it is reasonable to assume that the same god invented and created the bacillus of foot-and-mouth disease, the viruses of infantile paralysis and hydrophobia, and all the other ghastly diseases of man, animals, birds, fishes and plants. If this god causes a lovely tree to grow in a sunny glade he, she or it also causes the huge and loathsome tapeworms to grow in the entrails of men and animals. As Buddha pointed out to his disciples: "If a power permits all this suffering in nature it cannot be good. If it is powerless to prevent it, it cannot be a god." No priest has ever yet refuted that simple statement of the case. Intellectually dishonest Churches can merely try to gloss over or ignore all the facts which are incompatible with the beliefs upon which their bread and butter depends.

But if here and there any bricks or stones of man's great Monuments of Myth were still left to obstruct my mental fairway Darwin's literary atom bomb and the Church's reaction to it shattered and pulverised them (for me) finally.

By the time I was twenty-two or so, i.e., after some years of the most painstaking (without pain) study, thought, correspondence and debate, I had become a confirmed Atheist (using theos in its commonly accepted sense of a personal god), although always willing and ready at any future date to modify or renounce any opinion found to have been based on incorrect data, of course. Everything I have learnt since has still more strongly confirmed my initial studies and observations. Every book I read defending religious beliefs helped me materially on my way to disbelief: if that was the best that could be said in defence by the best theologians then it would have been better for their cause had they kept silent.

I was, of course, still forced to attend prayers and Church services! Religious hypocrisy is rampant in the R.N.

I rejected the Supernatural in toto. Everything from anthropoid gods to anthropomorphous goblins, together with all their apparent manifestations accumulated from man's semi-human past through thousands of years of ignorance and superstitious fears; fears of everything he could not understand, but which Science, that inexorable debunker, has since shown us to be natural phenomena. Gods, ghosts (holy and unholy), devils, demons, heavens, hells, witches, warlocks, werewolves, evil-eyes, angels, fairies, leprechauns, spooks, spirits, spectres, virgin mothers, Santa Claus . . . My whole (inherited) mythological collection I consigned to the dustbin, and felt much better for this mental spring cleaning.

As for conduct: practical ethical principles, based purely on common sense and social necessity—"Do unto others as you would they should do unto you" (Mithra, 3,000 B.C., Confucius, 500 B.C.), "Be kind and you will be happy" (Buddha, 500 B.C.), etc., etc.—and which even a small child can understand, have nothing whatever to do with supernatural beings floating about in interstellar space (although fitted with legs, arms, stomachs, etc.!) consumed with an unquenchable thirst for flattery from the inhabitants of this little planet.

Through three score somewhat adventurous years the writer has certainly enjoyed a very fair share of life's happiness, and on the many occasions when he has found himself in immediate danger of his life the idea that he might, or was about to, die has never—since his rejection of religious beliefs—worried him. By nature an optimist, a tinge of fatalism (sole gleanings from

his Mohommedan studies) has materially helped him in times of stress—earthquakes, shipwrecks, plane crashes, etc., not to mention two world wars.

Never in 40 years of atheism have I felt the faintest nostalgia for any of my discarded illusions.

After all, as some philosopher pointed out, there's really very little difference between a True Believer and an Atheist. The Believer rejects as false all the world's gods except one. The Atheist heartily agrees with him, merely adding one more rejection.

To the wonders of the great waters and the marvels of the firmament I owe my original intellectual awakening, and the consequent jettisoning of all my religious impedimenta. Some people seem to regard the loss of cherished illusions—their seat in a Fool's Paradise—as a calamity. As for myself, as soon as any idea is shown to be in error I have no further affection or use for it. Kidding oneself into believing this or that is a foolish occupation anyway for a rational human being. As for those feeble-minded people who—so it is said—cannot live without illusions, let these unfortunates keep their opium by all means, but surely the sooner these types die off the better for the race?

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

THE LITTLE CHURCH BELL

The little church bell
On the little church tower
Goes ding, ding, ding, ding.

To remind all the faithful that this is the hour,
Ding, ding, ding, ding,

To come and acknowledge they still have a fear
Of that which in childhood was dinned in their ear,
That there is indifference, the attendance shows clear,
Ding, ding, ding, ding.

Each Sunday the old deacon
Tugs at the rope,
Ding, ding, ding, ding,

To summon the few as a sort of last hope,
Ding, ding, ding, ding,

The same old story, the same old song
No longer attracts the Sunday throng,
The fear of an angry God now is gone,
Ding, ding, ding, ding.

All over the land
Is the empty pew,
Ding, ding, ding, ding,

And preachers are all in a terrible stew,
Ding, ding, ding, ding.

Since Automobiles and the Movies began
The preaching business has got in a jam,
The Radio song takes the place of the psalm,
Ding, ding, ding, ding

The men who go there
May have something to sell,
Ding, ding, ding, ding.

The women to see, to hear, and to tell,
Ding, ding, ding, ding.

The pickings are poor for the Parson to-day,
To dinner he's seldom invited to stay,
The Devil is dead, and the Parson to pay.

Ding, ding, ding, ding.

ROBERT HOWDEN.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM.

To the Editor of "The Freethinker."

SIR,—In his interesting article in your 9th November issue, Mr. F. Kenyon says: "There still remains the more serious question as to how Dr. Barnes is to justify his conduct in retaining office, and the emoluments appertaining thereto, while denying root and branch the doctrines he was appointed to maintain."

May I suggest an explanation? In the reign of Henry VIII, by what is called "the submission of the clergy," the Church of England surrendered its power of legislation by agreeing that in future it could not make canons (rules of faith or discipline) without the sanction of the Crown. This was repealed by Queen Mary I but re-enacted by Elizabeth and is still the law. So the Church of England has no power to decide any matter of faith except as debatable opinion: and logically any Anglican can say what he likes unless prosecuted by the civil powers.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. POYNTER.

RUSSIA AND RELIGION.

SIR,—Judging by the letter of R. Bishop (pp. Editor, "British Soviet Publications," see "The Freethinker," October 12), he seems to be somewhat sceptical as to the authenticity of the "Ten Commandments of Communism," published by the Komsomol, U.S.S.R., which was published in "The Freethinker" of August 24. I append herewith a report published in a German newspaper from the "German News Service" (D.P.D., Renter), Moscow. The report, even if it does not bear out in detail the "Ten Commandments," does, however, give us an idea of the general trend of the U.S.S.R. towards religion. Here is the report: "Communists shall neither go to Church nor have anything to do with religion, so runs the latest report of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Organisation in the Soviet Union, 'Komsomol' It is further the task of every Communist to help clear away religious superstition. Religion and Science are opposed to each other."

ICARUS III.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 25, 7 p.m.: "The Measurement of the Health of the People," Prof. F. A. E. CREW, F.R.S., M.D.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Sidney and Beatrice Webb," Mr. H. A. BEALES, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "God and the State," Mr. F. READ (A.F.B.).

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. SAMMIS.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-8 p.m.: "The 23rd Psalm," Mr. GEO. COLEBROOKE.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Education and Religion," Councillor BACKHOUSE (Bradford).

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Shakespeare and the Bible," Mr. E. H. HASSELL.

Merseyside Branch (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Forces Education," Mr. R. BAKER.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Conservatism in the World To-day," Mr. W. FOSTER.

THE ILLUSION OF RELIGION

HAVING recognised religious doctrines to be illusions, we are at once confronted with the further question: may not other cultural possessions which we esteem highly, and by which we let our life be ruled, be of a similar nature? Should not the assumptions that regulate our political institutions likewise be called illusions, and is it not the case that in our culture the relations between the sexes are disturbed by a series of erotic illusions? . . . Nothing need keep us from applying observation to our own natures or submitting the process of reasoning to its own criticism . . . We surmise, too, that such an endeavour would not be wasted, and that it would at least partly justify our suspicions. But the author of these pages has not the means to undertake so comprehensive a task; forced by necessity he confines his work to the pursuit of a single one of these illusions, that is, the religious.

But now the loud voice of our opponent bids us to stop. We are called upon to account for our transgressions.

"Archæological interests are no doubt most praiseworthy, but one does not set about an excavation if one is thereby going to undermine occupied dwelling-places so that they collapse and bury the inhabitants under the ruins. The doctrines of religion are not a subject that one can be clever about, as one can about any other. Our culture is built up on them; the preservation of human society rests on the assumption that the majority of mankind believe in the truth of these doctrines. If they are taught that there is no almighty and just God, no divine world-order, and no future life, then they will feel exempt from all obligation to follow the rules of culture. Uninhibited and free from fear, everybody will follow his asocial, egoistic instincts, and will seek to prove his power. Chaos, which we have banished through thousands of years of the work of civilisation, will begin again . . . And apart from the danger of the undertaking, it is also a purposeless cruelty. Countless people find their one consolation in the doctrines of religion, and only with their help can they endure life. You would rob them of what supports them, and yet have nothing better to give them in exchange."

What a number of accusations all at once! However, I am prepared to deny them all; and what is more, I am prepared to defend the statement that culture incurs a greater danger by maintaining its present attitude to religion than by relinquishing it. But I hardly know where to begin my reply. . . .

And now we proceed with the defence. Clearly religion has performed great services for human culture. It has contributed much toward restraining the asocial instincts, but still not enough. For many thousands of years it has ruled human society; it has had time to show what it can achieve. If it had succeeded in making happy the greater part of mankind, in consoling them, in reconciling them to life, and in making them supporters of civilisation, then no one would dream of striving to alter existing conditions. But instead of this what do we see? We see that an appallingly large number of men are discontented with civilisation and unhappy with it, and feel it as a yoke that must be shaken off; that these men will do everything in their power to alter this civilisation, or else go so far in their hostility to it, that they will have nothing to do either with civilisation or with restraining their instincts. . . .

It is doubtful whether men were in general happier when religious doctrines held unlimited sway than they are now; more moral they certainly were not. They have always understood how to externalise religious precepts, thereby frustrating their intentions. And the priests, who had to enforce religious obedience met them half-way. God's kindness must lay a restraining hand upon his justice. One sinned, and then one made oblation, or did penance, and then one was free to sin anew. Russian mysticism had come to the sublime conclusion

that sin is indispensable for the full enjoyment of the blessing of divine grace, and therefore, fundamentally, it is pleasing to God. It is well known that the priests could only keep the masses submissive to religion by making these great concessions to human instincts. . . .

Let us consider the unmistakable character of the present situation. We have heard the admission that religion no longer has the same influence on men that it used to have. And this, not because its promises have become smaller, but because they appear less credible to people. Let us admit that the reason—perhaps not the only one—for this change is the increase of the scientific spirit in the higher strata of human society. Criticism has nibbled at the authenticity of religious documents. Natural science has shown up the errors contained in them, and the comparative method of research has revealed the fatal resemblance between religious ideas revered by us and the mental productions of primitive ages and peoples. . . .

The scientific spirit engenders a particular attitude to the problems of this world: before the problems of religion it halts for awhile, then wavers, and finally here too steps over the threshold. In this process there is no stopping. The more the fruits of knowledge become accessible to men, the more wide spread is the decline of religious belief, at first only of its obsolete and objectionable expressions of the same, then of its fundamental assumptions also. The Americans who instituted the monkey trial in Dayton have proved consistent. Elsewhere the inevitable transition is accomplished by way of half-measures and insincerities.

Culture has little to fear from the educated or the brain workers. In their case religious motives for civilised behaviour would be unobtrusively replaced by other and secular ones; besides they are for the most part themselves supporters of culture. But it is another matter with the great mass of the uneducated and suppressed, who have every reason to be enemies of culture. So long as they do not discover that people no longer believe in God, all is well. But they discover it, infallibly, and would do so even if this work of mine were not published. They are ready to accept the results of scientific thought, without having effected in themselves the process of change which scientific thought induces in men. Is there not a danger that these masses, in their hostility to culture, will attack the weak point which they have discovered in their task-master? If you must not kill your master, solely because God has forbidden it and will sorely avenge it in this or the other life, and you then discover that there is no God so that you need not fear his punishment, then you will certainly kill without hesitation, and you could only be prevented from this by mundane force. And so follows the necessity for either the most rigid suppression of these dangerous masses and the most careful exclusion of all opportunities for mental awakening, or a fundamental revision of the relation between culture and religion.

From "The Future of an Illusion,"
by S. FREUD, pp. 59-69.

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