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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Are We Still Christian ?

OVER seventy years have elapsed since Strauss asked the question I have placed at the head of this article, and it is a question raised again by Bishop Barnes' "The Rise of Christianity." The query was direct, and the querist sought in asking it to bring the Christian world to a reconsideration of its fundamental doctrines in the light of existing knowledge. But that is what the religious world never has done, and never will do. The usual restatement of religious beliefs, so that they may not conflict with modern knowledge, is not a candid examination of their real present value, but an endeavour to see how much of the old can be retained *in spite* of modern developments, or an attempt to twist modern teachings so as to harmonise with ancient records and decaying creeds. It is in this way that the doctrine of evolution is made to harmonise with Genesis, the Biblical idea of the origin of languages with the scientific belief of the common origin of most of the European tongues, and, in sociology, the teachings of Marx extracted from the nebulous sayings attributed to Jesus Christ. The question is never, "What evidence is there for the old beliefs?" but always, "How much of the old belief am I compelled to relinquish?"

One way of answering the question might have been by putting a counter query: "Have we ever been Christian?"—Christian, that is, in the sense of carrying out the plain teachings of the Christian religion to their logical conclusion. Certainly no nation has ever been Christian in that sense. Individuals here and there may have come nearer the mark, but in the mass the common sense of mankind has asserted itself by putting necessary qualifications or modifications on Christian teaching that would admit of their possessing at least a show of reason. We hear much of the corruption of primitive Christian teaching, but the truth is that it was only as it became corrupt that it became decently practicable. Such a precept as "Give to him that asketh" demanded the qualifying clause—if he is deserving of the gift; that enjoining the believer to "Resist not evil"—do not encourage the spirit of revenge. In every case the extravagances of Christian teaching had to be toned down before there was even a decent pretence that it was applicable to ordinary human affairs.

And even then the interpretations placed by the bulk of the body of believers varied to such an extent that, in talking of Christian beliefs, it is necessary to specify the century, almost the generation, in order to have a clear conception of what set of beliefs we are referring to. There is no definite set of beliefs that can be said to have been accepted by all Christians at all times and under all conditions. The nature of inspiration, of revelation, of the nature and relation of the three persons of the Trinity, of

Providence, have all varied from age to age, one generation adopting what another has rejected, or taking as an article of faith what had previously been denounced as the greatest of heresies.

In the essay alluded to Strauss answered his own question by showing in a series of chapters that the standpoint from which we moderns contemplate nature has so completely altered from that of our ancestors that Christian beliefs no longer possess any force. To them the earth was the centre of the universe, the scene of God's direct operations; man was literally the lord of creation, with all nature constructed with a view to his welfare and happiness. With us, on the contrary, the earth has been deposed from its commanding position, and ranks only as a mere speck in a universe of worlds; man, while the most complex form of animal life known to us, is yet but a term in the long series of animal forms, to the continuance or happiness of which nature is as supremely indifferent as it is to the preservation or happiness of a worm struggling in the jaws of a bird. The cosmology upon which Christianity rested, and from which it was a logical conclusion, has been completely destroyed; it no longer exists even in the minds of the most illiterate, and with its decay the doctrines of Christianity are left without even a gloss of reason to hide their barbaric character.

The inevitable result of these changes, as Strauss pointed out (and followed by Bishop Barnes) has been that Christian beliefs can no longer stand as matters of intellectual conviction. They exist thanks to the indolence of one class, the fears of another, and the cupidity of a third; but a search for Christian doctrines as matters of sound intellectual conviction is fast assuming the shape of a search for the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life.

What educated man or woman is there to-day who can honestly believe in the power of prayer, in miracles, in inspiration, in special providence, or in any of the specifically Christian doctrines? All these beliefs may still be professed, but is there any sincerity at the back of the profession? Why is it that Christians denounce as impostures all stories of miracles and the like, except such as are contained in their own sacred books, and, when one of their contemporaries professes to have received a message direct from God Almighty, join with the most pronounced Atheist in looking upon such an assertion as a proof of dementia? Only that there is no conviction beneath the assertion of belief. There is a Wesleyan Methodist fire and life assurance society. This by itself is a practical negation of the belief in Providence, and a religious body in the States recently denounced such societies as Atheistic in character. But suppose this association were offered the chance of insuring two buildings—an Atheist lecture hall with a lightning conductor, and a church without; does anyone doubt which building would have to pay the larger premium? When it comes to hard matters of fact the Christian acts

pretty much as does the Atheist. He takes all the precautions that science advises or common sense suggests, and if he does place his trust in providence it is only because his resources elsewhere have failed.

No man can see God in the workings of the world as our ancestors saw him. Science has so successfully explained in terms of mechanical forces one set of phenomena after another, criticism has so riddled the various conceptions of Deity that have been propounded from time to time, that the portion of the Athanasian Creed affirming that God is incomprehensible is being generally accepted, only there is the additional conviction that it is hardly worth while troubling one's head concerning an established incomprehensibility. Christians themselves, filled with the desire to commit suicide to save themselves being slaughtered, explain at length that nature expresses invariable laws, that there is no alteration in the mechanical sequence of events either discoverable or thinkable; only they add that behind these processes there is a Deity as the creator and sustainer of all. But it was neither God the creator, nor God the sustainer of invariable processes, that aroused the fears and secured the worship of people. They worshipped God not as the creator of the universe, but as the constant manipulator of it in the interests of mankind. A God that *created* the world, and ever afterwards "sat up aloft seeing it go," could no more command the worship of people than a parliament that was twelve months in recess each year could successfully appeal for their votes. A mere abstraction such as Deity has become in the hands of most advanced apologists may live for a while in virtue of the inherited feelings or instinct to which it appeals, but its final disappearance is a mere question of time.

The distance we have drifted from our ancient moorings may be seen plainly enough by one or two further considerations. Nothing is more commonly met with in religious circles and in religious journals than the statement that Parliament is not the place in which religion should be discussed, nor is the pulpit the place to decide political issues. One could appreciate such a declaration if it were made by Atheists only, but to find it stated by Christians is, to say the least of it, surprising. Christians of earlier generations knew of no such division, nor does the greatest Church of all, the Roman Church, admit any such division to-day. To them the Church was part and parcel of the State, and if Christianity be all that its confessions of faith declare it to be, their position was the only logical one. If Christianity be a body of doctrines resting upon evidence that can command the assent of all who impartially examine them, if the current claim be true that the highest form of social life is inseparable from belief in these doctrines, that even family life and individual character are endangered by their absence, then every argument that will hold good for the State taking charge of the education of the people, regulating certain aspects of family life, and doing what it can to raise the character of its subjects, will also hold for the State to act as an instructor in matters of religion. Upon these assumptions the State has as much right to insist that a parent shall instruct his children in religion as it has to insist upon his taking charge of their education or supplying them with proper food and shelter. It is conceivable that Christians might be so far in a minority as not to be able to induce the State to act in this manner; but that Christians themselves should assist the movement for divesting the

State of all influence in matters of religion is an admission that they have ceased to believe in the supreme value of their own dogmas, and have come to regard religious beliefs as a kind of speculative luxury that no one gains by in the possession or loses by in the rejection.

The plain fact is that the vast majority of the civilised world have already outgrown Christian beliefs. They may, many of them, still accept these in name, but they attach to them a meaning completely at variance with their historical significance. The whole spirit of Christianity is alien to the methods of modern thought and antagonistic to its results. It dismisses its God as a myth, its science as a fairy-tale, its description of an after-world as hysterical and useless. With the doctrine of eternal damnation denounced from hundreds of pulpits as an outrage on the character of God; with the fall of man dismissed as a fable, and by implication the necessity of the atonement abolished; with the various doctrines of Christianity affiliated to similar teachings of half-savage religions; with the Bible reduced from its historic character as a God-given revelation to that of a mere collection of anonymous pamphlets without a shred of authority in science or history; with all this already accomplished, one may well ask with Strauss, Are we still Christian? Christian in name, perhaps in temper, yes; but in conviction, for the most part, no. Conviction—honest, earnest, intellectual conviction—on this subject is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. As a profession it still exists, and it will continue to exist in this form so long as the indolence of one class combines with the interest of another for its perpetuation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

THE atom has often been compared to a miniature solar system, in which the electrons revolve around their nucleus as the earth, and the other planets, revolve around the sun. But while the planets all travel round the sun in the same direction, and in elliptical paths of no great eccentricity, there is reason to believe that electrons travel round their nucleus in different directions, and in both circles and ellipses of all degrees of eccentricity.

It is assumed that when the atom is in a stable state the electrons revolve around their nucleus without radiating any energy. Bohr adopted the view that the emission of light was an indication of the atom passing from one stable state to another. According to this view, the emission of light indicates that the electrons, hitherto revolving in orbits comparatively distant from the nucleus suddenly jump into nearer orbits. The atom then loses energy which spreads as light-waves through the surrounding medium. When light is absorbed by the atom, energy is gained, and the electrons then jump to a larger orbit. When the orbit is circular, as in the case of the hydrogen atom, the electron can circulate round the nucleus only at certain definite distances from it. It cannot describe a circle with a radius intermediate between such distances. What is known about elements other than hydrogen is sufficient to indicate that, with the necessary modifications for elliptical orbits, the same principles apply throughout.

The passage of an electron from one orbit to another is generally considered to be an instantaneous event, and we are often told that the electron *passes* from one orbit to another without passing over the intermediate space. Such a phenomenon appears to be totally at variance with our most fundamental conceptions. Further consideration, however, may lead to the conclusion that it is not quite so paradoxical as,

at first glance, it appears. C. E. M. Joad, referring to this phenomenon, says: "One might be justified in saying that it (the electron) goes out of existence in one place and comes into existence in another." ("Guide to Modern Thought," Q. Books, p. 78.) It is on the lines of such an illustration that an explanation may eventually be found. It may be, as Bertrand Russell, in his "ABC of Atoms," says, that "perhaps there is no intermediate space." Other possible explanations, perfectly congruous with our fundamental conceptions, may be imagined. Some expression other than "passes" may one day be found to be more appropriate, when the phenomenon in question may occasion less surprise than the formation of water from two invisible gases.

When an electron jumps from a higher to a lower level, radiation, i.e., light of a definite wave-length is emitted (the emission and absorption of light is not necessarily confined to the visual rays. In the broad sense in which the word "light" is now used in physics it may be extended to all electromagnetic radiations). The radiation is observable and may be measured, but there is no way of discovering when an electron on one level will jump to another, nor to which particular level it will jump. Not only have we not yet found out a way of discovering the path of an electron, but, according to the Principle of Uncertainty formulated by Heisenberg in 1927, it is fundamentally impossible for us ever to do so.

Prediction of the movement of an electron requires an exact knowledge of both its position and its velocity at a particular instant. It had always been known that every measurement is subject to a certain amount of error, but it had been assumed that an improvement in method would lead to more accurate results, and there seemed to be no limit to the degree of accuracy that might be attained. According to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, however, there is such a limit, beyond which it is impossible to go. This limit does not affect position and velocity separately, but only the two when combined. Position alone, or velocity alone, can be measured with absolute accuracy, but the accuracy of one is secured at the cost of the accuracy of the other. The reason for this is that, while the effects of light upon masses of a certain magnitude are inappreciable and may be disregarded, the effects of light upon a very small mass, such as an electron, are appreciable, and modify the phenomena observed.

We know that it is impossible to see a body that is smaller than the wave-length of the light by which it is illuminated. The shortest wave-length of visible light is violet. The dimensions of the atom is many thousands of times smaller than the wave-length of violet light, and that of the electron is much smaller still. Consequently, the radiation used for the observation of the electron requires to be of a very short wave-length indeed. As the energy of the radiation increases with the shortness of the light-waves, it follows that the shorter the light-waves the greater is the amount of energy communicated to the electron. If the illuminating radiation has a short wave-length we get a good definition of the position of the electron but, at the same time it receives a heavy push which sends it somewhere quite different from where it would otherwise have been; when the radiation has a long wave-length the electron receives only a slight push, but we get a very indefinite idea of its position. The degree of uncertainty is very small, and inappreciable except when dealing with such ultimate particles as electrons.

The inability to predict the jump of an electron from one orbit to another has led many people to declare that since the jump is not *determinable*, it is not *determined*, and that the electron is consequently "free to choose" when, and to what orbit, it will jump. This argument depends entirely upon the ambiguous use of the terms employed. To say that the movement of an electron is not *determinable* is justified only in the sense that we are unable to ascertain, or fix precisely, its direction. To conclude from this that the movement is not

*determined* can only mean that it has not been ascertained, and is no justification for the assumption that it is not *determined* in the scientific sense, and that the law of causation does not apply. The electron's "freedom of choice" is not very apparent when we consider that its jump is limited to one of the *possible* orbits; that the electron is *pushed* by the light-waves that strike it; that the power of the push increases with the increasing shortness of the illuminating waves; and that the energy of a *gamma quantum* is so high that when it collides with an electron it knocks it clean out of the atom. Even the attempt to prove determinism false contains abundant evidence of its truth.

That the movements of the electron remain unexplained is no more a proof against determinism than is anything else that remains unexplained. To cite the unexplained as a proof of anything is, to say the least, illogical and unscientific. The Uncertainty Principle is still a matter of dispute among the physicists themselves. When the dispute has been resolved there can be little doubt that in the atomic world, as in the world of macrocosmic matter, it will be found that the law of causation still reigns supreme.

F. KENYON.

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

MR. DAVID MOORE, in his article "A date with Life"—obviously written in opposition to my unworthy effort, "A date with Death"—bids us "be men and live and leave out our difficulties by the roots."

Very fine-sounding indeed—but how does he propose to do it? Listen to his words—"Let each man and each nation strive to be the best." That is his simple remedy. It is the old jungle law—the survival of the fittest. Surely it is because each nation is striving to outdo every other nation that we continue to have wars and still more wars. Must we be men and live—*only to fight and die*?

Mr. Moore evidently believes in being top-dog—but all nations cannot be top-dogs. No, no. There must be no top-dog and no *best nation*. We already know to our cost and the Germans know, too, the fallacy of such a teaching. Hitler's race of Supermen is now biting the dust—does Mr. Moore wish us to do the same? If not, what exactly does he mean by bidding us strive to be the best? And who is to be the judge as to what constitutes the best? Does he mean the best fighter, the best breeder or the best money-maker?

Anyway, Mr. Moore's joy in life is truly amazing in these dark days of soaring prices, industrial disputes, international hatreds, food shortage, clothing shortage, fuel shortage, housing shortage—in short every sort of shortage short of strikes, of which we have no shortage! If this really is his dream-life may he never wake up! Possibly if I happened to be one of the New Rich I might feel quite satisfied, but unfortunately I am not one of those happy people whose salaries have increased out of all proportion to their brain capacity and who, without understanding the value of money, are spending it rashly and extravagantly and so helping to push up the already exorbitant prices still more.

But does Mr. Moore ever trouble to think of the unfortunate plight of the New Poor, those unhappy people whose fixed incomes now have no purchasing power, those whose means do not rise with inflated prices and who are now in poverty and want? Or does he suppose they are not even worth considering at all.

This is the age of jazz, jitterbugs and jive, with unchecked and irresponsible youth aping the habits of the jungle; yet Mr. Moore fears that unless we breed like stoats and rabbits we shall become a decadent nation. I suggest that it is precisely by breeding so prolifically that we are now producing such

decadent specimens of undersized and oversexed youth as now decorate the dog tracks and dance halls.

But surely even Mr. Moore does not seriously believe that any government deliberately encourages people to breed merely for the purpose of littering-up an already overcrowded and starving world? He must know that the State has only one object in view—to ensure a sufficient supply of human live-stock in readiness for the next great war. Our grandfathers reared their sons to be killed off in the first World War; our fathers also reared their sons to be butchered in the second World War, so how can anyone suppose that we are not being urged to rear our sons so that they also may be murdered in the next World War?

I still maintain, therefore, that until our perambulating statesmen can sit long enough at a conference table to reach a unanimous agreement to outlaw war and guarantee us a permanent peace, it is both cruel and selfish to bring children into this hate-infested world. I doubt if there has ever been a period in human history so filled with racial animosity, international distrust and economic bankruptcy as the present; yet it is into such chaotic conditions, with the threat of a greater and more ghastly war of annihilation hanging over us, that we are urged to breed like cattle for the devil's market. Unless we are patriotic (or foolish) enough to do so Mr. Moore and his kind will condemn us as a race of cowards. To me, such bigotry and narrowness tastes most unpleasantly like the Christian belief. In spite of the fact that Christ, supposedly our Master, Teacher and Guide, failed to produce any progeny the Church still insists that it is our duty to make up for his short-comings and do what he failed to do.

Just why we should be called cowards for saving others from having to suffer and endure what we have suffered I do not know. Nor can I discover any logical excuse for the continuance of Mr. Moore's "Stream of Life" as he so lyrically expresses it. Why add to a river of polluted water that is already rushing headlong into a filthy whirlpool of blood? Is life so precious and so desirable that it must be maintained at any cost? Even in those palmy and almost forgotten days of peace there was a certain genius who thought otherwise. I recall Lord Byron's poem "Euthanasia"—

"Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,  
Count o'er thy days from anguish free,  
And know, what ever thou hast been,  
'Tis something better not to be."

W. H. WOOD.

### CONVENT WAYS

The ceremony of feet-washing at St. Mary's Convent took place once a week, but unlike the apostles we each washed our own feet. Nevertheless, the performance partook a little of a religious ceremony as it was carried out in strict silence while a life of one of the saints was solemnly read. Each girl, for modesty sake, was ordered to carefully cover her knees with a towel. One day during the feet-washing, Sister Mary Agnes, the Sister in charge, left us for a minute to pay a visit to the chapel. Immediately a bubble of conversation broke out. The Sister, on hearing the noise, rushed back, and with horror in her voice, spoke to us of the immorality of talking while washing one's legs and asked us to remember St. John of Seville, who never, even as a child, allowed his own mother to see his legs.

"Go on, Sister!" exclaimed one daring girl. Whereupon Sister, drawing herself up to her full height, and turning furiously on the interruptor, shouted:

"How dare you use such familiar language to a Consecrated Spouse of Jesus Christ?" The culprit was ordered from the room while the rest of us, all cowed, drew our towels closer round our knees, and silently and modestly continued our feet-washing.

N. F.

## (The) PASSION

### I

RELIGION is a practical problem. To consider the question, what is Christianity, from an ideological or theoretical point of view, is to be faced with a tangle of incongruities and contradictions; in the historic transformation from the early ambiguous syncretism, through medieval dogma, to the platitudinous vagaries of the modern world; or in the tenets of the thousand and one sects and their discordant interpretations of the central theme "Christ and Him crucified."

Theoretically, we are lost in a mystical maze of intellectual confusion, dialectical, metaphysical, casuistical. But, whatever theory may be, and whether or not, Jesus was historical, there is continuity in practice. A pre-Christian gnosticism, and the substantial identity of Christian and pre-Christian mysteries, is now admitted by prominent theologians. Consider religion as systematic practice and not as system of belief, and we can see the essence of Christianity concentrated in the double meaning of the word Passion.

The Passion is the term used to refer to the events surrounding the crucifixion, or to their portrayal. Christ, weeping tears of blood, is symbolical of intensity of feeling; and the word passion does not refer to any specific type of feeling. In the Gospel it was said that Jesus was mad; and intensity of feeling, whether of proselytising zeal, or of the earnest conviction or sincerity of the "True Believer" is taken as evidence of divine inspiration. In adaptation, any and every type of feeling is included, and theoretical confusion only emphasises practical efficiency.

A primary essential is not to be found in any specific period, doctrine or creed. Like St. Paul, a catholic religion is all things to all men, and it is so in practice. Its ritual and ceremony is both personal and social; orgiastic in its sacrament, corybantic in its music and hymn chanting, evangelistic in its homilies and sermons, mystic in its contemplation and prayer in cell and cloister. Aldous Huxley said that the Church frowned on "the practice of the Passion in mystical contemplation," but we doubt it. For it has always asserted the Passion by any and every available means; not only verbally and vocally; using all the arts; not only with music, but in pictorial, sculptural, and in the dramatic art.

J. M. Robertson pointed out that the gospel narrative had the character of a libretto, and there can be no doubt that the passion play and the miracle play developed from the mystery, which awes a custom. As Havelock Ellis said, "Probably 95 per cent. of the people of Athens took part in the Elusian Mystery." And there is much in Frazer to take us back to the fertility cults. "I speak in mystery," said St. Paul. We see a syncretism of mystery cults. Not only a new interpretation of fertility cult, but an incorporation of that of the scapegoat, and that of the ecclesia.

In this syncretism of custom we see a confusion of ritual with the hero-worship of the military masquerade, the saturnalian dissimulation in the Mock King, the satirical comedy and drama, and the hilarity of the carnival. And in the personal identification with the elect of the ecclesia we see a confusion of this welter of personal feeling with a sardonic realism that engulfed suffering. And from personification in the ecclesia develop ecclesiolatry and ecclesiasticism, with its personification of both Nature and the State; with the humanistic analogue of individuals united as members of one body, a divine incarnation.

The apparent absence, in the ancient world, of an organised priesthood, lay in the combination of sacred and social functions. A separation came with the imposition of a military governor over local ecclesia; so that the political structure assumed a carnal and spiritual duality. The Church is the ghost of the Empire. But the separation of Church and State did not alter their functions nor affect the continuity of custom. The per-

sistence of pre-Christian customs was not a consequence of Christianity, rather was that a consequence of adaptation and amalgamation. The duality may illustrate the political maxim, divide and rule.

So similar are their functions that in medieval times, there are many direct parallels between the militaristic political pageantry and the religious ritual and ceremonial. And there is a direct parallel between the public executions and quarterings, the exhibition of gallows, stocks and pillories, the use of torture and the stake; and of the harrowing tales of future punishment in eternal torment. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin; the one, physical, the other, psychological, with its compensation in the projection, into a past Garden of Eden, and a future Paradise. In each case, intensity of feeling; passion the essence of Christianity.

There were an abundance of reasons for what Mrs. Langley Moore called "an eager suspension of the intellect." But how do we explain man's inhumanity to man? Demonic possession is now out of fashion, even with Christians. Aristotle's politics was study of militarism and rhetoric. Militaristic strategy used the methods of the jungle; misrepresentation, deception and lies, became forms of auto-suggestion. Rhetoric involves the use of fetishistic and totemistic symbolism with theological implications in personal appeal; both verbally and in the arts; in the cultivation of enthusiasm and even of blood lust.

The use of the magic of the arts is a feature of autocracy; in the glory of the Heroic Age, the renaissance of the Borgia Prince, Elizabethan drama, and the splendour of the Sun King. The glorification of the State parallels the Glory of God. The noble virtue of an age of chivalry is as illusory as a land of unfulfilled desire. Using such means to stimulate the animosities of the feud, the efficiency of means to ends is the sole concern. Machiavellian ideology is psychologically blind. On the other hand, Christianity has no concern for physical fact; the psychological aspect is the alpha and omega. Christianity is the psychological aspect of power politics.

H. H. PREECE.

## THE USES OF PHILOSOPHY

SOME considerable time ago (to be precise, in the "Literary Guide and Rationalist Review" for June, 1947), that able and interesting writer, Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, had an article in the course of which he said (commenting on some remarks of mine):

"Mr. Poynter, in his most instructive article in the April issue of the "Guide," mentioned that Monism, which is not a religion but a philosophy, theorises God and Nature as 'a single infinite, eternal substance,' which seems to me about as sensible as saying they can be represented by the image of a vast inexhaustible plum-pudding. But then I came long ago to the conclusion that *philosophy is an amusing pastime, like chess or bridge, but of no practical value whatever*" (italics mine, not Mr. Fyfe's).

I had wished to comment at the time on Mr. Fyfe's remark, but one thing after another (including there being no space for me to do so in the "Guide"), prevented my writing until now. As to the "Monistic" idea of "God and Nature," I do not say it is true. For one thing, it seems to me to leave human personality unexplained. We appear to be conscious of a degree of mental freedom, and that (unless it be an illusion) would be irreconcilable with the belief that nothing exists but one eternal substance working by inexorable uniformity. While, however, I do not say the Monist theory is right, I do not see that it deserves to be dismissed with ridicule. The theory of "one eternal reality" does present to our intellects at any rate an intelligible idea.

My chief concern here, however, is with those words of Mr. Fyfe's which I have italicised. Is it really true that philosophy

is merely "an amusing pastime, of no practical value whatever"?

It must be admitted that, during the centuries philosophers have put forward innumerable theories of what is the truth about existence, and that those theories have been largely contradictory of one another. From Plato to Bertrand Russell, philosophy seems a mass of unprovable hypotheses. No wonder that Isaac Newton, the mathematician, said: "I frame no theories" (*Hypothesis non fingo*)! Yet, if the mere fact of being involved in much confusion discredits anything, more things than philosophy must be given up. For example, sociology and politics, through the ages, present the picture of a numberless crowd of opposed theories, from Anarchism to State totalitarianism. If philosophy gives us Platonism opposed to Aristotelianism, Spiritualism to Materialism, Theism to Atheism, Positivism to Idealism, and so on, so politics and sociology give us democracy against aristocracy and monarchy, Socialism against Individualism, slavery against freedom, Free Trade against Protection, Liberalism against Conservatism, imperialism against nationalism, *et ad infinitum*. Are we, then, to give up all politics and social effort as unpractical amusements? Surely not!

I would suggest that every thinking person must be to some extent a philosopher. Mr. Fyfe certainly is! He says "philosophy" is of no use. In other words, apparently he would confine us to science. That, however, is the philosophic theory called Positivism. It rests on the belief that metaphysics is useless, and that belief is itself a very definite theory of existence! What Mr. Fyfe really meant, I think, was this: Not *philosophy*, but *metaphysical philosophy*, is useless. I would ask, however: What is "metaphysics"? It is the effort to go beyond mere physical appearances and to try to discover the laws of thought and ultimate reality. Whether such efforts can be attended with any success or not, they are at any rate worth making. Indeed, we cannot help making them. Everyone of any intelligence must have some belief as to the meaning (or "no-meaning") of existence. Even if one holds that life is "a tale told by an idiot: full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,"—even *that* belief is a kind of theory of the nature of reality. In short, some sort of philosophy we cannot avoid having.

Moreover, philosophy is, I would suggest, of real practical value: even if only as a form of mental discipline. The mind which studies it is thereby trained to think logically. The Scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages was despised during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it is now being revived by able minds (Jacques Maritain is not the only one, but I recommend his "Introduction to Philosophy": Eng. trans., Sheed and Ward, 1946); and the many great merits of the Scholastic method are being revalued. It was (and is) a valuable training for the intellect. A course of St. Thomas Aquinas will do no one any harm! The thirteenth century, when Scholasticism flourished, was (notwithstanding such horrors as the Albigensian crusade) indeed a great age, full of energy, intellectual and physical. In many ways it may be regarded as greater than the nineteenth. Certainly it was superior in most ways to our contemptible and decadent twentieth: whose 1939-45 war makes the Albigensian look like a joy-dance!

Finally, philosophy is a necessary check on the wrongful use of physical science. Pessimists are saying that science—with its atom bombs and other atrocities—is leading us to destruction. It is not science itself, but the misuse of it, which threatens so to lead us. What is the remedy? It is that of balancing physical science with philosophy—that is, with a coherent theory of ethics and general truth. Even the effort to reach such would do much good. In that way, "metaphysical philosophy" might yet help to save us.

J. W. POYNTER.

## ACID DROPS

Cardinal Griffin makes us think of that old tag, "fools will blunder in where wise men fear to tread." The Cardinal's latest is when he states that "we must not allow scientists, industrialists, or materialists to dictate to us the type of education our children are to receive." But why should we allow the Church to dictate?

In the old days church-going was one of the main features of the Welsh people. To-day, says the "Sunday Times," the decline in the attendance of the Chapel and the Church of Wales is causing considerable alarm in the principality. The blame is laid at the door of "materialism" which, it is said, is growing rapidly. This is indeed good news, and although the phrase the "great lying Church" was applied to the Roman Church, and we are suspicious of all Christian "truth" we are ready to believe the "Sunday Times" even when it informs us that at some services the congregation has numbered—one. From all over the world we hear reported that religion is declining. Unbelief is growing, and nothing known to man will bring back believers in religion.

The Rev. W. H. Elliott in the "Sunday Graphic" informs us that it was the animals who first bowed the knee to Christ in Bethlehem . . . the little donkey first made his adoration, and "There are a few donkeys who might set out for Bethlehem to-day." We hesitate to draw the most obvious conclusion, but who among us has not seen a congregation on its knees in church, and on some signal all bow their heads simultaneously. We have always been irresistibly reminded of camels patiently awaiting the yoke, wondering always when comes the last straw . . .

Despite the frequent lamentations of priest and parson about the decline of church attendances it appears that the "quality" of those that still attend is as good, or as bad, as ever. We append herewith a list from a Catholic newspaper, duly indexed and numbered, of thanks for favours received and hopes for favours to come. We have but one comment to make. If this sort of advertising was done outside the protection of the Church, someone would have to pay heavily for the imposture.

2744.—I know you will be pleased to learn that in less than a week after writing to you my favour was granted . . . I obtained a position, and a splendid one, in an engineer's office . . . I am sure I should not have obtained such a position if it had not been for the lamp.

2746.—In July I had four lamps lit, and all favours have been granted . . . In September I had two lamps lit. One was to get rain as our paddock was nearly all burnt out . . . We have got lovely rain. The other was to get a good buyer for the stock we had to sell, and we got the buyer within a week . . . The Votive Lamps are wonderful.

2755.—The one you lit for my niece brought luck. She got her wish—a position as soon as she left college.

2781.—I am enclosing 5s. as a thanksoffering for a great favour received, namely a good price for our land.

2787.—Some months ago I had a Votive Lamp burnt for my special intention. I was very much in need for some money to pay debts . . . I received the money quite unexpectedly.

2795.—I am enclosing 5s. for a lamp to be lit next month for my success in my examination.

2857.—I had a bad heart and the doctors told me I would never be able to do any hard work, but since I got a lamp burnt I am completely cured.

2875.—Please find enclosed one pound note, for which kindly light a lamp in honour of St. Jude for favours received within the last few weeks. St. Jude is really wonderful.

The Rev. John Heenan superintendent of the Catholic Missionaries on a lecture tour has now returned from the U.S.A. He reports that he can see no hope of the reinstatement of Christianity short of a miracle.

We do not question the truth of that statement, and in differing degrees this would be true of all parts of the world where

Christianity has established itself. Of course, the Rev. Heenan would say, if pressed, that the Roman Catholic Church is however, holding its own, but this would be a mere evasion. In other conditions where a number of men and women cease to support this or that church, their names, quite properly, would be struck off the registers. The Catholic Church is not so honest. With them the rule is "once a Catholic, always a Catholic" even if a Catholic leaves the Church, or becomes an atheist, his name is still retained in any census of church members. The only exception to this rule is a very elaborate process of excommunication, and one must be a very (theological) bad case before that process is put into effect. We think that the falling off of attendance at Roman Catholic churches is about the same rate as that of other churches.

The rush for new books at the cost of neglecting old ones, does not make for as much goodness as at first glance it seems to do. We should be surprised to find that the great historian H. T. Buckle is much read now. But take this as a sample:

"The Church, having first captured all the gentle natures and compelled them to celibacy, made another sweep of her huge nets, this time fishing in stirring waters, to catch those who were the most fearless, truth-seeking, and intelligent in their modes of thought, and therefore the most suitable parents of a high civilisation, and put a strong check, if not a direct stop, to their progeny. Those she reserved on these occasions to breed the generations of the future were the servile, the indifferent, and, again, the stupid. Thus, as she brutalised human nature by her system of celibacy applied to the gentle, she demoralised it by her system of persecution of the intelligent, the sincere, and the free. It is enough to make the blood boil to think of the blind folly that has caused the foremost nations of struggling humanity to be the heirs of such hateful ancestry, and that has so bred our interests as to keep them in an unnecessarily long-continued antagonism with the essential requirements of a steadily advancing civilisation. In consequence of this inbred imperfection of our natures, in respect to the conditions under which we have to live, we are, even now, almost as much harassed by the sense of moral incapacity and sin as were the early converts from barbarism, and we steep ourselves in half-unconscious self-deception and hypocrisy as a partial refuge from its insistence."

Perhaps it was a wise man who said that every time he saw a new book he read an old one.

People should be very careful when they are drawing analogies from historic events. For example. The Editor of the "Methodist Recorder" informs his readers that Jesus gave to mankind their "Magna Charta." The analogy is a very tender one—granting Jesus—for any student to tackle. Indeed, some of our trustworthy historians insist that "Magna Charta" is just a fraud that was given to the people. It is, of course, admitted that "Magna Charta" has of later years been used to give people a wider freedom, but it seems equally true that the creators of the Magna Charta had no such aim. It is clear that the people fought with the barons, as common people have always fought, but it also clear that no historian has been able to point out wherein the common people fared better. And it is not without significance that while the king was able to secure an army at home, the barons and the knights had to get help from abroad. It is also quite clear that for many, many years, the "common" people did not gain use of the land—on even a poor level—through the medium of the "Magna Charta." It was in comparatively later days that it began to apply to the people. On that head Dr. Stubbs, an authority, said plainly that the "people" were ground between the powers of the knights and the kings. But the one clear thing is that the idea that the "Magna Charta" was created in the interests of the people is clear nonsense. It was centuries later when the "people" began to move, that a new reading was given. Some attempts have been made to straighten out the matter, but more work is needed. What we can say is that the idea that the knights and barons were fighting for the "people" is an absurdity that fits well in with the theory that Jesus Christ came to make people happier on earth.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. H. S. Wheal, the Public Libraries Department of the Mexborough Urban District Council, has accepted the "Freethinker" in their Reading Room. This is good work and should be emulated all over the country. A little determined effort on the part of readers would get our journal in most, if not all, public Reading Rooms—where, in any case, numbers (mostly unread) of religious journals can always be found. Mr. Wheal is to be congratulated on his success.

Another new book has just been published by that insatiable student of London, our well-known contributor, Mr. William Kent. This is "London for the Curious" (James Clarke, 3s. 6d.). Although confined mainly to the streets of the great capital, it is an engrossing history, and is packed with all kinds of out-of-the-way information, making his book very difficult to put down. Mr. Kent's eagle eye seems to have let little pass him, and as he has always been a keen literary student as well, the reader will find concentrated in his book a mass of allusions and descriptions of the greatest historical interest. There are, in addition, some excellent illustrations also chosen for being a little out-of-the-way.

Although many of the contributors to the 1948 "Rationalist Annual" (Watts, 2s. 6d.), are not familiar to us, they have produced between them one of the most interesting issues so far published in its 65 years of existence. Indeed the high standard of the various articles makes the number a most memorable one. It is difficult to pick out one article more than another as proof of what we say, the reader must choose for himself; and whether he is interested in "Existentialism" or "Physics and Philosophy," or prefers a controversial issue discussed like "God and Mr. Lewis" or "Dr. Coulton and the Catholics," or a literary article like the one on "William Godwin," his taste is splendidly catered for. "Religion in a Changing World," by R. E. Money-Kyrle should be particularly studied, as well as Prof. Heath's "Probability, Science and Superstition." But all the articles are first-rate.

To-day (January 11th) Mr. H. Cutner is giving an address on "Malthus or Marx," for the West London Branch of the N.S.S., at the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1. The chair will be taken at 7-15 and the subject should provide both a good audience and discussion.

The Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. will have a visit from Mr. T. M. Mosley of Nottingham, who will lecture in The Socialist Hall, Arcade, Pilgrim Street, at 7 p.m., on "Christianity and the People." Mr. Mosley is a capable speaker and is sure to give an informative and interesting address. Admission is free, with reserved seats at 1s. each.

"Did Jesus ever Live?" That is the question Mrs. M. Whitefield will discuss in the McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, to-day (January 11th), on behalf of the local N.S.S. Branch. The lecture begins at 7 p.m., and the subject is one that is always attractive.

## THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

THE passing of Christmas reminds me of the Christian Year as it was followed by the two Nonconformist Churches to which I belonged before—far too late—I walked out of the house of religious bondage. The first was Evangelical; the second was "Liberal Christian," for short to be called "Liberals."

We started our New Year at an amazingly early hour. We were praising the Lord at about 12-1 a.m. This was at the Watch-Night Service, an institution that was, I think, a sprout of John Wesley's brain. In my teens I was supposed to be in by ten o'clock. I had a fervent Methodist for a father, but there were few dispensations, although all my recreations were innocent enough; I even eschewed the theatre. In my early teens, therefore, there was something thrilling in going to our mission hall at a time later than I ever dared to leave. The Watch-Night Service started at eleven. It followed a prescribed programme. If inclined to follow Doctor Faustus you could have staked your immortal soul to Mephistopheles on the certainty of one hymn being included. Still in the Methodist Hymn Book (No. 838) it started:—

"A few more years shall roll,  
A few more seasons come,  
And we shall be with those that rest  
Asleep within the tomb.  
Then O My Lord prepare my soul for that great day,  
O wash me in Thy precious blood,  
And take my sins away."

This macabre music engendered an atmosphere of what Dr. Johnson might have called inspissated gloom, and the stage was nicely set for soul-frightening and soul-saving. To this task our brother on the rostrum, a hardware merchant—and a hard bargainer—in Houndsditch, set himself as the clock ticked away that last hour of, say, 1902. "Brother, where will you spend eternity? Start 1903 by giving your soul to God." Everything was arranged to a time-table. The prolonged prayers and the soul-shuddering address terminated a few minutes before the midnight hour. In an impressive silence, and with bowed heads, we listened for a neighbouring clock to strike twelve. When it did, we were told 1902 had gone into eternity—whatever that might mean, and we sang the doxology to greet the unknown 1903. Some of us, ruefully retrospectively, cannot but wish that we were as little burdened to-day as were those early years of the century for most of us.

At 12-5 we were ready to start for our homes. It was thrilling to walk through the streets at such an hour, although the sky looked no different and, as a naïve friend once said in relating a story, "the moon went on shining as if nothing had happened." There were slight differences amongst the Liberals when later I went in a different direction. We did not so lugubriously contemplate the "ever rolling stream" of time, or "the years which the locusts had eaten." (I am not surprised to find the word should have been *ears*, which shows how people will try to make sense of any nonsense if it is in a "holy"

book.) The Liberals were more cheerful. They admitted having souls, but they were not always talking about them, and certainly never felt theirs were in any danger of damnation. My "Liberal" minister (liberally paid a thousand a year at the time of which I write), when he heard the chimes at midnight, would wish his congregation "Good Luck in the name of the Lord." I thought this was wonderful. So unconventional, don't you know! Now I think it was studied unconventionality. It was manifestly impious. Surely there was no room for luck in the plans of the "Good Father," the "All-enfolding Love"—to quote two favourite phrases from his saccharine sermons. The Christian view was that the planning in Heaven was far more efficient than our best political planners on earth; that even falling sparrows were watched and human hairs numbered. Where, then, could luck come in?

There was one New Year's resolution that was always up against the Watch-Night Service. It did not affect a stern resolve to discontinue biting one's nails, duly recorded in my diary, and perhaps no more heinous a sin than wiping your nose on a bath towel, once confessed by an Oxford grouper moved to much "sharing." It was, however, difficult to go to Watch-Night Service and start the New Year by rising early. Sometimes, for the broken vow, I had to get a dispensation from my conscience which, like that of Samuel Butler's Ernest Pontifex, not only talked but jabbered, until January 2.

I was never very keen on New Year's Day. Easter was a different festival. When Easter comes, can cricket be far behind? The answer is obvious. Here the Anglicans were stricter than we Nonconformists. On the notice boards of the Churches there would be annually displayed a poster showing a crucifix, and underneath the words, "Is it nothing to you all ye who pass by?" I confess my withers were sometimes wrung by this appeal. Did I ought to go to Clapham Common to play cricket on this holy day? Further, my zeal was such that I went before breakfast! Then, in the parks and open spaces controlled by the L.C.C., the cricket season did not start until May 1. Somebody at County Hall (a benison upon his head!) induced the Council to allow a little foretaste of our coming joys throughout the Easter holidays. So, at an hour when an Anglican might have been on the way to early morning communion, some of us, outside their household of faith, trekked to Clapham Common to worship what we thought the king of games.

Of course, we did not altogether neglect the religious side of the day, though it would be straining truth to say that this was so enthusiastically regarded. The Evangelicals had nothing in the morning, but in the evening there was a cheap tea—actually only fourpence, including cake!—and free baths (in the blood of the Lamb).

The Liberals contented themselves with a morning service.

Our pastor then mounted the pulpit in a black gown! Why? I now ask. A favourite hymn with the Evangelicals ran as follows:—

"Low in the grave he lay,  
Jesus my Saviour,  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus my Lord.  
Up from the grave he arose. . . ."

I well remember a Methodist aunt who bawled it out with a tremendous swell on the "Up." Looking at it now, the line I have italicised seems to negate all grief and make it mere affectation—a put-up job. The Liberals, perhaps, had a little more justification for the "nighted colour" and "customary suits of solemn black," when commemorating the death of their Lord, for they had no plan of salvation to observe, yet they also believed in some eternal "Land of Pure Delight" to which presumably He at once went, so why grieve? Recently I read that their graces the Archbishops of Canterbury and York had intimated acquiescence in the University Boat Race being held

on Easter Saturday as the practice the previous day would only be a short one! I suggest that, following the football crowds, both eights should together sing an appropriate hymn at the end. "O come and mourn with me awhile" was popular in my young days, even with the Liberals. Perhaps the tides would not permit of late afternoon practice, so the popular hymn of footballers, "Abide With Me" (the Centenary has been much overdone) would not do.

To us, Good Friday was the prelude to Easter Monday, and "the Resurrection morn" a route to it. Then there might be cricket in the day and a social gathering at night.

Sometimes at the latter they blacked faces and my puritanical soul so revolted at the disfigurement of the human form divine that once, in protest, I stayed away, and entered in my diary that hearing some report of these worldly pleasures I was glad I did.

W. KENT.

(To be concluded)

## CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

THE Church while battling with paganism recognised her deadliest foes in literature. Not only were Greek and Latin masterpieces the stronghold of a mythology that had to be erased from the popular mind; not only was their morality antagonistic to the principles of Christian ethics; in addition to these grounds for hatred and mistrust, the classics idealised a form of life which the new faith regarded as worthless. What was culture in comparison with the salvation of the soul? Why should time be spent upon the dreams of poets, when every minute might be employed in pondering the precepts of the Gospels? What was the use of making this life refined and agreeable by study, when it formed but an insignificant prelude to an eternity wherein mundane learning would be valueless? Why raise questions about man's condition on this earth, when the creeds had to be defined and expounded, when the nature of God and the relation of the human soul to its Creator had to be established? It was easy to pass from this state of mind to the belief that learning in itself was impious. "Let us shun the lying fables of the poets," cries Gregory of Tours, "and forgo the wisdom of sages at enmity with God, lest we incur the doom of endless death by sentence of our Lord." Even Augustine deplored the time spent in reading Virgil, weeping over Dido's death, when all the time he was himself both morally and spiritually dead. Alcuin regretted that in his boyhood he had preferred Virgil to the legends of the Saints, and stigmatised the eloquence of the Latin writers by the epithet of wanton. Such phrases as "the fictions or mad ravings of Pagan poets" are commonly employed by Christian authors of the Lives of Saints, in order to mark the inferiority of Virgil and Ovid to their own more edifying compositions. . . . "Let philosophers and impure scholars of Donatus," writes a windy fanatic of Cordova, "ply their windy problems with the barking of dogs, the grunting of swine, snarling with skinned throat and teeth; let the foaming and bespittled grammarians belch, while we remain evangelical servants of Christ, true followers of rustic teachers." Thus the opposition of the Church to Paganism, the conviction that Christianity was alien to culture, and the absorption of intellectual interests in theological questions, contributed to destroy what had remained of sound scholarship in the last days of the Empire. . . .

When the minds of the learned were possessed by these absurdities to the exclusion of sound method, we cannot wonder that antiquity survived but as a strange and shadowy dream in popular imagination. Virgil, the only classic who retained distinct and living personality, passed from poet to philosopher, from philosopher to Sybil, from Sybil to magician, by successive stages of transmutation, as the truth about him grew more dim and the faculty to apprehend him weakened. . . .



The meagreness of medieval learning was, however, a less serious obstacle to culture than the habit of mind, partly engendered by Christianity and partly idiosyncratic to the new races, which prevented students from appreciating the true spirit of the classics. While mysticism and allegory ruled supreme, the clearly defined humanity of the Greeks and Romans could not fail to be misapprehended. The little that was known of them reached students through a hazy and distorted medium. Poems like Virgil's fourth Eclogue were prized for what the author had not meant when he was writing them; while his real interests were utterly neglected. Against this mental misconception, this original obliquity of vision, this radical lie in the intellect, the restorers of learning had to fight at least as energetically as against brute ignorance and dullness. It was not enough to write books and to discover codices; they had to teach men how to read them, to explain their inspiration, to defend them against prejudice, to protect them from false methods of interpretation. To purge the mind of fancy and fable, to prove that poetry apart from its supposed prophetic meaning was delightful for its own sake, and that the history of the antique nations, in spite of Paganism, could be used for profit and instruction, was the first step to be taken by these pioneers of modern culture. They had, in short, to create a new mental sensibility by establishing the truth that pure literature directly contributes to the dignity and happiness of human beings. The achievement of revolution in thought was the great performance of the Italians in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

*The Renaissance in Italy*, by

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS, Vol. II., pp. 59-68.

## A CHURCH IN FULL RETREAT

THE year 1947 can be said to be the one when Dr. Fisher, the successor of the reputedly progressive Dr. Temple as Archbishop of Canterbury, reversed the trends of Church of England policy by his open opposition to ideas which in the twentieth century have flowed into Christian channels extensively from the outside sources of science and politics, and have found a ready acceptance there.

Under Archbishop Lang, prior to the Temple era, Church policy was much concerned with the search for a "restatement" of Christian doctrine which would reduce the obvious conflict between Bible narrative and the scientific knowledge then spreading everywhere. Next, under Archbishop Temple's influence, the emphasis was switched over to questions of social justice, contemporaneously with the achievement by the Labour Party of a dominant position in the political field.

Two events during the past year indicate that, under Dr. Fisher's leadership, the Church will have nothing to do with these or similar policies of accommodation. First, there was the rebuke the Archbishop addressed to Dr. Barnes, Bishop of Birmingham, during a session of the Church Assembly, for his book examining such fundamental Christian beliefs as the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ. He made it clear that the Church would not agree to give up the superstitions enshrined in the New Testament, as it had surrendered those in the Old. Then, almost at the end of the year, came his dissociation of himself and the Church from the opinions and activities of Canon Hewlett, the "red" Dean of Canterbury. A Church of England lining up with leftist political forces, as appeared possible during Dr. Temple's tenure of office, is now no longer on the cards.

The present policy of "back to the Old, Old Story," with its supernaturalism and its unconcern for the things of this world, ought not to be dismissed as a mere change of emphasis due to the accession to power of a man of different convictions from

those of his predecessors. A training for and a career in the Church are experiences that almost always end by making a man more alert to the demands of expediency than to those of belief. The church leader adopts a policy that circumstances indicate, and conviction usually follows in due course.

Freethinkers will remember the naive admission of Dr. Barnes that, while traditional Christian doctrines were suitable for preaching to an ill-informed congregation, he found that the better educated members of the Temple Church wanted something more modern. What led him to restate Christianity in the way now connected with his name was less a desire for the truth at all costs than the need for satisfying the type of people who came to his church. In a similar manner, Canon Hewlett's reply to Dr. Fisher's disavowal of his political opinions says that he regards himself as "a Christian spokesman within the Anglican Church for the great mass of English opinion in the mines, factories and fields." Let me say that I am convinced that neither Dr. Barnes nor Canon Hewlett is conscious that their positions are suspect or even due to the special environments to which they are adapted.

Dr. Fisher is in a different category. His position makes him responsible for Church policy on a broader basis. If he saw that Dr. Barnes had introduced a type of Christianity that was attracting the scientifically-minded to church, and that Canon Hewlett's "redness" was making the masses better Christians, he would have given both his blessing. He sees, however, that the policies of restatement and Christian Socialism have been tried and found wanting. Instead of saving the Church, as was hoped, they have accelerated its decline. They have not brought any noticeable numbers of educated and progressive people to church services, and they have caused disastrous splits in the ranks of the faithful. So the Archbishop has thought fit to declare that these policies are not in accordance with official Christianity.

The cheering fact for us who are bent on hastening the demise of Christianity, official and otherwise, is that Dr. Fisher does not appear to have devised any new or appealing policy to put in the place of those he has condemned on behalf of his Church. It looks as if he has resigned himself to a fight in the last ditch. We may, therefore, hear a good many more rebukes and denunciations directed at progressive tendencies within the Church, and every one should provide the Secular cause with useful ammunition for its fight.

Incidentally, an interesting example of the influence of the new set-up under Dr. Fisher was the use of the word "obey" in the recent royal wedding. If Dr. Temple, whose leaning towards feminine emancipation was well known, had still been alive and had conducted the ceremony, it might very likely have been omitted. Instead, the Princess had to promise, without a semblance of logic, to obey the husband who may one day be *legally* subject to *her* sovereignty.

Getting back to my main subject, the past year has revealed the very great weakness of the position of the Church of England in the modern scene. The Archbishop of Canterbury has publicly ranged his Church on the side of credulity and reaction. Freethinkers ought to exploit every opportunity of taking advantage of the position on behalf of the Secular cause. Particularly should they tackle scientists and Labour politicians who season their writings and speeches with Christian sauce.

Never was the time so ripe for winning over large numbers of informed and progressively-minded people, without any real belief in Christianity, whom the Church has hoodwinked in the past by accommodating policies. No longer can such people have any reason for paying lip-service to the Church's alleged value. The excuse they had has been destroyed by the attitude adopted by Dr. Fisher. To-day the choice is openly that of Secularism or Superstition. There is no halfway house.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

## GOD, WOMAN AND MAN

THERE was a deal of shrewdness in the remark of D'Israeli the elder that while poets are amorous and lovers are poetical, saints are both. Highly imaginative Christian literature is, often enough; but it is also extremely amorous, not to say erotic. Many of the ecstatic outpourings of female saints or devotees are far too "free" for reproduction; but the following from one of Wesley's converts, a young woman of twenty years of age, will serve:—

"Oh, Mighty, powerful, happy change! The love of God was shed abroad in my heart, and a flame kindled there with pains so violent, yet so very ravishing, that my body was almost torn asunder. I sweated, I trembled, I fainted, I sang. Oh, I thought my head was a fountain of water. I was dissolved in love. My beloved is mine, and I am his. He has all charms; he has ravished my heart; he is my comforter, my friend, my all. Oh, I am sick of love. He is altogether the chiefest among ten thousand. Oh, how Jesus fills, Jesus extends, Jesus overwhelms the soul in which he lives."

It is almost impossible to mistake the physiological significance of such an outburst, and the quotation is only one of scores that might be given. It is certain that no decent woman would ever dream of addressing another human being in such language; nor can it be doubted that if the name of Jesus were struck out of such a passage and that of an ordinary mortal inserted, and if it formed part of a 6s. novel there are scores of respectable booksellers who would decline to sell it on the grounds of indecency.

Nor is it without significance that the great "saints" of the Christian Church have usually been unmarried. They could not well have been otherwise. Marriage would not only have meant new duties and other interests; it would have been a channel for the satisfaction of feelings that have been ignorantly interpreted as "divine" promptings. Transport the writers of many books of devotion—particularly Roman Catholic works—into a different environment to that in which they actually moved; picture them as heads of families, with all the faculties of their nature receiving—as ought to be the case—full, free, and normal expression; and it is plain that these erotic-religious outbreaks would never have been uttered. It is not likely that the celibate life was encouraged because this misinterpretation of unsatisfied desire was consciously recognised; but the fact that religious fervour was more often associated with the single than with the married state would not fail to attract notice, and would be proportionately praised and prized.

That the extreme fervency of religious devotion is often nothing more than a misdirection of sexual impulses is recognised by many leading medical authorities, although usually it is without any attempt to dwell upon the full implications of such a fact. Dr. Mercier, noted that development of the sexual organs brings with it an "increase of self-consciousness, craving for self-sacrifice, and craving for sympathy and interest," which "if denied the proper outlet breaks out in excessive or bizarre expression."

Dr. Maudesley was still more explicit. After pointing out that much of what passes for religious feeling is really morbid self-feeling springing from "unsatisfied instinct" or other uterine action on the mind, he says:—

"The ecstatic trances of such saintly women as Catherine de Sienne and St. Theresa, in which they believed themselves to be visited by their Saviour and to be received as veritable spouses into his bosom, were, though they knew it not, little else than the vicarious sexual orgasm, a condition of things which the intense contemplation of the naked male figure, carved or sculptured in all its proportions on a cross, is more fitted to produce in young women of susceptible nervous

temperament than people are apt to consider. Every experienced physician must have met with instances of single and childless women who have devoted themselves with extraordinary zeal to habitual religious exercises, and who, having gone insane as a culmination of their emotional fervour, have straightway exhibited the saddest mixture of religious and erotic symptoms—a boiling over of lust in voice, face, gestures, under the pitiful degradation of disease. . . . The fanatical religious sects, such as the Shakers and the like, which spring up from time to time in communities and disgust them by the offensive way in which they mingle love and religion, are inspired in great measure by sexual feeling: on the one hand there is probably the cunning of a hypocritical knave or the self-deceiving duplicity of a half-insane one using the weakness of weak women to minister to his vanity or to his lust under a religious guise; on the other hand, there is an exaggerated self-feeling, rooted often in sexual passion, which is unwittingly fostered under the cloak of religious emotion. . . . In such cases the holy kiss of love owes its warmth to the sexual impulse which inspires it consciously or unconsciously."

Adequate education, or adequate parental or social control, would recognise these symptoms as what they are, and regulate their expression accordingly. But in their absence, and with the prevalence of a religious system that has its sacred books and its literature filled with records of more or less disease-stricken people classified as prophets from, or messengers of, Deity, the weakness of individuals is being continually exploited, few realising either the damage done to each personally and to others who fall an easy victim to what is really a species of hypnotic suggestion.

Clear as is the evidence that the fervour of monks, nuns, and saints in the past, and of numerous religious devotees in the present, as a powerful cause in this deeply perverted sexual instinct, the evidence is still clearer when we take the converts made at revival meetings by professional exhortists. Here the evidence is simply conclusive. It is found that so closely do the years during which these "conversions" are effected coincide with the period during which the male and female reach maturity, that the number converted beyond this time is practically a negligible quantity. Conversion, as Dr. Starbuck puts it, is wholly a phenomena of adolescence. And this, being interpreted, means that the only time during which the professional revivalists can convince young people that "the Holy Ghost is moving in their souls" is the period when new organs are being developed, new functions called into play, and the whole emotional nature subject to floods of feeling, and peculiarly unstable. It is then that these vague, new feelings are exploited by professional religionists, and young men and women led to interpret as religious strivings what is really a purely physiological change. And as to the harm done by this misdirection there seems to me to be little doubt. At such a period the organism is least able to bear any strong and unusual strain. It is the period during which insanity, epilepsy, or alcoholic tendencies are most likely to show themselves, because of this. And yet it is precisely the period when, through the ignorance of parents and the force of evil example, young people are subjected to the emotional stress of religious revivals, and excited to hysterical expressions of religious ecstasy that are greeted as evidence of moral regeneration. Could the results of these gatherings be followed out in detail they would probably rank as among the most injurious of the influences that affect young people.

Right through the history of Christianity the exploitation of sexual feeling is evident. Even the constant harping upon sexual purity by Christian preachers of all ages is evidence of the unhealthy prominence of sexual feelings due to efforts of repression. Sex covers a deal in life, but it is not all; and there is nothing more dangerous, and at bottom more unclean, than a constant harping upon sexual cleanliness. A perfectly healthy

mind is no more overweighted with a consciousness of sex than a healthy body is aware of the possession of organs. One becomes conscious of a liver or a stomach only when there is something wrong in their functioning. It was not cleanliness, but uncleanness, that created the obscene virtue of celibacy. A healthy recognition of sexual instincts as normal and legitimate would have averted this, just as it might have made human nature far better to-day than it is. When one remembers that the Christian efforts to crush the sexual instincts could, in the nature of the case, have been only partly successful among those who were best fitted to carry on the work of perpetuating the race, that for generations many of the spiritual leaders of society were without family interests, and in their teachings blind to the humanising influence of marriage and home life, is not difficult to see that this must have operated in the direction of cultivating anything but an admirable type of character. The fact that Christianity, in fighting against one of the deepest instincts in human nature, and has engaged in a hopeless struggle, does not diminish the gravity of its offence. What it could do it did, and its doing in this direction was almost altogether evil. C.C.

**BEHOLD THE PICTURE!—IS IT LIKE?**

"THIS IS A PRIEST, made 'according to Law,'  
 Who on being ordain'd vow'd by rote like a daw,  
 That, he felt himself call'd by the Holy Spirit,  
 To teach men the Kingdom of Heaven to merit;  
 That to think of the World and the flesh he'd cease,  
 And keep men in quietness, love and peace;  
 And, making thus his profession and boast,  
 Receiv'd, from the Bishop, the Holy Ghost:  
 Then—not having the fear of God before him—  
 Is sworn by a Justice, and one of the Quorum;  
 'Gainst his spiritual Oath, puts his Oath of the Bench,  
 And, instead of his Bible, examines a wench;  
 Gets Chairman of Sessions—leaves his flock, sick or dying,  
 To license Ale-houses—and assist in the trying  
 Of prostitutes, poachers, pick-pockets and thieves—  
 Having charged the Grand Jury, dines with them, and gives  
 Church and King without daylight'; gets fresh, and puts in...  
 To the stocks vulgar people who fuddle with gin:  
 Stage coachmen, and toll-men, convicts as he pleases;  
 And beggars and paupers incessantly teases;  
 Commits starving vagrants, and orders Distress  
 On the Poor, for their Rates . . . signs warrants to press,  
 And beats up for names to a Loyal Address:  
 Would indict, for Rebellion, those who petition;  
 And, all who look peaceable, try for Sedition;  
 If the People were legally Meeting, in quiet,  
 Would pronounce it, decidedly—*sec. Stat.*—a riot,  
 And orders the soldiers 'to aid and assist,'  
 That is—kill the helpless, who cannot resist.  
 He, though vowing 'from all worldly studies to cease,'  
 Breaks the Peace of the Church, to be Justice of Peace;  
 Breaks his vows made to Heaven—a pander for Power,  
 A Perjuror—a guide to the People no more  
 On God turns his back, when he turns the State's Agent;  
 And damns his own Soul, to be friends with the ———!"  
 (Last word omitted, but could mean Pope).

E. H. S.

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G.B.S. AND MRS. BESANT.

SIR.—I must apologise to Mr. Cutner for having mistaken for his conjecture Mrs. Besant's dramatization of an incident which occurred exactly as I recorded it. She dramatized herself not untruthfully; but she could not dramatize Stead. It was I who handed her *The Secret Doctrine* very prosaically; and through this she became acquainted with Stead and swept him into alliance with her in her campaign for Free Speech after Bloody Sunday, in which she dashed into the police courts and, without the smallest right to take any part in the proceedings, compelled the magistrates to listen to her by the sheer force of her personality, courage and eloquence.

As to the drying-up of her earnings (poverty is too strong a word), Mr. Cutner's account is quite consistent with mine. Bradlaugh was too loyal a friend to give her the sack; and her activities continued as Mr. Cutner describes; but she was dependent mainly on the gate at her lectures to the old Secular guard, who could not stand her Fabianism, which Bradlaugh was opposing. Her audiences fell off accordingly.

But in addition to this she felt that her association with Bradlaugh was harming him in his parliamentary candidature at Northampton instead of helping him. Freethinking Liberals refused to speak at his political meetings if they had to share the platform with the notorious Mrs. Besant of the *Fruits of Philosophy*. Bradlaugh never gave her any hint of this; but he must have known it. She certainly felt it, and foresaw that for his sake she must seek new sources of income.—Yours, etc.,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

**LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.**

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

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Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Life's Purpose," Mrs. G. GREENSHAW.

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Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Hall, Arcade, Pilgrim St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Christianity and the People," Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30: "Mental Illness," Dr. DUNCAN McMILLAN, B.Sc. M.D.

Sunderland Psychology Society (Sons of Temperance Hall, Norfolk Street).—Thursday, January 15, 7-30 p.m.: "Man, Mind and Muddle," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON. (All welcome.)

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