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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Thy Will be Done

TURNING over some papers that had been lying on my desk for some time I noticed a newspaper that reported an account of a girl who had been killed and her body was being carried to the cemetery. The account as such did not make much impression, I was born in a Christian country, and robberies and murders are not unknown. Indeed, had I seen nothing but an account of the trial of the murderer and the funeral of the victim, I would not have given it a passing thought. What pulled me, however, was a paragraph quoting a clergyman who was protesting against there being engraved on the coffin the words "Thy will be done." The Rev. gentleman was quite angry, he said it was "laying a crime at the door of God." The clergyman's anger puzzled me until I realised what was behind his outburst. It did look as though God had a hand in the affair, either directly or indirectly. True, one could not say that God had killed the girl, but one could say that He did nothing to prevent the murder.

There are two theories about God—one ancient, one modern. According to one God is omniscient, that is, He knows everything, and that He is omnipotent, which means He can do everything. Jesus went to the extreme by saying that never a sparrow fell to the ground that God did not know of it. If that theory is correct the inscription on the murdered girl's coffin was quite in order; it was God's will that she should be killed. Everything in this world, the good, the bad, the wise, the silly, the painful and the pleasant, are all parts of His plans. There is nothing that can happen without His knowledge and sanction, and it is useless to talk about Man's free-will, or Satan as in defence of the theory. God always means well, but He is perpetually finding His good intentions frustrated by Man—or the Devil, or both, and yet, according to the Creation story, God made both Man and the Devil.

The other theory converts God into a Limited Liability Company, and is chiefly valued by theists whose few ideas are drowned in a sea of phraseology. It is a kind of mongrel Pantheism without the logical force that Pantheism has. According to this theory, we must not saddle God with the responsibility for what occurs, because He can do nothing without our co-operation, and if that is withheld His intentions—which are always good—are frustrated. It is the motto of the mining camp out West, "Gentlemen, don't shoot the pianist—he is doing his best." That was a reasonable request, because in this case the victims were not asked to admire the performance, or worship the performer, but merely to restrain the expression of their feelings within the limits of polite society. But in the religious case we are asked to refrain from blaming God because he does not "do things well." It does not touch

the essence of the case, but it saves God's character. But a God who is only a fellow-worker in the universe does not meet the requirements, and leaves the question of the responsibility for the existence of the order of things, including the passions, the weaknesses and the follies of Man untouched. In short, it saves God's character at the expense of His judgement. It leaves Him with neither the supreme power, nor with supreme wisdom. He is no more than a well-meaning blunderer in a world in which the greatest blunder of all is His own existence.

The excuse that God would do well if only Man would let Him break down before the fact that many of the evils that afflict mankind cannot by any possibility be traced to human wrong-doings. Apologies for God will not do. If there is a God, then all things are an expression of His will. It is not merely a case of "Thy will be done," it is His will that is being done. If there is a God behind nature, then nature is an expression of His character; but there is blood upon his hand, and all the apologies of the word-spinning Theologians should not blind a reasonable person to the presence of that stain.

There remains the usual retort of the bemused believer. All this is a mystery; that we can only see through a glass darkly; that if we could see clearly enough, or see the end of it all, we should see that it is all for the best; that God's plans work out well in the end, and if we do not get all that we should in this world, we shall get it in the next. Then we shall see that all our pains are for our good; that they are really blessings in disguise; we are not suffering—we only think we are; and although we grumble to-day, there will come a time when we shall thank God for treating us as he has. And so folly after folly. Much of our pain may eventuate in pleasure, but it may also happen that much of our pleasure may result in pain. If we have to wait for the end before we can pass an opinion, then the assertion that God is good is as unwarrantable as any other. On this theory we do not know; no one knows. And if no one knows, can we conceive of anything more supremely idiotic than to pay thousands of parsons hundreds of thousands of pounds a year to tell us all about it?

How do we know that our wrongs will be redressed hereafter? No one comes back to give us reliable information, and the Churches that profess to have this information in their possession have usually been wrong whenever they have made statements on any subject on which they could be brought to the test of verifiable fact. Is the whole business anything but a huge confidence trick? Or is it more than an illustration of the historic truth that all religions begin in fear and end in fraud?

When a person dies suddenly, and the cause of death is known, the case is clear. If death results from heart disease, the coroner says so, but if the cause of death cannot be discovered, then the verdict used to be, "an

act of God," and the absurdity of the verdict is heightened by the addition of the phrase that death was due to "a visitation by God," sometimes adding "under suspicious circumstances." But in that verdict lies a whole philosophy, for it is nothing more than an expression of ignorance. It is a confession that the coroner court do not know the cause of death. The same element is observable in other circumstances. If a man is struck dead by lightning, that is an "act of God." If he is killed by a bullet, there is a verdict of homicide. On bills of lading the ship owner specially guards himself from the liability due to the loss of cargo by "an act of God." Always the same element, that of the uncertain, the unknown, the incalculable. Logically, when men come to such conclusions concerning acts of God, it should be the duty of the authorities to issue a warrant for the arrest of God, or at least, publicly denounce his conduct. But anything so straightforward is not to be expected. Rather do men get down on the marrow bones and thank God for His many kindnesses, and never seem to think that a god with a grain of intelligence might resent such an obvious sarcasm. Fortunately the Freethinker is not saddled with such demoralising and oppressive beliefs. He does not mistake his ignorance or his knowledge, and then fall down in worship before the creation of his own imagination. He recognises his limitations, and while the realisation of ignorance paves the way for real knowledge, its deification endows it with a disastrous perpetuity.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE EVILS OF ANTISEMITISM

MR. JAMES PARKES has selected three themes, above all others, for special study in his volume, "The Emergence of the Jewish Problem," 1878 to 1939 (Oxford University Press, 1946; 15s.). These subjects are Palestine, the Jewish minorities and the employment of antisemitism for political purposes. As our author observes, although "the Palestine Mandate has made possible the establishment of half a-million Jews in Palestine it has not solved the problem of their relations with the Arabs. Moreover, as a result of the deliberate propaganda of the Nazis, antisemitism has been spread throughout the world, and the most stable-seeming Jewish communities are conscious of increased hostility in the environment in which they have lived, possibly for centuries."

Poland and Rumania alike disregarded the obligations imposed for fair treatment of their Jewish subjects by the Versailles Treaty, and, in these States, antisemitism has raged as furiously as ever. Indeed, Britain, France, Holland, and a few other States are the only European countries in which the Jew enjoys legal equality. That religious animosity still plays its vindictive part in hatred of the Jews, Parkes emphasises in noting the glaring fact that in Poland "the complicity of many high-ranking Roman Catholics with the parties of violent antisemitism," is notorious.

Owing to the World War the publication of Parkes' volume was delayed. When his work was written Poland was the most populous centre of Eastern Jewry, but wholesale massacre and spoliation have since reduced the Jewish population of Poland to under 100,000 miserable survivors and the chief Jewries of Eastern Europe are, at present, in Hungary and Rumania.

Antisemitism is largely a sinister legacy from the Christian Middle Ages, when the Jew was denied the right to own, or even cultivate the soil, and his exclusion from domestic

industries drove him into mercantile adventures, usury, and even peddling. Also, he was frequently, especially in Moorish Spain, the leading physician of the day and, even in countries where the Jew was most bitterly persecuted, he was retained by princes, both of Church and State, as their medical adviser.

One of the most important chapters of Parkes' work surveys antisemitism from 1919 onwards. He shows how Roman Catholic antagonism retreated from sight, while political antisemitism extended its scope. The prominent part played by Jews in the peace settlement attracted wide attention, while the publication and extensive sale of the spurious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" imposed on people of all classes. Again, the influence of Jews in the Russian Revolution, with Jewish participation in Hungarian and German upheavals, combined with the alleged revelation of a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the Gentile world, aroused both resentment and alarm. As Parkes pertinently observes: "It was the appearance of Jewish strength on all sides which disposed people to lend an ear to the revelations contained in the *Protocols*. Brought to the West in devious ways, they were quickly translated and appeared in Britain and America, in France, in Germany, and in many other countries. In this country they were taken with a puzzled seriousness by the 'Morning Post,' in the United States they turned Henry Ford into an irrational antisemite."

But as Parkes points out, this supposed Hebrew ascendancy was soon proved illusory by subsequent events. The Arabs in Palestine prevented Jewish predominance. The rights conferred by treaty on the Eastern Jews were completely ignored. The Jews were mercilessly treated in Poland, and in the Russian regions overrun by Denikin and Petluray. Also, during the earlier years of Bolshevik rule in Russia itself, they were penalised, if not persecuted, on economic grounds.

Moreover, the *Protocols* were completely exposed as brazen forgeries. They were shown to have been fabricated from a satire on Napoleon III published many years ago, and the alleged Jewish plot appears to have been concocted by the Tsarist police as a justification of the appalling pogroms that followed the assassination of Alexander II of Russia, in 1881. Nevertheless, we gather: "To this day the *Protocols* are impudently circulated among the ignorant, from Latin America to Japan, not omitting the Arab world, as though there had never been any doubt about their authenticity, or, at least, as if the forgery had never been proved."

Thirteen years before the Nazis assumed authority their party programme denounced the Jews as inveterate enemies of the German people. Therefore, Section 1 of their proclamation announced that: Only those who are of German blood, without regard to religion, can be members of the German nation. No Jew can in consequence be a member of the nation.

So, having persuaded himself that he acted under divine guidance, Hitler ordained that all Jews or suspected Jews, must be deprived of their occupations as journalists, editors, physicians, legists and, indeed, of every important post. No untruth was left untold if it served to inflame fanaticism throughout the Reich against the envied and hated Israelite. All foreign protests against Nazi enormities were ascribed to Jewish machinations. As Parke notes: "Under war conditions it became possible, when desirable, freely to make Churchill, Roosevelt, or other statesmen of the United Nations into Jews, or into stooges of crypto-Jewish influence."

Every ill from which the German people suffered after their defeat in the first world war was attributed to the malevolence of the Jew. Jewish Bolshevism was a favourite political bogey. The great industrialists were warned against international Jewish finance, while small retailers were reminded of the deadly competition of the Jewish multiple stores; also, students were antagonised by Nazi insistence on the predominance of Jews in the learned professions.

Hitler's fulminations against Israel were so extreme that, for a time, foreign observers declined to take him too seriously,

despite his reiterated assertion that he was divinely inspired in his crusade. But many early ugly incidents might have warned them of their misjudgment. No sooner were the Nazis in control than excesses of the most outrageous character occurred. These misdeeds were officially condemned, but nothing was done to curb them. And in 1938 came the pillage of the Jews as a professed reprisal for the murder of Von Rath, and the destruction of the synagogues by an indignant people, also, the authorities imposed a penalty of a thousand million Reichmarks (£80,000,000) on the previously impoverished Jewish community.

Parkes cites a passage from Stephen E. Roberts' "The House that Hitler Built," which clearly describes the deplorable condition of the German Jews in 1937, to whom all civil rights had been denied: "He is not a citizen; he cannot vote or attend any political meeting; he has no liberty of speech and cannot defend himself in print." After mentioning many further disabilities, Roberts continues: "If he is starving he can receive no aid from the *Winterhilfe* organisation, and if he dies in battle his name will be on no war memorial." Then follow various other restrictions, and "the upshot of them all is that the Jew is deprived of all opportunity for advancement and is lucky if he continues to scrape a bare living under the Black Guards and Gestapo. It is a campaign of annihilation—a pogrom of the crudest form supported by every state instrument."

With official connivance and encouragement, the German Jews were bullied and badgered everywhere, and even their school children were made the victims of spite and intolerance. By 1935 the persecuted people were pouring out of Germany. Earlier emigrants had been able to carry substantial sums which enabled them to embark on enterprises abroad, but now, those that had remained behind were too poor to do anything but seek humble employment in lands to which they had fled.

Parkes reminds his readers that: "The disturbance caused by the arrival of refugees thus gave scope to the Fascist parties to impress themselves on public opinion. To what extent the parties were also directly financed by Germany it is not possible always to establish. But it is known that in their general propaganda abroad the Nazis were spending 286,000,000 marks by 1934 . . . and that this figure had risen to nearly 500,000,000 two years later. Whether it were Mosley and the British Union of Fascists, Degrelle and the Belgian Rexists, the Mufti and the Arab extremists, or Codreanu and the Rumanian Iron Guard, the leaders were brought to Germany, fêted at the Party rally, taught the Nazi methods of propaganda, provided with literature, linked up with the local German organisations, magnified in the Nazi Press and generally identified with the interests of the Third Reich." And even in Italy, where Mussolini had formerly repudiated racialism and invited Jewish students to study in Italian seats of learning, Nazi influences became so powerful that in 1938 anti-Jewish measures were introduced.

In truth, anti-semitism was gradually intensified wherever Nazi propaganda penetrated. The spurious *Protocols* are still in circulation and it is stated that: "At the present moment there exists in England a publishing company (The Britons), whose sole function is their dissemination." And when one considers the vast sums expended in Nazi propaganda with the millions of anti-semitic pamphlets circulated throughout the world, it is not surprising that an increased anti-Jewish feeling has been generated in Canada, South Africa, Latin America and even in the United States.

Parkes is fully aware of the complexity of the problems he surveys. The Palestine problem alone presents insuperable difficulties and recent events add to one's despondency of any peaceful settlement. When dealing with the Polish tragedy, Parkes hesitates to apportion blame, for both the Jews and the Catholic Poles have erred.

In his forthcoming second volume, Parkes hopes to deal with more recent happenings. Meanwhile, let us hope that the future will prove less tragic than Jewish experiences in the past.

T. F. PALMER.

GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE

SATAN is probably the most calumniated person in the world. Everybody puts his own misdoings on that universal scapegoat, and then drives him into the wilderness. We wonder that, since Nero, Henry VIII, and Judas Iscariot have been whitewashed, no generous person has come forward to the rescue of Old Nick. The Devil's advocate would have a very good case. Milton, when he set out to assert eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to man, was nevertheless forced to justify the ways of Satan, who is the real hero of *Paradise Lost*, and in his high-minded rebelliousness represents "some of the grand spirit of the English Republican, John Milton himself, who may be suspected of thus covertly protesting against divine despotism, as he openly did against human tyranny."

All the worst things said against the Devil by the religious really redound to his credit. He is said to have tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. But, had she not done so, a pair of ignorant fools would have remained in Paradise, and we should never have been born. We are told that he is the author of pleasure. He invented all kinds of dances, and laid the corner-stone of all the theatres and music-halls. It is he who gives us Sunday excursions and all kinds of freedom. Satan is the liberator and the emancipator, and to his enterprise and spirit we owe such freedom and pleasure as we enjoy. In representing the principles of doubt, individuality, criticism, and the breaking of conventional chains, Satan has been the great public benefactor.

Satan has been most vilely abused and without cause. He is called in the New Testament "the father of lies," and "a liar from the beginning"; but honesty must return the verdict of "Not proven." If he was, as the author of Revelation makes out, identical with the serpent of Eden, it appears from the story that he told our first parents the simple truth. They did not die when they ate the fruit but lived to a ripe old age. It was the other fellow who was a liar from the beginning. As but for Eve's transgression there would have been no culture or civilisation, the Devil is entitled to our gratitude for bringing it about. He was the first advocate of woman's rights, and introduced the sex to the means of education.

Then Satan is said to have made poor old Job boil over, but he did no more than the Lord permitted him to do—indeed, put poor old Job into his hands to do; and the story shows that Satan had sized up Job quite correctly, and the Lord made a mistake when he backed his constancy against the adversary.

Then Satan is represented as tempting Jesus Christ. But he did not tempt him to turn water into wine for drunken folks, or to curse inoffensive fig trees, or destroy other people's pigs. Jesus had been anticipating Tamer and Succa by fasting, and the Devil made the sensible suggestion that he should display his divinity by turning stones into bread. To show his divinity was the very occasion of his coming to earth, and Satan deserves thanks for his assistance. Jesus at this time lost a magnificent opportunity of converting the Devil.

The defence of Old Nick might be elaborated into a volume. Nearly all the accusations against him stultify themselves. They say "lazy as the Devil," and at the same time admit his wondrous activity. What the enemies of Satan have denounced him for is really his glory. They have, as has been pointed out, unwittingly carved him out a great reputation as the champion of personal liberty and the purveyor of manifold terrestrial delights.

A. FRAND.

ACID DROPS

The obvious fraud at the Roman Catholic Church at Stockport is still going strong. The "miracle" it may be remembered consisted of a crown of flowers which were placed in the Church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the flowers remain as fresh as ever after more than six months. An enormous number of people have visited the Church, and a large sum of money has been received by the Church. The latest report is that "not a petal has moved; they still retain their colour." But we would add that the ban against strangers getting too near the flowers is still in force. Has the Church something to hide? We leave further comment to our readers, except to add that if ordinary people tried the same stunt the police would have something to say.

We wonder what it is that urges masses of people to camp out all night in damp and cold in order to see the Princess and the man she has since married? Was it the newspapers with their tremendous boosting of any activities of royalty, the appeal to the emotions has been brought to a fine art by the Press. We recall the almost mandarin details published on the occasion of the Princess's visit to South Africa, particularly her promise to "dedicate her life to the people," which was very touching. But this sort of thing can be over-done.

The "Leader" thinks that "what the world needs is more truth-seekers like Bishop Barnes." But, of course, it all depends for what we are looking; if we are looking for a real revival of Christianity the Bishop is quite out of court. If he is looking for a new form of religion and to call it Christianity, the Bishop is playing double. For the Christianity of Barnes is not the creed that is said to have been established in Jerusalem, and for which historic Christianity has fought. When all is said and done, Bishop Barnes is trying to make the religious beliefs of two thousand years ago agree with the intellectual life of to-day, and that we submit is impossible.

One feature of this trying to save Christianity is often forgotten, but which we should always bear in mind. No matter how much dogma is thrown over, the character of Jesus is always retained. Of course we all feel indebted to those who have added to our intellectual life, or helped us in this or that difficulty. In science, in literature, in all things, the lesson once learned, we do not require to know the name of the teacher—we are independent of him.

A ghost has appeared at Ipswich; its latest exploit is playing the Church organ. The Rector guarantees the genuineness for he has heard the music, which stopped when he got to the Church door. This is considered to be enough evidence, but we suggest that the evidence would have been more telling if the ghost played the organ whilst the parson was in the church.

Mr. W. B. Nottidge, Chairman of the Kent Education Committee, informs us that he would like to see Christianity forming the background of all education, and further, he wants the religious education made compulsory. We do not think that parents are particularly desirous that religious education should be part of the curriculum, otherwise there would be no need for this constant pressure from education authorities. We think that the majority of parents do not care about religion; they simply take the line of least resistance and submit. The rising generation will have to pay the price.

A lament from Bishop Flint (R.C.). He gives us the startling news that the world is "in a terrible state," and with the aplomb of a man advertising his own wares, the Bishop advises us that the best thing we can do is to "turn to God." During the war, he says, when the danger was very real, "England turned to God, and we were saved by a miracle." We are afraid that this follower of God either does not speak the truth or his memory of God's part at the beginning of the war is not trustworthy. Our own recollection is that when the war broke out there were the usual appeals to God, Days of Prayer, Nights of Prayer, even weeks of prayers, still no help came from heaven. Arrangements were made for our political leaders to go abroad

to "carry on the war" from there. The people of Britain were urged to do their utmost, and the cry was for more men and more guns. In short, the deity was put in cold storage. We suggest that Bishop Flint thinks again.

It is generally with pleasure that we read Cummings, of the "News Chronicle," because the opinions he expresses are his own and are usually very sound; they are not an echo of what others say. For this reason we "pull him up" with some little pleasure. He attributes the following anecdote to one of the four Georges, who was inspecting a body of soldiers, and studying them intently he remarked: "I don't know how they will affect the enemy, but, by God, they frighten me!" We believe the story was told of the Duke of Wellington, for none of the four Georges was renowned for his wit or intelligence. A love of fat women, mastery of the art of robbing the Treasury, and immorality in general, were the features of their reign. It is a pity that for many years no publisher has re-issued Thackeray's "Four Georges." We doubt whether any "modernist" would deal with the subject in such a truthful and trenchant style. Thackeray does not mince words, he shows his readers exactly what the "Four Georges" were.

Mr. Cummings says that there are "actually only twenty-eight members of the Jewish race in the House of Commons." This is simply not true. There are no members of the Jewish Race in the House of Commons or anywhere else. There are German Jews, Dutch Jews, English Jews, Italian Jews, Turkish and Chinese Jews, but these definitions are national and religious, not racial. The Princess—whom our readers will know was recently married—does not belong to the Scotch race, any more than her husband is a member of the German or Greek race. In most countries nationality is determined by the birth place. If Hitler had been born in England he would be English, subject to the laws of England. A man's religion operates under that ruling. If he is born in the West, it is odds on that he will be Christian; if in the East, then Mohammedan or Hindu, with this difference, if he is intelligent he will discard religion. We hope Mr. Cummings will help to kill this stupid racial superstition which nestles so comfortably in the heads of those who are pleased to consider themselves educated.

War did something good that might not have happened for some time. The demand for better social conditions and international relationship based on intelligence is all to the good. We have noted also that there is a great demand for literature; people do read more than formerly, which augurs for a brighter future. We have in mind, particularly, what we may call the "Thomas Paine Revival," especially his book, the "Age of Reason," the book that was—except for militant Freethinkers—abused, misrepresented, hated and feared by Christians all over the world. It can now be classed as a "Best Seller." We stress the fact that Churchill borrowed extensively from Paine, but let it be noted, however, without acknowledgment.

The Bishop of London makes certain discoveries that set one wondering at his keen insight and knowledge of human nature. The "Yorkshire Evening News" announces that the Bishop had discovered that "sincere people are longing for the fundamentals of Christian belief." This may be wishful thinking on the part of our Christian Priest; our difficulty is to understand it. We know of people who get uneasy as to the state of their bank balance, or, if they are patriotic, as to the future of their country. But we have yet to find someone who is longing for something that is so vague; even if he had it, it would resemble—nothing!

At the time of writing, the Isle of Ely is in the throes of the Battle of the Sunday Cinemas. We are of the opinion that everything for or against has been said, and to-day the opposition is a clear instance of religious bigotry against common sense. Surely no one can sincerely maintain that a form of amusement that is permissible and relatively innocent on six days of the week, becomes vicious and immoral on Sunday. From beginning to end the opposition is evidence of religious intolerance, and there is surely enough common sense among the people of Ely to set aside this latest manifestation of religious intolerance.

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SUGAR PLUMS

A town's meeting at Burton-on-Trent gave 128 votes in favour of Sunday Cinemas and 344 votes against. A poll was demanded and taken which decisively reversed the position, 7,541 voted for Sunday Cinemas and 2,137 against, a majority of 5,404 in favour. The Rev. P. K. Challen, Vicar of Christ Church, deplored the result, and sincerely hopes the Lord may have mercy on the souls of those organising the campaign for Sunday Cinemas. It would seem that the Lord and the Rev. Challen have not seen eye to eye over Sunday Cinemas but that is not important, we hope the cinema management will ignore souls and consider the brains of the people of Burton-on-Trent and provide instructive rational Sunday films for the intelligent citizens, the others can go to church.

Does anybody want to buy a church? God apparently has no further use for the 150-year-old Westgate Methodist Church at Barnsley and it is to be sold by auction, together with the organ, pews, and other furniture. One hundred and fifty years is not a great age as churches go but possibly the congregation has died out, or been directed elsewhere, or maybe they were such a bad lot that Jehovah decided to cut losses and sell out while prices were good.

Will Freethinkers in Crewe willing to help form a branch of the National Secular Society in that district get in touch with Mr. T. Abrams, at 74, Smith Grove, Cheshire. Indifference to religion is widespread but that is not enough, we must lead in that work.

Here is something of interest to Blackburn and district Freethinkers, Mr. T. M. Mosley of Nottingham, will lecture in the Public Lecture Hall, Northgate, Blackburn, to-day (Sunday) at 2-45 p.m. on "What Think Ye of Christ?—A Freethinker's Answer." Local saints can best help by bringing their religious friends to hear Mr. Mosley.

The West London Branch, N.S.S., has plenty of variety in its lecture syllabus and is holding some very good meetings in "The Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, London, W. To-day (Sunday), Mr. R. H. Rosetti speaks on "From Jesus to Atom Bombs." The lecture begins at 7-15 p.m. The subject should be attractive to Christians as well as to Freethinkers and the Branch officials are hoping for a big attendance of both.

ATHEIST versus CHRISTIAN

A CHRISTIAN, for some reason known only to himself, delights to denounce an Atheist as the personification of all selfishness.

In the stunted mind of the orthodox believer the mere fact of a man *daring to believe in himself* definitely establishes his unutterable selfishness. I may be very dense, but for the life of me I cannot see why it is considered *selfish* to be self-reliant and *unselfish* to rely on some incomprehensible, half-being-half-spirit who has never yet been seen, heard, felt or smelt!

The poor Christian simply cannot get away from the idea that Man is a silly, senseless, helpless, incompetent, nasty and entirely wicked piece of work who can do nothing at all unless he begs for aid from some supernatural spirit claiming to be *three persons in one!* That otherwise perfectly normal human beings, capable of using their brains for transacting Big Business, can still remain at the infant level of intelligence regarding supernatural belief is strange, indeed. To believe in an Intelligent Spirit one might just as well believe in fairies, hob-goblins or even Santa Claus.

Surely it is no worse to be a selfish Atheist than it is to be a cringing, crying and fawning beggar—pleading for favours and rewards and indulging in sycophantic flattery in order to escape punishment. To my mind the man without fear, the Atheist, who is prepared to take what comes like a man and not like a whining puppy-dog is the finer specimen and definitely the more moral. But courage is seldom a strong point with Christians. They must have a leader and follow with the crowd—it is so much safer than striking out independently with the courage of one's own convictions. The Christian will willingly sacrifice reason to belief in primitive superstition for purely selfish gain. He is looking out for his own safety all the time and yet he presumes to call the Atheist selfish!

Another of his favourite arguments is that God must be the sole answer to everything. He claims that we cannot live unless God puts the breath into our bodies. The world could not exist unless God created it. Nothing can be that was not made by God. Nothing can happen unless God wills it. And so on *ad nauseam*.

As for the creation of this world; surely every schoolchild is taught that the earth was originally a whirling mass thrown off by the sun and that millions and millions of years elapsed before it cooled sufficiently for life to evolve upon it. Furthermore, it is no more than a speck of dust in the whole vastness of the Universe. Certainly no intelligent God would take such a round-about way to create one little world and take an eternity in which to do it. And what about all the other millions and millions of worlds dotted about in illimitable space? Did God just put them there for ornament? Surely no one could suppose that he went to the trouble of creating countless millions of *other* worlds merely for the sole purpose of putting puny little Man on the map of *this* world. It is, of course, quite unthinkable.

And again—why did God bother to people this earth with primitive savages when he could have created civilized and intelligent beings in the first place? And why didn't he make them all believe in him instead of letting them invent their own beliefs and then punishing them for doing so?

But no Christian would dream of asking such questions—and no priest could answer them if he did! It is always so much easier to denounce the wicked Atheist who does dare to question because he has the courage and the honesty to doubt the veracity of such unreasonable nonsense.

Only a helpless child needs someone to support him and some higher intelligence to guide him. The adult should be able to stand on his own feet and have sufficient confidence to believe in himself. To ascribe all goodness to a God and all wickedness to a Devil is to put us on a par with the most ignorant savage. With only half an ounce of brains we should know that our

human characteristics are either inherited or developed. We can be good or bad without believing in the bogeys of gods and devils so the argument that Atheists must of necessity be evil-doers is too absurd to countenance. Yet the poor, childish Christian still uses this fallacy as a master-thrust in his feeble attempt to justify his belief in God. It is pitiful, indeed, to see him floundering in the darkness of Superstition when the light of Reason is there—if he was not too blind to see it.

W. H. WOOD.

SANCTUARY IN THE WILDWOOD

The gracious lady in the white hat with the large feather seemed older, her face sadder, though still as comely as when he had seen her last.

"Yes, I'm the same gamekeeper," he said. "But lady, why do you come to this dreary place?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered in a voice tinged with spiritual melancholy. "I guess it's because as a girl I knew the Count and his queer ways. I loved him as a father. You've been here long, my friend?"

"Yes," he reflected, "over 40 years. But tell me madam—who are you really?"

"You've forgotten? I'm the little one they placed as dead on the bier. You must remember how the Count loved death, the nuns chanting, the waning candles!"

"Yes, yes! As yesterday. Strange man was m'lord!"

"Strange indeed!" she continued wearily, "and as I lay on the black bier and the candles burned low . . . oh God! Do I remember? How the Count sat beside me, kissing my forehead and saying, 'Poor child! So lovely! To die so young! O just and merciful God—how canst thou?' Those were his words . . . now you'll remember!"

They passed into the gloomy chapel as the setting sun shone through the stained glass windows.

Suddenly the old gamekeeper seized her; but gently, my friends, *very* gently! And lay her as gent(leman)ly on the same black bier, upon a rude cross.

"This is the last act," he said calmly. "You have it coming . . . according to the old manuscript you are to be crucified in your 44th year."

"Oh!" she gasped, lying quietly on the cross. "How delightful!"

"Yes . . . as you know, this is a little temple of love. The Count loved Jesus bleeding and dying on the cross. It represented *love*. Now relax!"

He rubbed her hands with a white powder; "So the nails won't hurt so much," he said.

"You will nail my feet too?" she asked, her eyes large with wonder.

"Yes, of course. You will not be angry with me?"

"No, dear . . . you must do your duty, naturally; are my garments arranged modestly, dear?"

"I will attend that, milady. But there must be no endearments . . . the Count wouldn't approve, and don't wiggle your feet . . . but cross them on the cross. There! How can I drive a spike through the ankles if you don't lie quietly?"

The lady smiled wearily as she raised her soft swimming eyes to the ancient beamed ceiling. The gamekeeper pulled a box of spikes and a heavy wooden mallet from beneath the bier.

"How do you expect me to nail your hands, madam!" said he, "when they're folded on your bosom? Extend them. . . . So!"

"Oh!" she answered quietly submissive. "I forgot! And will you raise the cross, so I may hang and bleed to death, nice and slowly?"

"Certainly!" he replied. "Why not? The Count loved it thus . . . the *transfiguration* he called it."

"And will you spear me in the heart? . . . Oh if the Count could only see me *now*!"

Then from the organ loft came soft sounds as of phantom music, and voices singing, "Lord God Almighty!"

A door opened and there sat the old Count Oswald, staring with dead eyes at the crucifixion he so loved during his long and unhappy Christian life.

All according to the ancient manuscript!

But at this moment a certain Lady Gloria awoke with a start. Moonlight covered her downy bed; and as she stretched her lovely white arms in luxurious abandon, a *second* pan fell to the pantry floor with a crash!

"Rats!" screamed Her Most Gracious and Luscious Ladyship. "Oh my God!" . . . as she dived under the silken coverlets.

EARLE CORNWALL.

HOW MANY GODS ARE THERE?

It was a day of great portent in Tipperary town. His Lordship the Bishop had already arrived to examine the children before giving them Confirmation the next day.

Young Terry McDoon after a final admonition from his mother to mind carefully all His Lordship the Bishop was saying, ran off to take his place in the Church.

Terry's turn arrived at last. He was now kneeling at the altar rails amongst a group of six boys.

The Bishop, after much humming and hawing, pointed straight at Terry, and asked:

"Is God the Father God?"

"Yes, me Lord."

"Is God the Son God?"

"Yes, me Lord."

"Is God the Holy Ghost God?"

"Yes, me Lord."

"Hum, hum," said the Bishop, facetiously, "so there are three Gods?"

It had been dinned into Terry that the answer to the conundrum was "One God," but surely he was mistaken as the Bishop said "Three," so he straightway answered:

"Yes, me Lord, there are three."

Wherewith the Bishop called furiously to Fr. Moriarty:

"Take that boy outside and teach him how many Gods there are!"

The priest rushed Terry into the churchyard and after boxing his ears and giving him a blow which knocked him flat on the ground, said:

"Now can you tell me how many Gods there are?"

"Yirrah!" answered Terry, indignantly, "if there was a whole field full of them now I wouldn't tell you about them!"

N. F.

CORRESPONDENCE

LEGAL MARRIAGE.

SIR,—In response to Rev. F. H. E. Harfitt's inquiry in "The Freethinker," November 16, 1947, regarding the legality of marriage in England, you state that "the person sanctioning the marriage must be licensed by the State." Surely the reverend gentleman will now be satisfied that this is a true and accurate statement of fact and not an "expression of opinion" as he suggests.

Continuing, he states that he "feels sure you would wish to be accurate" and volunteers the information that "a civil Registrar's Licence is not available for a church marriage." This is very misleading and at best only a half truth. The law of England requires that the actual ceremony takes place before witnesses, and that it be duly registered. *Residence of 21 days in the district must be proved before the certificate can be granted.* A minister may insist on *episcopal licence* when the marriage is in church. If it is not in the parish church, but in a *dissenting chapel* or other place of worship, a registrar must be in attendance.—Yours, etc., J. HUMPHREY

FREETHOUGHT POETRY.

Sir,—May I thank Mr. W. Hawes for his most interesting letter in your issue of October 26 last?

Like him, I have found great pleasure recently in the anti-religious poems in "The Freethinker," and should be pleased to see more.

His plea for an anthology of such I wish to warmly support. I have mentioned this to reputable booksellers' and publishers' representatives, but have neither found nor heard of such a publication.

As a lover of poetry I am often nauseated at the frequency of allusion to the supernatural which often spoils what otherwise would be enjoyable.

When I first read "Thanatopsis" by Wm. Cullen Bryant, the American poet, I thought I had a real find, but on delving into his other work I find he lapses, and so does Robert Buchanan and various other supposed Secularists.

I know sir, you have as much as you can manage, but as Mr. Hawes says, among your large circle of friends surely one could be found who would undertake the compilation of such an anthology.

For the religious reader there are many books of religious and devotional verse while the many hymn books can be classed as such.

Perhaps you will give the suggestion your serious consideration.—Yours, etc.,
W. MORRIS.

RELIGION IN THE U.S.A.

Sir,—I thought you might like to know the attitude of people in this country towards our enemy—Religion.

I married a G.I. in England nearly two years ago, and came here to live.

From time to time my father sends me copies of "The Freethinker," which I enjoy reading very much.

I gave some to people around here to see how they liked them, but unfortunately they read just a little of them, and told me I was a heathen and many other "nice" words.

In my opinion, English people, although having undergone many privations which Americans know nothing of, are much more friendly and open-minded to religious discussion.

Most of the people in this town, I'd say about 75 per cent., go to church regularly, and many of them in new cars! And I'd sure like to see their reactions if they had to give up any of the luxuries they have and live like some poor English people for awhile, on two ounces of butter per week.

This is a very small town, but there are over eighteen churches in it!

Even the professors in Cornell University (in this town) seldom, if ever, have an argument against the clergy here.

So I certainly agree with anyone who says America is a more religious country on the whole. For religion is introduced into most discussions.

I hope English people are thinking about more earthly things than God, which is showing itself more every day to be the myth that it is.—Yours, etc.,
IRISE JOYNER (Mrs.).

Ithaca, New York.

OBITUARY

MARY POPPY PARKINSON

Seldom, if ever, have I felt so sad in reporting the death of a member of our branch, as I am now to report the death of Mary Poppy Parkinson at the early age of 24 years. Poppy was a very bright, cheerful, and friendly girl, and had endeared herself to all with whom she came in contact. A member of the branch for a number of years, with her parents, she was always to be found busy whenever help was needed in various activities of the movement.

Few so young have done so much so cheerfully and willingly for any cause.

An address was delivered at the Crematorium in Newcastle, before a good gathering of friends and relations by John T. Brighton.

Our sympathy goes out to her parents and brother in their loss.
J. T. B.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held October 27, 1947

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Seibert, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Woodley, Page, Morris, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to Bradford, Manchester, West London Branches, and to the Parent Society. The Secretary gave a report of the Public Conference at Birmingham organised by the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, upon which the N.S.S. is represented. The three days' proceedings were well attended, speeches were informative, the President of the N.S.S. being among the speakers, and audiences played a useful part in questions and discussion, and the local Movements should benefit from the Conference.

Reports of work done and future prospects were received from Halifax and Sheffield Branches. Lecture arrangements for Blackburn Branch and items of correspondence were dealt with. Preliminary notice for 1948 Conference ordered to be sent out in December. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for January 8, 1948, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

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, December 9, 7 p.m.: "Historical Fact and Historical Fiction," Mr. G. JEFFREY TREASE.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Decline and Fall of the House of Lords," Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "From Jesus to Atom Bombs," Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (General Secretary N.S.S.).

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Hall, Northgate).—Sunday, 2-45 p.m.: "What Think Ye of Christ?" Mr. T. M. MOSLEY (Nottingham).

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "One Hundred Years of Marx," Mr. J. C. SIDONS, B.Sc.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Film Show — "Arabia and Islam," "Galapagos."

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Freethought and Politics," Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool 1).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Atheism and Communism," Mr. S. OAKLEY (C.P.).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Socialist Realism," Prof. J. LAVRIN.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Saturday, December 13, 7 p.m.: A Whist Drive; valuable prizes. Tickets, 2s., refreshments included.

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

TO the question, "What to put in place of religion," C. G. L. DuCann has suggested Thought (with a capital T). Surely the ghost of a god. This simple substitution of a metaphysical concept recalls Comte's three stages of intellectual development; the abstract as a stepping stone between the imaginative and scientific.

The subject is interesting for we have scriptural warranty for considering God as Thought; Creative Thought; in the Wisdom literature, of Christ, the Logos, as a divine thought. Not only have we the identification of Christ as the Word, with Wisdom, Reason, Memory, Mind, Love, Brotherhood and Social Unity; but also historic philosophical consideration of thought as spiritual communion, in personal projection in a humanistic analogue; a mystical manifestation of the dialectic opposition of sympathy and antipathy.

Clearly we have different concepts of thought. Sometimes divinity is incarnate in an individual, as the Fuehrer was an incarnation of the Volk; or as with the Roman Catholics, the God is incarnate in the Church and speaks through the mouth of the Elect. As with the ancients, Thought is considered as a form of communion, just as social unity within the State was communion of individuals as members of one body, united by the same animus. And this mystical animus is identified with Thought.

Being subjective, thought is no more observable or demonstrable than God or the soul. And unless the spirits of religion are demonstrable, religion must arise in Thought. We certainly cannot consider religion as a moronic thoughtless acceptance of belief and tradition, in view of the pedantic logic of the scholastics, the intellectual acrobatics of theological dialectics, or of the sinuous subtleties of Jesuitical casuistry. And if we consider the mystic in meditation, in communion with God, as lost in thought, then thought is a characteristic of religion.

J. B. Watson, in his "Ways of Behaviourism," denied that we think, unless by that is meant verbalisation, talking to ourselves. Such a definition would seem to cover the extreme verbosity of theological and metaphysical controversy; but the quaint and fantastic imagery of the mystic may even be visual. And we are not only concerned with esoteric or technical terms, platitudes, slogans and shibboleths; but also with verbal visualisation. Analogy in poetic and rhetorical metaphor may expand into allegory, and we may be mystically lost in a maze of metaphysical or casuistical confusion of the affinities and infinities of human hopes and fears.

What is meant by thought, and can thought be separated from other metaphysical concepts; imagination, inspiration, genius, authority, power? Undoubtedly it is imaginative, and the evolutionary development of word magic involves aesthetics, of the arts as well as the sciences; and of what has been called ritual drama, and its evolution through mystery and masquerade, miracle and morality plays, the pantomimic mummery of the ballet and drama, tragedy and comedy. All of which involve the expression of feeling in human behaviour; of personal projection. We are not only concerned with intellectual and moral; with emotional and aesthetic, but also with the so-called spiritual values; the so-called religious experience.

We are not, then, concerned with thought or its absence, but with different concepts of, and different ways of, thinking. Religion is not merely theoretical; acceptance of belief and tradition; it is also practical, just as mysticism is practical psychology. Religion is a form of discipline; a specific technique, characteristic of the mystery, as of the masquerade and carnival, of pomp and pageantry; the mystical cultivation

of specific psychological states. Special music, vocal and instrumental, special dress, decoration and architecture, give the requisite atmosphere, in ritual and ceremonial. And our civic and political ceremonial still retains much that is characteristically religious.

The technique is one of illusion, involving analogical substitution in symbolism, and a saturnalian dissimulation; a mystical topsy-turvydom, a dream fantasia. There is a connection between poetic allusion, "ritual drama" and "prophetic vision," in the projection of personal feeling, in personification, personal identification in communal action, and projection into past and future, in the past Golden Age and the future Land of Unfulfilled Desire. There is a wish-fulfilment and a sublimation of repressed and inhibited feeling. And sublimation may be delirious and violent.

DuCann asserted thought as the best form of prayer, but is not prayer a form of thought? As an expression of desire, supplication in prayer not only implies a mystical quality, but also indicates one aspect of religious technique; whether it be the "vain repetition" deplored in the Gospel, or the sincere feeling in the more methodical mystical orisons. If there is one clear characteristic of religious thought it is the cultivated intensity of feeling; whether it be the insensate ferocity of feud or vendetta, the intolerance of puritanical bigotry, the sadistic discipline of the ascetic, or the senseless delight of beatific vision.

To the hypnotic effect of the religious atmosphere and the rhythmic repetition of hymn and prayer, we must add the escapism expressed in isolation; whether it be the solitude of the hermit, the monastic cell and cloister, or the more relative closed circle of sectarianism. Though the reasons may be various, segregation, whether of the child, of the sexes, of sects, of individuals or peoples, appears to be a primary condition of religious training and technique which, being practical, is a means and not an end.

For this reason it is a mistake to seek any particular psychological state as specifically religious. Like the Church and St. Paul, it is all things to all men. In war it stimulates blood-lust, and in peace time, a docile acquiescence; in each case, a discipline for obedience and humility. It may foster persecution and also espouse martyrdom. It offers a means for the accentuation of any emotional state. Though primitive, religion is practical psychology and the mystical method, effective.

Religion has played its part in the evolution of thought. Freud suggested that it is, though physically false, yet psychologically true. It may be, to whatever extent we live in a dream world. So it is necessary to understand religious thought, for it offers neither balanced judgment nor social integrity.

IL. H. PREECE.

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