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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Atheism Again

ATHEISTS are the last people in the world to resent criticism. Experience has inured them to it, even if principle had not taught them to recognise its justice. But if criticism is to be justified it must be intelligent. The critic must understand what he is criticising and this is, unfortunately, what few religious critics take the pains to understand. A brief glance at the literature of Atheism shows that no small part of the work of Atheists has been to remove misunderstandings, some of them deliberate. Very seldom indeed does a religionist fight the Atheist fairly. The opponent generally gets his Atheism out of the pulpit. Where Atheism is fairly represented the removal of adverse criticism is easy and effective. There is a classical illustration of this in that famous 17th century scholar, Ralph Cudworth. His "True Intellectual System of the Universe" was intended by Cudworth to be a complete reply to Atheists. His criticism was so fair and so powerful that it was stronger than any religious essay.

The consequence was that the Christian world met the work—or as much of it as was published—with abuse. And the author grew so disgusted with its reception that the remainder of what was intended to be a defence of Theism never saw the light. The general opinion was well summed up by Dryden, who said that the author "has raised such strong objections against the being of a God and Providence, that many think he has not answered them." And the famous Earl of Shaftesbury says that Cudworth was "accused of giving the upper hand to the Atheists for having only stated their reasons and those of their adversaries fairly together."

I will just note in passing that at the time Cudworth wrote and spoke there was in being a number of books for and against Atheism. The later periods showed a stop against Atheism to some extent owing to the price that had to be paid for its publicity.

I was reminded of this case of Cudworth's by coming across the following sentence in Canon Ainger's life of Charles Lamb:—

"He went through a phase of Atheism—probably out of sheer curiosity."

These words, it should be said, do not refer to Lamb, but to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was a schoolfellow with Lamb. And unless one knew to the contrary, one would be inclined to class it with Lamb's own observation on Coleridge's love of German metaphysics, that it was due to his sense of humour. But Canon Ainger is quite serious over the matter. Coleridge went through a phase of Atheism, says the Canon, and he explains it as due to sheer curiosity.

Now, so far as Coleridge himself is concerned, it is extremely unlikely that he ever was an Atheist—in any

genuine sense of the term. He himself refers to his "infidelity," and this may be what Canon Ainger had in mind. But it is very probable that this "infidelity" never went beyond what would be called Deism. He rejected the Biblical stories, and was very likely influenced by the better class Deistic authors. "It is for these opinions that William Smith assured the Archbishop of Canterbury that I was what half the clergy are in their lives—an Atheist. Little do these men know what Atheism is. I repeat it. Not one man in ten thousand has either goodness of heart or strength of mind to be an Atheist. And were I not a Christian I would be an Atheist with Spinoza."

I am not, however, concerned with any discussions on Coleridge's religious opinions. I am using Canon Ainger as an illustration of a common phase of mind as regards Atheism and religious disbelief in general. Atheism, it is assumed, is a phase of mind that may be passed through, or even deliberately adopted, much as one might select a motor-car or a suit of clothes. Some people, disgusted with religion, "try" Atheism, and then give it up on seeing what an inferior thing it is, or they pass through it, as if Atheism was a species of intellectual complaint to which bright intellects are susceptible. Bright intellect be it observed; for it is easy to see that it is never the foolish ones that catch this complaint, it is always the more brilliant minds. The fools are quite safe. Stupidity is the true anti-toxin against Atheism. The fool does *not* say in his heart "there is no God." On the contrary, he proclaims God, and then goes on his knees and thanks God for his own stupidity.

But anyone who thinks that a man can become an Atheist, as it was said Coleridge did, is a fool. However wise he may be in other directions, he is a fool at times. He does not know what Atheism is. How can anyone adopt a frame of mind for mere curiosity? One may examine things out of curiosity, one may feel a curiosity in one's own mental twists, but by what means can one pass through a *mental* phase merely because one is curious about it? A man may realise that he is an Atheist or a Theist, but that is all. Mental states are not created by order. They arise and are a consequence of growth. Their causes and their consequences are alike matters of history.

The idea of becoming an Atheist from sheer curiosity is ridiculous. The reasons that lead to Atheism are easily found by anyone who cares to study the situation. Atheism is not a secret society. Those who understand Atheism are always ready to express it to all who are interested. Is there some curiosity to find out the quality of an Atheist's feelings? There may be something in all this, and one may conceive a forward believer in Deity genuinely puzzled to realise how people can get on without God. But, then, judging by all appearances, the Atheist is not greatly unlike other people. He looks the same as others, he acts the same as others, and, apparently, feels the same as others. And if anyone wishes to realise an Atheist's mental con-

dition, there is only one way in which this may be done. That is by becoming an Atheist. We are not so curious about Theists, for the reason that most of us have passed through that phase of mind. It represents a stage in our development. But one cannot take up with Atheism out of curiosity. I can attend a religious service, and may even go through a religious ceremony, because I am curious about them. But there is no method by which one can acquire a conviction save by appreciating the proofs on which that conviction rests.

It is naturally agreeable to Christian prejudice to assume that Atheism is no more than a mere transient frame of mind to which all are subject, but from which really well-balanced minds soon recover. It removes it from the category of serious forces that have to be reckoned with, and at the same time gives the believer a comfortable feeling of superiority. But genuine Atheists never do "recover." A man who is really an Atheist is never reconverted—that is while he remains mentally healthy. The change is all on the one side, and all in the one direction. Nothing is, indeed, more amusing than finding religious people attributing the Atheism of this or that one to false views of the Bible, or to the revulsion brought about by contact with undesirable Christians. The truth is that Atheism is very seldom, if ever, brought about by these means. They may give weight to one religious doctrine against another religious doctrine; but that is all. If every believer was a wholly admirable person, if every religious doctrine were as clear as daylight, and if all Christians were agreed as to what was the correct view of the Bible, these things would leave the Atheist quite unaffected, and they would be quite powerless to prevent the growth of Atheism. That rests on causes that are part and parcel of human civilisation.

Look at the matter historically. Quite apart from the desirability or undesirability of Atheism, the whole trend of the world's mental growth is in the direction of Atheism. Bacon's often quoted saying that a little philosophy leads to Atheism, but greater depth in philosophy brings men back to religion, will not stand examination. It is quite the other way about. It is a little philosophy that leads to religion, a greater depth in philosophy brings one out of it. Religion is not the final philosophy of nature, it is the earliest. It is true that religion is the product of reason, but it is reason in its crudest and least informed state. Had man been incapable of reason the gods would never have existed, and providing he keeps on reasoning the gods will one day cease to exist. All history and experience proves this. The very universality of religion proves it. For religion is only universal in the sense that no tribe or nation is known without possessing some kind of superstition. And then exactly in proportion as a people advance in genuine culture, we find religion losing its hold on the human mind. One will never expect to find Atheism among savages. Amongst civilised people it has ceased to excite comment.

The essential fact about Atheism is that it represents growth—growth in the individual and growth in the race. That is why a man cannot become an Atheist and revert to religion. One may exist without knowledge, or perception of certain truths, but once this knowledge is ours, how are we going to divest ourselves of it? So one may easily remain a believer in God—the majority do so remain, but once a man sees the fallacy of the god idea, understands its origin, and appreciates its history, how is he ever going to bring himself back to his previous mental condition? It

simply cannot be done. Yet it is this fact of growth that is of vital significance in connection with Atheism, and it is the one fact that the Theist declines to recognise. Perhaps one ought to say he dare not. For its recognition involves the admission that the belief in gods is a passing phase in history, analogous to the belief in fairies in the history of the individual. It is in the infancy of the race that the gods are born, to the infancy of the race they properly belong; and that is a truth which is not vitally affected by the fact that in many cases this period of infancy is a very prolonged one.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

WORLD GOVERNMENT OR WORLD CHAOS?

THERE are some who dream of a pleasant Utopia, a Summer-land in which all men will share all things equally. It sounds delightful—but what exactly does it mean? It means that the idle will enjoy the same privileges and rewards as the industrious; the unprincipled will share a social equality with the honest; while the thrifty will have to bestow their savings on the spendthrift.

To take from one man who, by ability and hard work, has accumulated a comfortable sum of money, while you give to another who is less industrious or who is, perhaps, a gambler of weak character, can hardly be considered a good principle.

Men are not yet born with equal gifts or talents; equal intelligence or capacity for learning; or equal moral standards. In short—Equality of Means is unpractical; Equality of Character is impossible and Equality of Ability is absurd. The most we can hope to do is to ensure that all men are given equal opportunities in life; good conditions under which to live and work, and freedom to enjoy their own lives. What each one makes of his life is then his own concern and if he fails he cannot blame Society.

Only a fool could suppose that if all men began their careers with equal amounts of money, they would still have equal amounts in a few years time. One would have gained by industry and ability and perhaps good luck, while another would have lost by idleness, inability or bad luck. Are we then, to continue taking from those who *have* in order to give to those who *have not*? Such a system would discourage industry and thrift and encourage indolence and extravagance.

The only good system of government is one which provides Equal Opportunity with Equal Freedom for all. This would abolish class distinction and privilege; eradicate race hatred and colour prejudice; eliminate religious intolerance and prevent extremes of poverty and wealth.

The question is: How are we to ensure that no one nation, no dictator or aggressor shall arise to subjugate and coerce the smaller and weaker nations? Until we are able to prevent such a possibility no lasting peace can be assured. If, through selfishness and greed the world is overwhelmed by another war, make no mistake about it, the result will be mass annihilation with the complete and utter destruction of the world's great cities. Atomic warfare is too terrible to contemplate, but unless we, the people, do something about it quickly, Civilisation is doomed. The few who manage to survive will find themselves back in the Stone Age, hiding miserably in caves and hunting for such food as they can find. Thousands of years of cultural development will be wiped out in a day.

So let us realise now, before it is too late, that Man's future lies in his own hands. Are we worthy to survive or not? The laws of nature decree that only the fittest shall survive—not merely the *physically* fit, but the *morally* fit. Man's moral character must be unimpeachable, he must banish every vestige of envy, hate and greed from his nature. He must progress through his own unaided efforts, by his unselfishness and by

his own will towards goodness for its own sake, not for future rewards or fear of future punishment.

We must cast away the great illusion that as individuals we are of any importance. We are merely a part—and a very small part—of the Universal Pattern. It is the duty of each separate and distinct entity to fit himself, by perfecting his moral character, so that he can finally take his place in the completed picture.

Man must learn to realise that in the Great Scheme of Things he is as a grain of sand in the desert. His little material successes or failures count as nothing—it is only his moral worth that is of any value at all. Why then should we labour and sorrow from cradle to the grave if we are of such small importance? The answer is that once we rid ourselves of our inflated sense of superiority we shall know that we must work and strive, not for selfish advancement, but for the good of all humanity.

We must learn the true meaning of brotherly love. We must not idealise our own race and our own country above all others. The rich nations must share with the poor, and the strong help the weak. There must be no monopoly of abundance while there is want elsewhere. Greed, distrust and envy—and above all, lust for power—must be banished from human nature, for they are the causes of all civil unrest and wars.

Man has progressed from the Stone Age to the present Machine Age; but that is not the end. There is one Age he has not yet reached—the Age of Idealism, Art and Beauty. Science and machinery will have supplanted manual labour, and Man will at last have the time to cultivate his intellect to the full. Philosophy, literature and art will emerge from the mean attics of the starved intellectuals to be discussed as freely as football and racing are to-day.

But can this final stage be reached by peaceful means? We believe that it can if we act now and choose the only possible way. We must establish one *Universal System of World Government*. The peoples of the world do not want war—they never have wanted war—it is always foisted on them by professional statesmen and war-mongering financiers whose lust for power and financial gain can only be satisfied by the sacrifice and mass murder of the common people who are persuaded to die for a worthless slogan. Patriotism—Duty to one's Country, etc.—high-sounding ideals, but false and meaningless. It is our *Duty to Humanity* that matters—the Cause of Brotherhood and Goodwill to all men—not mere service to a strip of land or to a ruler, be he King, President, or Dictator.

The doctrine of World Government must be preached in every town and hamlet, in every country in the world. The people must unite and, by their unity, Statesmen must be forced to put international interests before and above their own national interests. So long as men are politically divided amongst themselves, with every country following a different line of thought, no lasting peace can ever be established; but with one political system universal throughout the world *there could be no more war*.

Such an ideal can be realised and it *must* be realised. We have seen, after both world wars, our professional statesmen floundering around the conference tables and failing to secure any peaceful agreement among themselves. All such attempts are foredoomed to failure because each representative is working in his own country's interest, which means that he must consider every proposal from that point of view. It is a wicked waste of the taxpayer's money when each delegate is trying to foist something on other people who do not want it; and at the same time resisting what other countries are trying to foist on him. The result is stalemate, deadlock and universal distrust which must automatically lead to an armaments race and finally total war.

But how very different would be the result if only this national self interest could be eliminated. If we would abolish all national governments and establish one *international govern-*

ment instead, elected by free ballot among all the free peoples of the world, self-interest and the conflict of national ideologies would be impossible. We would have a World Government speaking for all peoples and not merely for one particular nation. There could be no costly armaments race, no distrust, envy, hatred or selfish greed—thus every possible cause of war would disappear.

Every thinking man must see that this is the only solution and insist that no more time and money is wasted in useless talk. We must act now—the people alone can do it. The only alternative is annihilation—and the choice is ours. Shall we choose Death or Life as we were intended to live it—in happiness, peace and prosperity?

W. H. WOOD.

SYMBOLS IN RELIGION

THE EVIL EYE

The world over the superstition prevails that there are people who can do harm by their looks (fascination, the supposed power to harm by looks or spells, of alluring). In Ancient Rome sex images, called "fascinum", were worn as a preventive (phylacterion). In Italy, nowadays, people put their thumb between index and middle-finger, thus making the fig-sign ("far la fica") as a symbol of sexual intercourse. In Batavia, Chinese women anxious for children, make a pilgrimage to an old gun barrel of bronze the muzzle of which shows the "fica-hand". This they touch.

Eye-ornaments, too, are used against the Evil Eye (mal'occhio). goblets, coats and even stones were covered with eyes.

TEPHILLIN

Every morning the orthodox Jews put on their phylacteries (Matth. xxiii, 5), a docket amulet on leather straps (cf. the leather throngs of the Roman luperci). Phylacterion means a preventive, and Jer. Berakhôth, fol. 1, 2a, corroborates to the effect that they serve for warding off evil spirits. Hence phallic capsules are connected with them. Similar binnales are borne by African negroes at exactly the same place where the Jews put them, viz., on their foreheads right in the centre of where the hairline starts. Attached to Negro masks, this phallus is still clearly recognisable; similar conics can be found on the foreheads of Indian deities and the Greek Dionysos. Hence, these cones were called a "menace" (Megillah 24b) and supplanted by the present cubical form; still, at least with the Jews in the Orient, the capsules for the hand have preserved their genuine shape and, therefore, are always hidden away.*

The sexual meaning of the Tephillin is being increased by the way in which they must be put into a receptacle that in Yiddish is called the "scrotum."

Thus, sexuality, thrown out by religion at the front door, keeps coming back through the back-door!

PERCY GORDON ROY.

* Such as the touching of bare parts of the human body the hands could be defiled by touching the Tephillin capsules. (Yadayim III, 3 Zabin v. 12.) With the "Melanesian Arm Amulet", that part round the upper part of the left arm is said to contain the charm "magarra" causing amorous frenzy with women, whilst the strap for the lower arm protects from enemy weapons.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 9d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

We must confess that when we come into contact with educated men and women, and find that they swallow the miracles of the Bible and the New Testament, we often wonder whether the reader or speaker is indulging in what is called "pulling the rope." Here is an example of what we have in mind, and it is taken from one of the most respectable religious papers "The Church of England Newspaper." The person in question is the Rev. Charles Winsland. He gives us for consideration "the greatest of all miracles, the Incarnation." We agree that if one can swallow the story of Jesus in its beginnings and endings—we may skip most of the intermediates—there is really nothing more to be said. A belief of that kind may well defy destruction. We would only suggest that those interested should run over the last thirty-odd pages of the sixth volume of Toyinbee's "Study of History", where they will find that there is the old story of "Jesus" in being centuries before Christianity was heard of. It is not to be wondered that as the Christians became strong enough, they destroyed as much of ancient literature as was possible. Actually, the old representation of the pre-Christian story was much better told than the one that Mr. Winsland calls the Christian story "the greatest of all miracles"! As the story is told we think the better title is "the greatest of all lies."

We know nothing about Mr. Eric Fletcher, save that he is an M.P. This lack of knowledge is entirely our fault. But we gather that he is a bit of a "wag." That we may assume because of the way he writes to the "Times" asking that the Christian Ministry should explain the application of the Christian doctrine to the problem of a "complete economic society." As we have said, that is a bit of a joke. Very slyly Mr. Fletcher tells us that the Christians were from early times concerned in building a happy society in *this* world. But that was not at all the aim of Christianity in the beginning, and it has never achieved anything like a happy home on earth. For the matter of that, Christians, as a whole, have never agreed as to what is the basis of Christianity. The New Testament showed Christians quarrelling as to what *is* Christianity, and weekly Christian papers show the same thing to-day.

Let us take a brief survey of the idea of a Christian "complete economic society." We will take a very famous Christian historian—Mosheim, who was born in 1694 and died in 1755. We will take just a few words of the great Mosheim's judgment:—

Second century—"The very worst of moral instructors."

Third century—"Church rule was followed by a train of vices."

Fourth century—"The number of immoral and unworthy Christians began to increase. Real piety and virtue became extremely rare."

Fifth century—"The vices of the clergy were carried to enormous lengths."

Sixth century—"The vices of the clergy were carried to the most enormous lengths."

So the story goes on so long as the historian lived. The general influence of Christianity may be reckoned by the fact that, in spite of wars, two things stand out. One is that the Churches have less power than they ever had, and the character of men and women is still better than it was when Christianity was at its greatest.

The Bishop of London says that "for the present generation the Bible has come to be a new book." That, we take it, means that the Bible no longer really exists. But within our own life and time we have seen the Bible declared to be the veritable word of God. Now it is being admitted that the historic Bible is out of the market. So it is the Freethinkers who are right; it is the Christian leaders who are wrong, and not one of these Bishops has the decency to say that if it had not been for Freethinkers, Christians would never have understood what the Bible really is. Bishops are very ungrateful individuals. They lie about religion as long as they can, and when Freethinkers force the truth on them they do not say to the Freethinkers, "Thank you."

Then comes from the principal writer on the staff of "The British Weekly" the statement that "The Church is desperately sick." Of course it is, but the sickness is not the result of looking for truth, but the recognition that, having lied and lied, sent men and women to prison for telling the truth about the Christian religion. What makes Christians fret is that they are being forced now to tell the truth, not exactly all the truth, but just enough to make it look respectable. We should keep in our minds that Christian leaders never tell an unpleasant truth so long as there is a comfortable lie at hand. For example, Sir Stafford Cripps cannot see anything wrong in a man in his position standing as a champion of Christianity. He does not realise that there are some freedoms that prevent one being free in this or that way. For him to say openly that this country can be saved only by Christianity, is good enough for a preacher, but it is completely out of place when it comes from a representative of a mixed mass of all sorts of people, to talk as he does.

Lord Halifax is of opinion that a Christian with a true vocation deserves enough to eat and live. We agree with him. But there should be some care as regards the abilities of the person in question to do certain work. How can we determine the right or wrong of this? Once upon a time, God "called" for people of that kind. Now that has broken down, and with all respect for everyone, it may be that when the candidate is called—by a Bishop—we have only the opinions of one or two clergymen, who actually do make a mess of it. We think that Lord Halifax should attack this problem sensibly. God may not have such a high opinion as he imagines.

One of these days we whites may be called to make good where the coloured people are in a position to demand equality. An indication of that kind came the other day in reply to the Archbishop of Cardiff, who had been talking of the Blacks as Whites are in the habit of talking. A reply was given by Mr. Hitchens. We think it is important to put it almost in full. Here it is:—

Whatever the defects of the moral codes of these so-called savages, they do believe in them implicitly and on them sincerely. Irresponsibility, insolence and conscious cruelty are not features of their behaviour and are far oftener encountered among the Africans who have come in contact with them and been half-educated by Europeans.

It is this contempt for native customs and institutions, exemplified in the Archbishop's address, which has led to the demoralisation of so many Africans under European and Church influence. The faith of the African in his own traditions and institutions tends to be destroyed by ridicule before he can appreciate European ways of life, so that he turns to depravity and vice. It is far easier to destroy a faith than to instil a new one.

R. HITCHENS.

Any falsehood, large or small, is permissible so long as it helps the "great lying creed." For example, the "Catholic Herald" tells the world that there is a loss of "natural virtue" with the decline of religion. But that is simply untrue if we put the influence of the world wars aside. Everyone knows that a war of any great scale involves a lower degree of social life. The best men and women have always complained that "war" means a lower scale of life. To try to make the lower level of life a consequence of a decay of religion is just a lie, and every sensible and honest man and woman knows it to be so.

The Reverend Godfrey Robinson says that "What is wrong with the world is that men and women just defy God. They think they know so much about running the world that they have no time for the Bible." That is not quite true. First of all, theoretically, God made Man, and if it turns out badly, all we can say is that God's work has turned out not as well as it might have done. Religiously, God made the first dose of everything—including Man—and as someone has said, if God wanted man better than he is, he should have made him better. In any case nearly all improvements that have been made for man have been made by man.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Some of our readers will remember the fine Russian story called "Dead Souls". The book is over seventy years old, and deals with the "Serfs"—that is, slaves. Legally, the death of "serfs" had to be published, but that rule was not always obeyed, and that gave a chance of raising one man's status on the account of his wealth. He bought the dead "serfs" very cheaply, and on the number of slaves he had he stood high in the opinions of the people. It was a fine story and it had its points. Moreover the story had its application of the way "great men" are often made.

The Roman Church did not take its behaviour from Russia, but a feature similar to it operates. For example. Mr. Douglas Jerrold writes in the "Catholic Herald" that the Roman Church alone among religious systems increased its number of worshippers. We might have accepted that story did we not remember that the Catholic Church arranges matters differently from other Christian bodies; it makes no allowances for deaths! The result is that whereas other religious bodies have to allow for those who give up a particular religion, it is with Rome, once a member, always a member. It is the story of "Dead Souls" over again. We ought to say that a man or woman may be put through the ordeal of ex-communication, but it is so filthily brutal that it is very seldom practised. Only Christian love makes room for some of the Roman practices.

It may be noted that this handling—or rather, mishandling—was substantially, if not completely, unknown to the slaves of the ancient world. In Rome and Greece this was outstanding. In fact, many of the writers we are used to seeing in Roman and Greek literature began their lives as slaves. A fine sample of the facts will be found in "Slavery in The Roman Empire", by R. H. Barrow, a first-class book, which was published in 1929 (Methuen and Co.). Another book on the same lines is "Freemen in the Early Roman Empire", published by the Clarendon Press.

A curious case reached us recently from "New York Herald Tribune." A Russian who had taken out citizenship papers in the U.S.A. decided to cancel them and return to Russia. All this would have been in order but for the interference of a Roman Catholic Priest who claimed to have the control of the Russian's child because it had been attending a Roman

Catholic School. The matter was never settled because the father—with his children—left the U.S.A. The case is worth keeping in mind. Rome stops at nothing.

Following last year's successful Motor Coach outing, the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. is arranging another day trip to Weston super Mare on June 13th. Tickets 18s., tea extra. Coaches will start from John Bright Street, Station Street Corner, 7-45 a.m. All those interested—members and friends—please make application by March 15th, with 5s. deposit for each seat required, to Mr. T. G. Millington, 6, Heskett Avenue, Warley, Birmingham.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. had a real live meeting last Sunday. The attendance was good, Mr. Rosetti's lecture was well received, and questions were many and searching. The Chairman, Mr. G. Peck, closed an enjoyable evening with a suggestion, that the meeting send a message of good will to Mr. Chapman Cohen. Mr. Rosetti reports the suggestion was received with a real warm enthusiasm which Mr. Cohen acknowledges with a deep feeling of appreciation.

NEW THOUGHTS ON THE ROMAN CHURCH

IN these days of world-wide confusion, revolution and perplexity, it is well to seek methods of reconciliation of old disputes rather than to perpetuate them. This article has that object. Its writer has published from time to time various vigorous criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church. Such criticisms were sincere and well intended; but the sad world conditions above alluded to have cast a somewhat different light on the subject. Hence this article—which may be taken as a stage in an increasing modification of outlook. It is not expected that all readers of this paper will agree (indeed, probably many may disagree even vehemently) with the remarks made below: but the subject is important, interesting and eminently worthy of debate.

Recently, I have been re-reading, or in some cases reading for the first time, some outstanding books on the Roman Catholic Church. For example: *The Catholic Church Against the Twentieth Century*, by Avro Manhattan (London, 1947: Rationalist); *The Key to the World's Progress*, by C. Stanton Devas (London, 1907: Catholic); Newman's *Apologia* and his *Essay on Development*; *The History of the Church, Vol. 3*; *From Aquinas to Luther*, by Father Philip Hughes (London, 1947: Catholic); and various Encyclical Letters of Popes from Gregory XVI to Pius XII now reigning. These perusals aroused a number of thoughts. Devas's *Key* and Manhattan's *Twentieth Century* well deserve to be studied together. They survey the same problems, but from contrasted points of sight. Manhattan describes in elaborate and fascinating detail the world-wide political and religious activities of the Papacy and the Roman Catholic episcopate and priesthood as controlled by it. He has a careful description of the organisation of the Church's Vatican headquarters, and of its methods of operation. The book does not obtrude arguments, but its conclusion is that, on the whole, the Roman Church is the enemy of progress.

Devas's book also—though in less detail, for it is shorter—surveys those activities, and argues that the history of the Papacy is "paradoxical"—it seems at times the enemy of progress, toleration, and freedom, yet at other times their friend; the conclusion being that in reality, the Roman Church stands for "absolute values"—the eternal ethical principles of right, and therefore is "the key to progress." Newman, in his *Apologia*, deals (*Everyman's Library* edition, p. 220ff.) with the accusation that the Papacy is tyrannical and opposed to progress. His reply is that, if God made a revelation through a Church, that Church must necessarily be the antagonist of evil in the world, and therefore must always be apparently "challenging" to the

age. Father Hughes, in his learned *History*, deals with the complicated religio-political events of the 13th-16th centuries, and concludes that the secular ("temporal") activities of mediaeval Popes were necessary evils, and saved, to a great extent, European culture.

These problems are of great interest and importance in our own period. The political prestige of the Papacy is at present somewhat diminished, owing to the power of secular States overshadowing the Church; but it is, nevertheless, by no means negligible. In some countries (as Spain, Portugal, South America, French Canada, Malta, Eire, and so on) it is even predominant; in others (as France, Italy, the U.S.A.), it is powerful and even nominally the national faith of one; even in professedly Protestant lands, like England, it is important. The activities of the Roman Church, then, are matters eminently deserving careful study.

They should be studied impartially. After all, the Catholic Church is a great historic development, even if it be not the vehicle of a divine revelation. It could not have survived all these centuries unless—at least to a great extent—it served many of the interests of humanity. The old crude "no-Popery" hatred of everything "Roman" is unhistorical and unscientific. A striking article on "Witchcraft," in the *Rationalist Annual for 1948*, shows that in Spain, while all the rest of Europe was crazy over witch-hunting, the much-maligned Inquisition damped down the frenzy and promoted relative justice and sanity. This is but one example of the need for viewing these subjects without prejudice.

The Roman Church, of course, is opposed in principle to the "secularist" view of life. Inevitably, it must be supposed since it claims to be the divinely appointed teacher of a supernatural revelation whose object it is to show mankind the way to life in heaven. The Roman Church proclaims without hesitation or diminution its belief that "heavenly things" take precedence of "earthly." That being so, it logically follows that the Church, as the teacher of "heavenly things," claims to be superior to the State, which is concerned only with the "earthly and transitory." In a really well-ordered State, therefore, the Church (meaning, of course, the *Roman Church*: "which alone is true") should (it is claimed) guide and even in many matters control the activities of the civil power.

In 1864 Pope Pius IX (who, six years later, was to convene the Vatican Ecumenical Council, which made Papal *ex cathedra* infallibility an article of faith) published a *Syllabus of the Principal Errors which Afflict our Unhappy Age*. The last of the eighty maxims therein censured was that which said that the Popes must make terms with progress and modern civilisation. That *Syllabus*—and especially the eightieth censure—has been commonly held to have branded the Papacy as a retrograde foe of enlightenment. Catholic writers, however, argue that the Pope was condemning not genuine, but only false and harmful "progress"—and they point to our present lamentable social and political conditions as evidence of the wisdom of his warnings. What, then, is the truth of this?

In the present writer's opinion (which, of course, is advanced here simply as his personal view, subject to debate), the Pope was right at least to this extent: He condemned the pursuit of merely material scientific progress apart from higher philosophic ideals; and events have justified his censure. Of course, that censure was based on the Church's claim that the ideals so neglected are, in fact, divinely revealed truths. Apart from that question, however, we may surely agree that the cultivation of merely material science, to the neglect of ethical ideals, is a one-sided and harmful policy. It has led to the world-wars and the menace of the atom bomb.

In considering the problem of the activities of the Roman Church, therefore, this article would suggest that for people not members of it, what is now needed is not the old spirit of antagonism but a fair and impartial sympathy. Even "non-believers" must allow that in many past periods, the Papacy

has saved Europe from deadly secular tyranny—for example, in the struggles with the Hohenstaufen German emperors. In our own country, had it not been for the Popes, we should have had a cruel royal absolutism under Henry II, with calamitous subsequent results. In our own times, the Papacy is a bulwark in many countries, against State totalitarianism. It resists the modern concentration on physical science at the expense of ethical ideals. It is well, then, to adjust the former sectarian antagonisms and to view this subject in the light of the need of our times for concord, tolerance, and good will.

J. W. POYNTER.

MAGIC IN THE AIR!

"I WAS engaged," said the boy to the priest, "and her parents weren't too pleased about it. They didn't care over much for a budding magician. I told them I could make a banknote walk down the street by itself, and they said 'Quite.' They took her away to the seaside.

"Believe it or not," said the boy, and there was a note of bitterness in his voice, "my pals rallied round me and gave me a squirrel. One of them handed over his fancy-dress Chinese outfit. The idea was I should get a job with the pierrots at the seaside, be on the spot, and win the girl's folk round with my success story. But the pierrots said they didn't want a conjuror without experience. And there was I, stranded at the seaside, without my fare home. And if the girl's parents saw I was hanging around, and not exactly making good, I knew they'd move her off and I wouldn't be able to raise the cash to follow the procession."

"It must have been very trying," said the priest. "You must have been wondering all the time where the squirrel's next square meal was coming from."

"Damn it!" said the boy, "I had to see my girl and ask her advice. So I put on my Chinese outfit, and my theatrical make-up and went out into the streets. I figured her people wouldn't recognise me if they saw me walking about as a chink."

"You can't blame them," said the priest gently.

"Believe it or not," said the boy, "I created a sensation. And I went all over the town looking for my girl, and I couldn't find her. At last I became so desperate, I forgone everything—poverty and all that—and dived into a bar. I was followed by a man who immediately stood me a drink and entered into polite conversation. He was the boss of the pierrots and he didn't recognise me. 'Can't you do a few tricks?' he said, 'and I'd put you on as Wu, the Chinese Wizard.' You see he was impressed at the way I'd got every one looking at me. Then he said, 'And look here, old boy, it'd be better if you didn't. Pretend you can't speak a word of English and it'll add to the mystery.' That's what he said you see."

"And your girl was sitting in the front row?" suggested the priest, who seemed to be out to spoil the story.

"Yes," said the boy, "I saw her when I started my trick of bringing balloons from an empty hat. I had a secret way of inflating balloons inside a hat. But that night they all exploded in my face. It wasn't till afterwards I realised the squirrel had clawed the skin of the balloons. The squirrel, of course, was to have come out of the hat at the end of the trick."

"Poor little mite," said the priest.

"You understand, father," said the boy furiously, "I hadn't the faintest idea why the balloons were bursting. It seemed to me that somebody else was working my magic. I was scared, and the audience roared. And after that, nothing would go right. I lost every trick. And there's something else I lost that night, father, I lost my faith. That's why I came to tell you all about it."

"My poor child," said the priest, "this is very terrible, very terrible indeed."

"Yes it is," said the boy, "for I can't believe a really good god would have let that squirrel actually have colic inside my hat. And I'm damned if I can see how the Church can have any answer to that one!"

"Perhaps you'd better not tell me any more about it," said the priest a little faintly. "Do you know, when I was in the seminary I almost went mad because for a whole six months I found it very difficult to believe in miracles?"

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

CORRESPONDENCE

PESSIMISM

Sir.—The poems and articles of your gifted contributor, W. H. Woods, are a delight to this reader of your paper. His intensity and delicacy of feeling and indignation over the palpable wrongs of the day are evident in everything he writes. But is he not inclined to be too gloomy?

I refer to an article of his in your issue of 11th January entitled "To be or not to be." He scores dialectical points over Mr. Moore but . . .

I am an old man and hope it will not be considered priggish to assert that I have always, from early youth, been, above all else, interested in progressive movements. Disillusion has been frequent and bitter, and there have been times (fortunately transitory) when suicide seemed logically inescapable; but just when the future appeared blackest, I have managed to thrust a hopeless situation into the background and see myself in a less tragic light. I have managed even to laugh, to "dance on the edge of the abyss."

I know that it is almost impossible, in certain circumstances, to "pack up your troubles," but those of us who have the strength left to fight are not going to improve matters by adopting the Byronic pose.

I grant that a fluent and persuasive writer can make out a most impressive case for pessimism. Who can say that a Leopardi, a James Thomson, and (latterly) an H. G. Wells may not be right? Quite possibly they may be. But for the same reason that we do not "throw up the sponge" because the human race is not immortal, must we live each day as if life is to go on for ever. It is a measure of the progress that we have already made that sensitive men like Mr. Woods are overwhelmed by the horror of the contemporary scene. Man is a tough animal, as history proves. So let us go on struggling—and laughing, and leave the shirking to Christians whose hands feel the gold in their pockets and whose thoughts are professedly, not on things of this world!—Yours etc.,

E. A. McDONALD.

"A WORD FOR OUR CHILDREN."

Sir.—Most thoughtful people will share the foreboding of Mr. Rowland over the future of adolescents, but there won't be so much agreement with his views as to the causes of the evils which afflict the body politic.

These abound in our foreign dealings, in the attitude of labour to its duties, and in general to our superficial way of life. Space could not be allowed to discuss these *in extenso*, but I take note of Mr. Rowland's statement that in former years there was an appreciation of freedom that made "life heavenly."

What I want to urge upon him if we are to overcome our decadence is to substitute for the present pseudo-democracy a governing democracy, with an intellectual basis with the cardinal principles for its guidance resting upon Liberty, a sense of responsibility, an acknowledgment of its obligations, and a rigid adherence to justice between man and man.

Hardships will come that way, but we shall attain in the end a standard of conduct which seems to be Mr. Rowland's aim.—Yours etc.,

W. RONSON.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 9, 7 p.m.: "The Advance of Christianity," Mr. H. J. RANDALL, LL.B. (Lond.), F.S.A.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Gandhi—Prophet and Portent," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday: "Russia, the Degeneration of a Workers' Revolution," Mr. JOCK HASTON (Revolutionary Communist Party).

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Saturday, March 13, 7 p.m.: A Whist Drive, tickets, 2s., refreshment included.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Body and Mind," Mr. H. L. SEARLE (Treasurer, Bradford Branch N.S.S.).

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Case for Determinism," Mrs. M. WHITEFIELD.

Glasgow Secular Society (Clarion Rooms, Queens Crescent).—Monday, 8 p.m.: Executive and Members' Meeting.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boar's Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Should Drama Return to the Church?" Miss D. GARNETT.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: The 67th Anniversary of opening of the Secular Hall. Musical Items. Speaker, Mr. BASIL GIMSON.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester).—6-30 p.m.: A Lecture.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "The British Housewives," Mrs. J. SANSOM.

AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY. A Survey of Positions. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 14d.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS. By W. A. Campbell. With a Preface by the Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

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WILL PUBLICITY SAVE THE CHURCH?

THE Publicity Commission appointed by the Church Assembly nearly two years ago has now issued a report in which it recommends the setting up of a Church Information Board for using modern publicity methods to make Church work better known. I find this somewhat curious, for I have always noticed that the more people know about the Church and its work the less they are concerned about its preservation. I have rarely missed an opportunity of making little-realised facts about the Church known to those with whom I have come into contact, and I cannot say that the Church has reaped any advantage from my efforts. As for the paper in which this article appears, it has freely given the Church all the publicity at its disposal for nearly seventy years. If publicity is such a good thing, the Church Assembly ought to pass a vote of thanks to "The Freethinker" every time it meets.

Publicity, however, has two main aspects. There is the truth and there is "eyewash." It is the second of these that the promoter of a shady enterprise wants when he expresses the hope that "full publicity will be given to the facts," and it is "eyewash" that the Church is seeking when it criticises the Fleet Street approach for bringing disrepute on the Church "by the undue and unfair emphasis of incidents of a nature equally likely to arise in other walks of life." In effect it wants undue and unfair emphasis of the alleged ethical superiority of Church standards over secular teachings, but suppression of the facts when Christian conduct gives the lie to such a claim. I hope that editors will note this attitude, and remember it when next approached for help by a publicity-seeking parson.

I wonder if any advertising manager would complain if he could secure for his firm a fraction of the publicity that the Church enjoys. Suppose two-thirds of all new-born babies were pledged by sponsors to become users of his product when they were old enough. Suppose that his trade propaganda was impressed upon children daily by their school teachers as part of their education. Suppose that his firm had fine buildings and solus poster-sites all over the country. Suppose his goods received praise from broadcasters time and again every day. Suppose practically every newspaper published without charge a weekly article recommending his product. Such is the publicity the Church enjoys. Would the experienced advertising man complain it was not enough? Not for a moment. What he would say, if he had all these advantages and found that the market did not respond, would be that the goods must be wrong.

Twenty-five years of my career have been spent in the advertising business, so maybe my advice to those contemplating a publicity campaign for the Church would not be without value. Treating their requirements in very much the same manner as he would those of the prospective advertiser of a proprietary food or medicine, the publicity expert would no doubt ask them if theirs was a branded product. "Oh, yes," would be the reply, "our brand of goods is Christianity." Then the trouble would begin, for the honest expert would have to point out that Christianity is no more than a label, and not, in the marketing sense, a brand at all. A brand of marmalade or of pills is not just a name, but a standardised product. The purchaser knows that it will be the same wherever purchased. The name is the guarantee of satisfaction, because the product does not vary. Advertising pays because the public knows this from experience. Is Christianity an analogous case? Boiled down to essentials, a publicity campaign for the Church would have to say: "Try Christianity. It cures everything. Obtainable from branches everywhere." Now people already know that the label Christianity does not specify a standard product, and thousands of lines varying with the shops seeking public patronage. Most people also believe that the Christianity on

sale in most of the shops is spurious. The number of customers who have bought and then have been disappointed with their purchases is tremendous and is forever growing. In view of all this, our honest publicity expert would have to say: "Sorry. Go away and do two things. First produce something that meets modern needs and then give it a name as much unlike Christianity as possible. Advertising never succeeds when goods are obsolete and discredited."

Such advice would not, of course, be taken. The Church will probably go ahead and take the advice of its Publicity Commission, appoint the suggested Church Information Board and a number of well-paid officials headed by "a chief information secretary, with a salary not less than £2,000 a year, plus expenses." Quite a racket, this Church publicity business. I have no doubt that there will be many applicants for the jobs it will create. And the result? As usual a considerable expenditure of money on print and talk, desperate efforts to obtain evidence that the expenditure has achieved something and in the long run fewer people than ever showing any interest in the Church or anything to do with it.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

AMERICAN CHRONICLES, 1948

IT was on the trolley car where I first saw him, a gentleman of 50 or thereabouts, evidently one of the intelligentsia, for surely the man had fine features, clear eyes and seemed every inch a sophisticate. He was usually reading.

Then one day, to my horror, I saw him deeply engrossed in the "American Freethinker" with glaring headline "Man, the Myth-Maker"; and as I looked across the narrow aisle which separated us, my startled gaze fell on a horrid black book in his lap, entitled "Jesus, A Myth," by Georg Brandes, which sent a shudder through me from head to foot.

"Surely," I sighed, "not *the* Georg Brandes, celebrated Danish critic!"

In silent reverence I bowed by head in prayer. "Dear God," I breathed, "Guide this fine man in the paths of truth and righteous rightness . . . for Jesus' sake, Amen!"

And as I finished my prayer—O horrid thought—could God already have done this thing?

Something to think about; for the Devil has puzzling ways too. So I must not confuse myself.

Be that as it may, somehow or other my thoughts turned from the beautiful woman with the glorious hair in front of me, to beloved Jesus sitting on a stone seat, with beautiful Mary, the prosti—I mean the Magdalen tenderly washing his feet with her long hair; and then, by some strange vagary of my over-taxed imagination, I wondered if gentle Jesus, at that foot washing scene, *might have slapped Mary's face*, first on the one cheek and then on the other—just to teach her a lesson in humility.

I say I just wondered!

GEMINI.

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