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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Back to Jesus

IN its lengthy career, Christianity has rested its claims on three things—the Bible, the Church and Jesus. The first of these has completely broken down. But the Bible continues as an interesting collection of folk-lore and the like, and takes its position as it should in helping us to understand how religious beliefs came into being. Indeed, the chief indictment of the Christian Churches is that they have done what they could to keep the world in ignorance when they should have helped understanding.

For those who wish to understand the origin of the Bible, we suggest the reading of the three volumes written by Sir James Frazer. They should be available in any public library. The title is "Folk-lore in the Old Testament," and it is a charming work, as well as instructive; and it uncovers what Heine called the great lying creed. So far as modern science is concerned, that work should be in all institutions.

The second point on which Christianity depended was the Church. In early times, the Church stood as a fairly good instrument for keeping people and religion in order. The shameless way in which the poor were treated could not have been maintained as it was without the aid of the Churches. When working men—and women—were treated like so much cattle, and more or less dependent upon charity, alms meant that the poor had to be on good terms with the local clergy. Slave ethics—as late as a century ago—forced the obedience of the poor. And for many years after the creation of the Methodist Church, Wesley ordered his followers to take no part in politics. The established Church taught people that their duty was "To honour and obey . . . to be lowly and reverent to all my betters," and so on. And when food was scarce, the famous Hannah More reminded the hungry to be obedient and to remember that a "gracious Providence had brought about want of food so as to show how the poor were dependant upon the rich and God." All those factors that ran in the favour of religion are now petering out, and there is no reasonable likelihood of a revival of religion.

The last resort of the Churches is Jesus, and that is now being played as hard as possible. But to think that we must have Jesus if we are to live decent lives is just about as foolish as one can imagine. First of all, we are not certain that Jesus ever lived. We must also remember Gibbon's crushing satire on the wonderful miracles which Jesus performed, many of them appearing also in other parts of the world. Jesus was like the ambitious mathematician who said that Newton was very lucky in there being only one law of gravitation to be discovered. But the discovery of the law of gravitation could be tested, and once tested and accepted, it exists for ever. As it is, a miracle comes and goes and then one has nothing more to look for. As a plain matter of fact, there is not a single act of decency, kindness,

truthfulness, honesty, etc., that could not be found without bothering Jesus. It is true that some of the B.B.C. religious speakers deny this, but one does not expect sense when B.B.C. religion sets to work.

For anyone to say, therefore, that the purpose of Jesus coming to earth (like an aeroplane from the skies) was for ethical reasons, is to desert the original theory of the purpose of Jesus. It is not even hinted in the New Testament that the main inducement of the people to listen to Jesus, or his followers, is to hear some beautiful teaching. The most powerful of his followers, Saul of Tarsus, was converted by a supernatural revelation while on the road to Damascus. In the whole literature of primitive Christianity mere morals are not considered as enough. It was Jesus, the God incarnate, who could save men from Hell that was of moment. Stoicism was then too much alive for Christians to make their absurd claim of the superiority of Christian ethics—if any existed. It was Jesus, the God incarnate, who could save people from the flames of Hell, and secure them the eternal felicity of the Christian heaven. The historical literature of Christianity is full of these lessons. The cry of "Back to Jesus" to-day, with its wholesale rejection of historic Christianity, is just a trick that can only be accepted by either fools or knaves.

What does the ordinary Christian mean by getting back to Jesus? How does he propose to do it? The truth is that every real Christian begins by believing that the teaching of Jesus alone contains the cure for the world's ailments, and on that basis he ultimately finds himself where he began. He is in the position of counsel for defence laying down the case for the prosecution. All that getting back to Jesus means is that, starting with an old superstition, he remains there to the end. And this he considers an examination.

While it was held that the ethical precepts current in the name of Jesus originated with him, there was some plausibility about the desire to model our lives in accordance with his teachings. But nowadays, when the "New Theology" or "Modernism" teaches that Jesus was only one out of many teachers who were inspired by God, and when it is admitted that the moral precepts in the Four Gospels are in no way peculiar to Jesus, be they good or bad, even this pretext is available no longer. And let the teachings attributed to Jesus be either good or bad, the question is quite apart from any belief in his personality. The validity of the law of gravitation, of the principle of natural selection, or of the conservation of energy, is absolutely independent of the men whose names are associated with their discovery; and even if it were demonstrated that neither Newton nor Darwin ever existed, these principles would yet remain as valuable as ever. All truth runs on this basis. Only when it is felt that there is nothing to commend a belief in the shape of reason is it necessary to drag in a personality to support its claims.

"What think ye of Christ?" may be an important question from a doctrinal point of view, and it may be

a catchy phrase, but from an ethical point of view it is absolutely worthless. I do not believe that the world need be tied to any man, even the man Jesus—if he actually lived. I believe there are lessons of warning and guidance to be taken from past lives, but I do not believe that it is either wise or profitable to chain the world to the waist-belt of a poor Jewish peasant, who in all that has really contributed to the world's civilisation showed himself to be upon pretty much the same level of the people around him.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE TEMPORAL POWER AND THE HOLY OFFICE IN SPAIN

THE reign of terror inspired by the Spanish Inquisition was deeply intensified by its spiritual ascendancy, against which all secular protests proved vain. The Papal Inquisition was a purely ecclesiastical institution, which called upon the State to execute its commands. But, during the interminable conflicts between Church and State which demoralised Christendom, the behests of the Roman tribunal were apt to be ignored by temporal princes. And, as Dr. Lea shows in his standard four volume history, "The Inquisition in Spain," this later infamous institution combined both spiritual and secular authority and established a tyranny unprecedented in human annals. When Ferdinand introduced this institution into Spain, he determined to forge an instrument subject to royal authority and firmly rejected every plea for Papal control, although he consistently encouraged it in its merciless campaign against heresy and the burning alive of convicted heretics. Still he insisted on the Crown appointment or dismissal of higher officials and, as Lea intimates: "Ferdinand's control over the Inquisition rested not only on the royal authority, the power of appointment, his own force of character and his intense interest in its workings, but also on the fact that he held the purse strings. He had insisted that the confiscations should ensue to the Crown, and he subsequently obtained the pecuniary penances. The Inquisition had no endowment. One could easily have been provided out of the immense sums gathered from its victims during the early years of intense activity." Certainly grants were made to supplement official salaries, but these were entirely dependent on the King's goodwill.

It is noteworthy that Ferdinand never interfered with the spiritual jurisdiction of the Inquisition, if he permitted it little encroachment in temporal affairs. Even when suspected Conversos were among the Crown's most trusted advisers, Ferdinand, instead of openly opposing the Inquisitors and, despite his own dislike of Papal intervention, "procured a series of curious briefs to spare those whom he favoured from the disgrace of public reconciliation and penance and their descendants from disabilities."

This, however, was a very exceptional instance of real statesmanship, for Ferdinand ostentatiously fostered the Church's cherished doctrine that heresy is the most pernicious of all mortal sins, one, indeed, to be extinguished at the stake. Still, as Lea states, this did not debar the King from "gathering in every shred of the spoil which he could lawfully claim from the confiscation of the victims, but, in the distorted ethics of the time, this comported with the strictest equity, for it was the obedience to the canon law which was the expression of the law of God."

Ferdinand's successor, Juanna, was incapable of government, while his grandson, Charles V, was long

abroad in his other dominions. Thus, the rulership of Spain virtually devolved upon Cardinal Ximenes, the then Inquisitor-General of Castile, while his colleague, Adrian, soon exercised similar authority in Aragon. With the return of Charles and the death of Ximenes, Adrian, whose influence over the pious monarch in the spiritual sphere was dominant, laid the firm foundations of the Inquisition's future independence.

Philip II seems to have left all appointments to the Inquisition while, in later reigns, if royal supremacy was acknowledged in theory it was usually disregarded in practice. From time to time the kings were goaded into the assertion of authority, but as most of them were superstitious cowards, they gave way to the warnings of divine displeasure, more than hinted at by their ghostly advisers, if the Inquisitors were overruled. Yet, if all minor appointments ultimately rested with the Inquisitorial Supremacy, the selection of the Inquisitor-General himself was reserved by the Crown, although this right was never officially confirmed by the Pope. Indeed, as Lea observes, this special power was "essential to the State's dignity, if not to its safety. Had the appointment rested with the Pope, either the Inquisition would of necessity have been reduced to insignificance or the kingdom would have become a dependency of the Curia. Had the Suprema possessed the power of presenting a nominee to the Pope, the Inquisition would have become an independent body, rivalling and perhaps, in time, superseding the monarchy."

Still, as the years passed, the Holy Office covertly acquired an ever-increasing control over finance and the Crown's claims for confiscations and fines were contemptuously set aside. Formalities were still observed, but temporal control became merely nominal. Even when appeals to the sovereign from subjects seeking redress were favourably received and restitution ordered, the Inquisitors usually refused all compensation for injury.

Moreover, a method of organised deception was elaborated by these pious persecutors in order to defraud the temporal power of fines and confiscations. "As early as 1560," avers Lea, "we have evidence of this in a letter to the Inquisitors in Sicily instructing them when reporting *autos de fe* to the King, to suppress all statements as to the confiscations, but to report them to the Suprema so that it may determine how far to inform him."

The Inquisitors soon found several other sources of income, and bribery, intimidation, corruption and general malfeasance were in full swing. Canonries and other clerical emoluments were utilised for their benefit, for the Holy Office felt a depression when its revenues were sadly reduced by the shrinkage of confiscations and bribes. So to cite Lea once more: "In Valencia an agreement was reached, in 1571, by which the Moriscos compounded for them with an annual payment to the tribunal of twenty-five hundred ducats. The Judaizing heretics had been largely eliminated, especially the more wealthy ones, and it was not for some time after the conquest in 1580, that the influx of Portuguese New Christians brought a new and profitable harvest."

With the incineration of the opulent heretics and the consequent decline in revenue, the Inquisition encroached more and more persistently in purely secular concerns, and fines and imprisonment were inflicted and heavy fees charged in cases that legally appertained to the jurisdiction of the royal courts. The friction

between the rival tribunals led to what was almost civil war, especially in Aragon and Catalonia. Even when appeals from the civic authorities to the Crown led to promises of royal redress, it may be safely said that after a conflict of two centuries the Inquisitors remained as dictatorial, vindictive, avaricious and overbearingly arrogant as ever.

Very seldom did a king venture to censure the Holy Office and, when he did, his admonitions were contemptuously ignored. Even Philip II was assured that if he injured the Inquisition, he would thereby offend God and imperil his soul's salvation. Also, the superstitious terrors of the populace were so great that, when the Holy Office threatened them with excommunication, or placed their cities under interdict, they were terribly alarmed. Again, the kings themselves were easily subject to the Inquisition's jurisdiction and were easily intimidated. For under Canon Law they held their kingdoms as strictly orthodox rulers who must render every assistance to the extirpators of heresy.

The wavering policy for the monarchs cannot, therefore, be wondered at. As Lea notes: "Even when the seventeenth century was well advanced, a learned and loyal juriscounsel tells us that, from the time of the sixth Council of Toledo, in 638, their monarchs had imposed on themselves the law that, if they fell into heresy, they were to be excommunicated and exterminated; that Ferdinand, in 1492, had renewed this law and that he had instituted that most severe tribunal, the Inquisition, and had sanctioned that in view of the Toledan Canon, all kings in future should be subject to it. Even Spanish loyalty could not have been relied upon to sustain a king suspect of heresy, against the claims of the Holy Office to try him in secret, and suspicion of heresy was a very elastic term. Impeding the Inquisition came within its definition, and any effort to curb the arrogant extension of its powers could readily be so construed."

It is to be hoped that the spiritual revival sponsored by Halifax, Cripps and their clerical confederates, will not permit the return of the Inquisitorial ideology and murderous oppression which were the main causes of the pitiful downfall of Spain.

T. F. PALMER.

HANGING AND THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

I

I AM not proposing here to re-open the arguments for or against capital punishment, nor to deal with the legal and political points raised in the debates in the two Houses of Parliament. These have been sufficiently aired already. I am concerned here only with the extraordinary and shocking attitude of the dignitaries of the Church of England, the right reverend Prelates—as the quaint phrasing of Parliament has it—who sit in the Upper House and joined in the debates there on the Criminal Justice Bill. There were two occasions: the Second Reading of the Bill, which took place at the end of April, and the Committee Stage, which occurred in the first days of June.

We hear a good deal nowadays about the Christian way of life. To us Atheists, the Christians' claim to have invented, patented and alone to practise the virtues of correct social behaviour appears as arrogant as it is false. Naturally, we consider our own moral codes superior to theirs. Be that as it may, however, we now have an opportunity of learning what this way of life is from certain prominent members of the largest and most

important body of organised Christianity in this country, the Church of England. I refer to my Lord Bishops, the right reverend Prelates of Winchester and Truro, and his Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The proposed Bill seems to have the laudable intention of emphasising the reform of the criminal rather than the deterrent effects of punishment. Retributive justice, that is, vengeance or vindictive retaliation on the person of the condemned is no longer a fundamental of British Justice, we are told. It is in this new spirit that the Bill is conceived, and its clauses provide, on the one hand, for the elimination of hanging, flogging, and other brutal punishments; on the other, they aim at helping the criminal to regain his place in society. It is, on the whole, a noble attempt to humanise justice.

The measure, however, met not at all the approval of my Lord Bishop of Winchester, the first of the two clerics to hold forth in the debate on the second reading of the Bill. He hastened to scotch any idea that people of his cloth should concern themselves with repentance and forgiveness rather than crime and punishment; he said these two aspects were so "perfectly interdependent" you couldn't separate them. He then proceeded to do so and to devote the rest of his speech to the last two, damning the Bill as inopportune, impracticable and ill-advised.

One of the objections often raised against the death sentence for all murders is its lack of discrimination. The right reverend Prelate of Winchester, however, was able to make the astonishing statement that the present system is "extraordinarily rich and flexible" and gives "so much opportunity for the exercise of mercy that we shouldn't interfere needlessly in so happy a balance of forces as are embodied in our administration of the death penalty"; he found, in fact, "sinister reasons behind the lost belief in punishment." (A Catholic priest once told me that it was no longer incumbent on the true believer to *revel* in the tortures of the damned, as the mediavalists did; the worthy Bishop, however, seems to have retained the mediaval mind!)

It was not the value of capital punishment as a deterrent that possessed this noble Prelate's mind, so much as the thought of what would be "the effect of abolishing the death penalty on the education of the conscience of the community." They might, he feared, lose their "general sense of the wickedness of wickedness," a phrase that is obscure, but sounds nasty. A French philosopher once remarked: *tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*. This, I imagine, is just the sort of sentiment which, to the good Bishop, shows a deplorable decadence of the communal conscience, and is therefore to be abhorred and feared above all things.

Nor was my Lord Bishop of Winchester alone in his dismay at the decline in public moral fibre. My Lord Bishop of Truro ran a good second to the Hampshire colt. The right reverend gentleman from Cornwall was even more strenuously opposed to putting the executioner out of business.

Arguments and statistics seem to have effectively disposed of the claim that capital punishment does act as a deterrent, and it was noteworthy that those who maintained that it did, did so as a matter of conviction and produced no facts or figures to support their contention, as most of the abolitionists did. Truro claimed to be a mathematician, but it wasn't science but his *feeling* that he held to be "a surer guide" to judgment, and *that* told him that hanging was "a great deterrent."

P. C. KING.

ACID DROPS

The "News Chronicle" reports: "Invasion of Belgium by Colorado beetles to-night threatened nationwide disaster as ebbing tide deposited millions of the insects on the sandy coasts. The Belgian authorities are preparing to send Army units to reinforce the police squads; school children and other workers are fighting the beetle invasion for the second consecutive day." As the Holy Book has it: "And God made the beast after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and God saw that it was good." (Gen. I, 25.) The Belgian authorities evidently do not agree with God. But we would point out that the truly Christian method of dealing with the plague would be to set aside a day for prayer and fasting, and form a procession carrying the bones of some saint to a Church to beg God to withdraw his beetle. The authorities will find many precedents for such action in the history of the Church.

The Free Church of Scotland believes very strongly in Freedom. But it seems that between the Church and the young people there is some difference as to what is meant by "Freedom." It would seem that by freedom the young people mean, among other things, the right to enjoy games on Sunday, leaving those who wish to go to Church to do so. But to that statement, the "Elders" say that if games are available on Sunday, the young people will not go to Church, and the recording angel will write a point against the Free Church of Scotland. So the elders say, "No enjoyment on Sunday." To that, the young people, in set terms, say that if there is any interference, "Christianity will be abolished." We raise our hat to the youth of Scotland. It is a fine stand for freedom.

Still keeping to Scotland we turn to "The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald," which gives a lengthy article by the Rev. Dr. Smart, who says quite clearly that the Christian religion is tottering to destruction. Here are some of the warnings he gives to his followers:—

"They had to face the fact that the life of one half of Europe is dominated by Atheistic Communism, and the other half is being energetically permeated with it.

The chance to capture the world in face of the vast onslaught is very small.

And so it goes on. Empty churches, withering Gods, nothing-to-do angels, and the power of common sense growing more and more powerful.

The man who sets out with the notion that Christianity aimed at social regeneration, knows nothing of the origin of Christianity. The framework of the Christian teaching is that a number of wandering preachers believed that the end of the world was at end, and salvation depends upon someone who never existed. What was the use of virgin births, resurrections from the dead, miracles, angels, devils, if Jesus came to give us a new social existence on earth? Unless the Churches had gone beyond the essential features of the original Christianity, the whole of it would have been forgotten by now. So the Churches became more reasonable, a process that has never ceased. To-day Christian Socialism is one example of the process. The devil-hunting, miracle-working, end-of-the-world and saving-from-hell Jesus gradually came to mean the nationalisation of the mines, or a branch of the Labour Party. There should be a humorous book on the subject.

If organised religion (or "Churchianity," as it is often euphemistically termed) is no longer the power it was, religious ideology has still a very strong hold over the people, and the threat of burial in "unconsecrated" ground without the usual religious flummery, still causes great uneasiness and fear. Evidence of this can be seen in the "Daily Mirror" which gives three cases of the difficulties in the burial of unbaptised infants. A ten-month old baby was refused, in any case, said the parson, because "the baby is certain to be crawling about the floor of Hell." Another case was that of an unbaptised infant who "was born in sin, and not fit for Heaven"; another—a mother has to pay a priest otherwise her baby will never leave Limbo.

In each case shocked surprise is expressed and the mothers found great difficulty in having their babies buried in "consecrated ground" by other parsons. The Freethinker who is familiar with Fr. Furniss: "Hell opened to Christians," and similar works, will not be surprised at the attitude of the clergy, and will take this as further proof that human beings are always better than their religion.

The golfers' Mecca, at St. Andrews, is in the throes of a heated controversy judging by the press cutting received. The question at issue is whether the Grand Hotel, St. Andrews, should be sold to Roman Catholic authorities for use as a teachers' training college. We hope the Catholics will be unsuccessful, for if it is true that "by their fruits ye shall know them," Catholic education is not particularly successful in training future citizens. It can hardly be a coincidence that the proportion of criminals in America and Australia who profess Catholicism is greater than any other religion. We append some of the figures for 1944: in Sing-Sing of a criminal population of 816, 400 were R.C.s. 44 were Protestant; in 1943, 64 per cent. of delinquents were Catholic. A point to bear in mind is that the Catholics are only 20 per cent. of the total population.

Four overseas Bishops took advantage of the publicity gained by Butlin's holiday camp to hold a morning service in one of them. The holidaymakers filed in very sheepishly to listen to the usual twaddle about the Holy Spirit. One African layman however, was puzzled, "to us" he declared, "every white man is a Christian, and he simply could not understand the "un-Christian" behaviour" of so many white men. In fact, Africans are beginning to ask "Is Christianity a fact?" We can answer him. Christianity is not a fact, and sensible and intelligent people who study the history of religions, are throwing it overboard, just as they have witchcraft, wooden idols, devils and hell. In other words, Africans are being thoroughly hoodwinked; and in any case, few white Christian bishops would subscribe to the kind of Christianity that is preached to coloured peoples.

According to the "Catholic Times" there is a pronounced revival of interest in miracles. We are not in a position to deny this, but we would like to see just one miracle, but they seem to occur only to Christians and believers. With due solemnity the Catholic press continually reports the Fatima miracle, when Mary appeared to three peasant children with Jesus in her arms, then as a grown up, at the same time the "sun danced up and down in the heavens." We suggest—mildly—for we are a little bored with the continued hullabaloo—that the whole affair as reported is a lie, and that the affair is a deliberate attempt to trade on the credulity of fools.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. GERBER, U.S.A.—Thanks. Will appear soon.

K. FORDER.—"The Freethinker" is an open forum. We attack all superstition in all quarters. We are pleased to note that you are following in your father's footsteps.

J. STEELE.—Thanks for your letter.

For "The Freethinker."—M. BITTNER, Canada, 8s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

The Christian Union has just published "Truth, Unity and Concord" a book of essays, one of which is entitled "The Nature of the Church," wherein is explained to Christians, after nearly 2,000 years of Christianity, what the Church really is, as of course they do not know. In any case, Protestants and Catholics will never come together unless they both consider that the Church is "the Body of Christ," or the "Visible Church," the "symbol of the Invisible Church" all united "Through Christ to God." Anyone who does not now know what the Church is, after such crystal clear theology, ought to be excommunicated.

In the same book, the Bishop of Brechin calls disunity "the scandal of Christian division," while true "unity" requires a "unity of faith, sacraments and worship." This Catholics and Protestants are poles apart, but there are signs to-day that Protestant thinkers are beginning to approach the Catholic standpoint. We agree that if Christianity is to survive, Catholic Gods, Angels and Devils, have to be swallowed whole, with no dilution whatever—Christianity as it came red hot from Jesus and his Apostles with all the primitive credulity, superstition and ignorance—only such a Christianity ought to be preached, and the slightest deviation, the most simple questioning, and "unity" goes overboard again.

In evidence of the above we quote a statement issued by the Pope forbidding Catholics to hold conferences with non-Catholics "at which matters of religious faith are discussed." Such a conference "is severely prohibited" according to Canon Law.

It seems that there is another Canon Law being violated, women are going to Church hatless, which is bad enough; but it appears that young and old are going to church stockingless. How can any priest keep his eye on the service in the face of such sex-provocation?

SOME NOTES ON EVOLUTION

II

TO emphasise our difficulties the compiler of "Evolution" has gone through all the books possible written by Christians or Theists against Evolution, and has artfully added copious quotations from convinced evolutionists and biologists who frankly admit the gaps in the history of Evolution—indeed they point them out; and no doubt the impression received by the average Christian who reads this pamphlet is that even a man like Sir Arthur Keith is really against Evolution.

It is the easiest thing in the world to pick out from a large number of books as many opinions as possible admitting various difficulties in the theory, and thus making ill-informed readers believe that the writers of the books in question accepted without qualification the Special Creation of the Bible and Mr. Douglas Dewar, and rejected Evolution in every sense of the word. I myself could compile a pamphlet showing the exact opposite—the difficulties admitted by many Christians of the first two chapters of Genesis, and their whole-hearted belief in the general principles of Evolution.

There is one point which must always be borne in mind. Evolution does not depend on the special theory advocated by Darwin—the survival of the fittest, or however he put it. He may have been wrong in his theory as to how Evolution worked, and yet Evolution absolutely right. Darwinism, all the same, has not yet been overthrown, though certain of his conclusions might well have to be modified in the light of modern research.

A real difficulty with the pamphlet "Evolution" is that one cannot tell how the quotation given looks in its context. Let me give one example. Prof. T. H. Morgan says:—

"If then it can be established beyond dispute that similarity or even identity of the same character in different species is not always to be interpreted to mean that both have arisen from a common ancestor, the whole argument from comparative anatomy built upon the descent theory seems to tumble into ruins."

This is the only quotation given in the first section of the pamphlet dealing with comparative anatomy, yet the "Medical Scientist," who has compiled it, adds, "We see, then, that comparative anatomy affords no evidence whatever of the evolution of species." No doubt he does "see" it, and no doubt the earnest believer sees it. But I cannot see it from the quotation given. I do not know what Prof. Morgan said before or after the quotation, nor do I know whether he does or does not believe in Special Creation. Morgan might have claimed that comparative anatomy cannot always give us the evidence we need, but that is all I read in his remark. Yet we are told that "comparative anatomy" affords no evidence whatever. If anyone, with the skeletons of the higher apes before him, can say that they prove nothing whatever of Evolution—I think he should really stick to the Bible and leave science severely alone.

In discussing genetics and the inheritance of acquired characters, Prof. Morgan is again called in, and his "Scientific Basis of Evolution" quoted to support the view that "the new work in genetics has struck a fatal blow to old doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characters." I have not read this work, but there is a very significant passage from it in Mr. Joseph McCabe's "The Riddle of the Universe To-day," in which Prof.

Morgan defends the "mechanist" approach to a solution of the cosmos, as against that of the metaphysicians:—

"The boldest spirits among the mechanists further claim that in time they hope to bring within reach of their methods a study of the lucubrations, hallucinations, and obsessions of the human mind which, masquerading under the illumination of introspective metaphysics and transcendental philosophy, pretend to solve all the riddles of the universe."

Needless to add here that that particular passage is not quoted by the compiler of "Evolution." Nor is Prof. Morgan dragged in to point out, as he does, "that the idea that Darwinism has been abandoned is not worth considering."

We know that Prof. Keith is a Darwinist, yet he is quoted in "Evolution" just as if he sided with Mr. Dewar—"Sir Arthur Keith has rightly stated that 'as Paley declared a century ago our list of useless structures decreases as our stock of knowledge increases.'" Thus the Christian reader is shown a great anthropologist agreeing with a thorough Fundamentalist like Paley; and if he has not read Keith for himself may be induced to believe that here is another man of science going back to dear old Paley, that once famous luminary in the heaven of Christian evidence, and now, alas, not only almost forgotten, but almost laughed at by most of our Christian bishops.

Now whether man has or has not certain organs which may disappear in the course of centuries as being useless is a point which is still being discussed, and not all scientists have come to a definite conclusion. To quote one of them against the other may be fair game, but how it helps the Christian side is beyond me. Mr. McCabe says in the work I have named that the "argument from vestigial organs has been made more impressive by the discovery of hundreds of such atrophied traces of ancestral organs in the plant and animal world," and he cites, the short body-hair, the external ears and their muscles, the fold in the inner corner of each eye, the appendix, the pineal body (a vestigial remnant of a primitive dorsal eye), the vestigial tail and male milk glands, all of which "have had their evolutionary meaning placed beyond dispute." This may be denied by a believer in "Special Creation," but anybody who really believes in such a fairy tale, or believes that Jesus floated up to Heaven after he was dead so that he could sit at the right hand side of God is surely not fit to pass judgment on any new scientific deduction and discovery.

Slight variations (or mutations) have been made in breeding from some of the lower forms of life, but in general it may be true that the species produced are "degenerate." To be evolved at all, species have taken in the past, millions of years, perhaps hundreds of millions, and it is absurd to put forward the failure of our breeders to produce a "new" species as an argument against evolution. Nature herself has produced possibly millions of misfits, some of which have died out through "degeneracy" or sheer uselessness. I looked in vain through "Evolution" to have it clearly explained from a true believer exactly how our Australian aborigines or our African pygmies "degenerated" from that magnificent specimen of humanity endowed with perfect speech in such a difficult language as Hebrew, and all the other graces of humankind—the being made by God Almighty himself with his own hands whom he called Adam; but there is not a word. On the other hand the Fundamentalist Prof. W. W. Keen, who easily swallowed everything in the Bible, had to account for man's

animal nature and airily dismisses the difficulty with a wave of the hand:—

"God deliberately made man out of the same stuff as animals, and, as I have shown, on the same plan as animals. Bodywise, man is an animal but, thanks be to God, his destiny is not the same as that of the beasts that perish. . . . Man's soul must be immortal."

This sheer balderdash is quoted as a stunning reply to the infidel evolutionist. It is the kind of argument the Dewars and the Flemings imagine is a reply to the theory of evolution. Well, they certainly have the Salvation Army and similar Christian bodies with them. And they are welcome to such followers.

H. CUTNER.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

If it is assumed that an omnipotent God exists it is as well to consider his attributes and qualities. In a previous article it was shown that he has habits and tendencies towards the human race which are anything but friendly. Nevertheless the exponents of the Christian Religion vie with one another in declaring his goodness. Hymns are written, congregations chant "Yes, God is Good!" Sermons are delivered, priests extol and mothers advise that God is Good!

Good to whom? The human race? Lest the last analysis of his goodness was insufficient in pointing out the sadistic evil inherent in whatever omnipotent God rules the universe, perhaps it would be as well to proceed to some faults of omission.

For many thousands of years the human race has suffered from diseases, famine, floods, calamities too numerous to mention, yet our omnipotent God has done nothing whatever to alleviate human suffering except the performance of an occasional miracle, always executed on some obscure person, preferably without witnesses and always in circumstances which give rise to very grave doubts as to the veracity of the event itself.

The age of miracles is past, gone, surprisingly, with the age of credulity and superstition. Is it possible that there may be some connection between them?

But let us believe in miracles for a moment. We are then presented with the picture of a God who, in thousands of years has the performance of a very few isolated acts of mercy to his credit, far fewer than those performed daily by the doctors, surgeons, chemists and scientists throughout the world.

In a brief two or three hundred years man has achieved more for himself than was done for him in the many thousands of years during which things were left to God. Since man has achieved these daily miracles surely God could have done the same, or is man greater than God? He cannot be greater than our hypothetical, omnipotent God, hence it follows that God too, had he wished could have achieved these miracles in as great or even greater profusion.

Since he did not he is guilty of faults of omission towards the human race. He has watched with equanimity the death throes of a million men, tortured to their graves by the unrelenting grip of cancer; he has looked down upon girls in the bloom of youth stricken by the lethal touch of tuberculosis. Is it with a sadistic gleam that he watches the light fade from their eyes, the smile from their lips, the flesh from their bones until at last they hack their way with agonising bloody cough to their premature unlooked-for graves?

Unfortunately man, as yet, can do little to forestall these two diseases cancer and tuberculosis. However,

with drugs and the surgeon's knife he has overcome many of the more painful exterminators of his race, and, better still, he has found ways of obviating their onset. Vaccination, immunisation, mosquito control have conquered diseases before they have begun. Since man in his ignorance can achieve this great result is it not reasonable to ask that God too could have done so, and not for a few diseases but for all, and not only now, but thousands of years ago? Had God only been so magnanimous, millions of men and women would have been spared a painful, ghastly death. Since God has done nothing (with the exception of the few miracles previously mentioned), he is guilty of the most severe faults of omission or he has acted deliberately for one of two reasons.

Firstly it is suggested that the whole gamut of disease and death is a punishment on man for his sins. Why then did young and innocent babies suffer and die from diphtheria (until man discovered that immunisation would prevent it)? Why have countless evil men pursued their ways in peace, and peacefully left this life at an age when all desire was spent? Or was man more evil several hundred years ago, hence he suffered more? (But surely then was the Golden Age of Christianity, an age when the Church waxed strong and God's Own Religion held powerful court!) No! Pain, disease and suffering cannot in any way be punishment for evil. It is not reasonable, logical or intelligent and it is as well to proceed immediately with the second hypothesis.

This is a more modern theory based on the doctrine of evolution, affirming that God is an evolutionist, that pain and suffering are all necessary adjuncts to the Great Plan whereby God brings man to Perfection.

Assuming this, that man at some future date will achieve perfection, let him look back down the years of history and count the cost of his rise to Glory! A million years of pain and sorrow, death, sadness and affliction, war, famine and catastrophe. Let him humble himself before the forgotten millions who have died at God's command to make him great, and let him ask himself, and God, who created so vast and wondrous a thing as the Universe, incapable of perfecting man in no other way than this, this clumsy, brutal, bloody way? Why, there is not one man but who would say "I could surely have managed things better." And so he could.

Neither the first nor the second reason for these Godly Acts is reasonable or logical, hence there remains only the proven charge that God is Guilty of the most glaring, brutal, sadistic sins of omission toward the human race. Yet Christians worship, praise and laud his goodness!

It is patently the duty of every man to be an atheist, to fight all gods and all religions subscribing to gods, to lead all men, followers of a religion or otherwise, in the fight.

Know thy enemy! Teach others to recognise the evil of a God, to believe in man and, above all, to refrain from adulation of the whip that chides. Shake off the shackles of superstition and step forward into the new unbounded Freedom of Mankind.

DAVID MOORE.

CORRESPONDENCE

MARXISM.

Sir.—As Mr. Wood is the kind of a chap who must have the last word, I do not intend replying. Permit me, however, to sum up.

Whilst Mr. Wood himself admits his ignorance of Marxism, I do not arrogate the right of passing judgment on subjects I have failed to study thoroughly. Before going into battle I strive to know my enemies and their arguments.

I pride myself on being a Marxist and this hard-won conviction was the result of experience. My opponent, on the other hand, takes the easy way of drawing his ideas and ideals from books, press reports and from dreams of what ought to be. This urge for a dope proves once more that we are living under Inhuman conditions, which cannot be cured with sermons on the Brotherhood of Humanity.

It was obviously due to my calling him a believer that Mr. Wood retaliates in labelling me a Communist.

Having propagated Freethought for more than 30 years, I consider it unworthy of a Rationalist to borrow the moth-eaten catchwords from the Sky-Pilots.—Yours, etc.,

PERCY G. ROY.

OBITUARY

JOSEPH M'CORRISKEN

It is with sincere regret that we announce the death of Joseph M'Corrisken, a member of the Glasgow Branch N.S.S., in his 74th year, which took place on June 21. Features in his character, nourished by his Freethought principles, were a love of literature, a sense of humour, devotion to his domestic circle, and a fraternal understanding of his fellows, to whom he was popularly known as "Tapper Joe."

Our sympathy is with his widow, recovering from a serious operation, and surviving members of his family. His remains were cremated at the Western Necropolis, Glasgow, on June 24, and a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. A. Peters.

R. H. R.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon; Highbury Corner, 7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, JAMES HART, G. WOOD, E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Why Civilisations Decay," Mr. S. RATCLIFFE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. V. SHORTT.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWASI and J. HUMPHREY.

Hapton.—Wednesday, July 7, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (on Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. G. THOMPSON, W. PARRY, W. C. PARRY.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers' Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. A. SAMMS, G. L. GREAVES.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Glasgow Secular Society (Clarion Rooms, Queens Crescent).—Monday, July 5, 7-30 p.m.: Executive Meeting, 8 p.m.: Special Meeting to discuss open-air propaganda. All interested please attend.

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CLERGYMEN AND SIN

YOU'RE born in sin, say the clergy—you're a miserable sinner, get saved or be doomed to a Lost Eternity. Keep out of the cinema, the pub and the dance-hall, do not gamble, prepare yourself for death. If this isn't enough to bring about suicide then I don't know what is. Presumably, all we need to do to ensure a life of bliss, is to keep away from those things that make it possible.

For my own part, give me a life free from these warnings, from the graveyard and anti-social inhibitions, rather than one that entails sweating to "get saved" and conformity to a rigid self-denial.

What the clergyman fails to realise is this: that the ordinary human being is not so much concerned with preparing for death as he is with preparing for life. And that if the clergyman has nothing better to offer, then he would do well to pack in his job and offer his services to an undertaker. At least, the latter would be certain of a flourishing business.

If the clergy, with their "miserable sinner" and "Lost Eternity" technique, haven't actually succeeded in making people miserable, then, at least, they have done nothing to make people happy.

We are born in sin, they are forever reminding us. If that is so, then there is nothing we can do about it. If we are born in sin, then we must die in sin. And no amount of pulpit vapourings nor mental acrobats on my part can do anything to alter the situation.

"Why don't you come to church?" asks the clergyman. We have many reasons, perhaps, but one is particularly outstanding; people object to attending those places where the only welcome is in the form of the solemn "You are a miserable sinner," and if that is so, then it is far better to exist as such outside the church than inside one with misery on the increase.

Furthermore, if I'm a "miserable sinner" there must be a reason. And looking round I do find that "sin" is in abundance. In fact, I'm in it up to my neck, whether I like it or not. This brings to my mind the conundrum: "How does man manage to do right?" It is worthy of note that for many centuries the clergy have "controlled" morality. Someone, somewhere, hasn't been doing his job right!

When a priest or a parson tells me that unless I attend this chapel or that church, I am doomed to a "Lost Eternity" in a "Lake of Fire," it makes me wonder if he really means what he says. It would be interesting to know, if he knows, what he is talking about, and if he does, then all I can say is that if such a state exists, then only they who preach it should go there.

What's the next solemn wisecrack? Oh, yes, keep away from the cinema. Admittedly, many films do anything but moralise but does this justify the condemnation of all films? Most of us know full well the value of the cinema as a source of education. Evidently the clergy don't. But is the drawing of attention to immoral films the exclusive right of the clergyman? After all, the real credit for this should go to our psychologists and social reformers, but with this distinction: that whereas the latter consider the cinema in terms of life before death, the clergy consider it in terms of the life after death.

Often we hear: "Keep out of the pub, unless you want to stain your soul." Presumably, teetotalers have stainless souls, and therefore can do little wrong. But this isn't the case. Many of the world's vilest crimes were committed by those who "never touched it." And many of the world's greatest discoveries were done under the stimulus of "a quick one." Not that I'm advocating

a reckless indulgence in alcoholic orgies, but merely pointing out that all things equal, the fellow who has an occasional drink is neither better nor worse than the fellow who abstains. In moderation, drink is beneficial, for it contains many nutritious elements and genu-destroying properties. It is only when it is taken in excess that any serious consequences may arise. But in this respect, alcohol differs from no other sensual pleasure.

We are all familiar with the clerical admonition "don't gamble." Now on the surface, this seems a reasonable warning, for we know, that as a result of gambling, pockets have been emptied, fortunes have been lost, and homes broken up in the chaos. But knowing the clergyman as I do, I am tempted to look beneath the surface, and arrive at this conclusion: that when he warns us not to gamble, he is not so much concerned with keeping money in our pockets, but with getting it into his collection box.

Who can deny that an occasional "flutter" on the Pools or the "winner" does bring some measure of contentment to the average man, especially in these days of unsurpassed austerities and restrictions? No, it simply won't do! If the clergy can find nothing to justify pleasures, then they might do well by taking up a better job.

If there is one thing that has put abject misery and suicidal tendencies into people it is the age-repentant solemn phraseology: "Are you prepared for death? Why should I prepare for death? What is there to prepare for? I didn't prepare for birth. Nor did I have any choice about coming into the world with a 'soul full of sin.' And if I had, wouldn't I have decided to remain unborn rather than enter a world, carrying with me the sins of my fathers, to condemn me eventually to something I haven't done?"

Besides, the man who lives a decent, moral life has no fear of death, be he believer or unbeliever. Curiously enough, it is the fellow who has gone through life worrying if he has been "saved," who fears death, even though his life behaviour towards his fellows has been insufficient to warrant his unimpeded one-way journey to heaven.

But does anyone seriously believe that moderate indulgence in the cinema, the pub, the dance-hall, the music-hall, dog-tracks and "wimmers" really make a man a "wretched offender"? If so, he had better think again. It is on this belief that the clergy flourish; it will be on its removal that the clergy will collapse.

Man is a human being. Because he is, he wants to live. This desire places upon him the acceptance of certain social obligations. He wants to be happy, and finds he can be so only by associating with his fellows. To this end he must share in the common day-to-day pleasures, unless he wants to bring about a "Lost Eternity" on earth.

ALEXANDER HENRY.

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