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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A New Lease of Life ?

IT was rather surprising to learn through the "News Chronicle" that Mr. A. J. Cummings expressed the opinion that the assembling of the World Council of Churches will give religion a new lease of life. At first glance we thought that Mr. Cummings was just having a joke, for I could not imagine a reporter of the calibre of Mr. Cummings believing that the churches can be revived in the twentieth century. Naturally, the revival of Christianity in any part of the world, to any great extent would set a lot of people rejoicing. But it is not the first time in recent years that we have heard the same thing, only to find that Christianity was actually left in a worse position than before the new religious army set forth. It is true enough that here and there there may come revivalist movements that boost various sects for a time but these, too, sink into apathy. People may remain religious for a lifetime, but once the chain has been broken it never regains its previous state. I commend to Mr. Cummings a few passages from that great writer and wit Heinrich Heine, who gives his view of the birth and life of the Christian God:—

"We have known him (Jehovah) from his cradle upwards; in Egypt, when he was brought up among sacred calves, crocodiles, holy onions, ibises and cats. We have seen him as he bid adieu to those playmates of his childhood and became a small god-king in Palestine to a poor pastoral people. We saw him in contact with Assyrian-Babylonian . . . We saw him emigrate to Rome . . . We saw how he spiritualised himself more and more; how he became a loving father; a universal friend of humanity; a benefactor of the human race; a philanthropist. It all availed him naught. Hear ye the bell ring? Kneel down, they bring the sacrament to a dying God"

Mr. Cummings should remember that when a god once dies he never regains life.

When Mr. Cummings has revised his opinion of the clergy gaining more followers and more respect from the people at large, he will probably recall the fact the clergy are what they always have been, and that more useful leaders can be found outside the Churches.

It would, indeed, be passing strange were it otherwise. Although the clergy represent an educated body of men, new ideas and subjects make less headway among the clergy than any other body of people. It is true noticeably the case with religion, and for that fact it becomes the same result in social matters. The past hundred and fifty years have witnessed an enormous development in relation to religion as a whole, but this revolutionary development has occurred outside the Churches. Of course, there have been developments within religion, but this has been mainly due to the pressure outside the Church. To resist new bodies as long as possible, to denounce all who came with new beliefs of

man, so long the Church avoided truth and development. Even to-day the Churches of all kinds are fighting against new ideas as much as they dare. And if people are now ceasing to look to the pulpit for guidance, the clergy have themselves to blame. The mass of the people learn slowly but time tells with the dullest.

Gibbon's famous statement that in the later days of ancient Rome no two priests could meet without a smile is applicable to-day. In that respect things have not changed. One still sees the essential nonsense of the priest dressed with clothes that take one back to ancient Egypt, and in fact all its religious ceremonies were annexed by Christian Churches. We still hear the clergy in the pulpit referring to all the old prayers, to the mystery of life and the hell that is awaiting to punish human beings. All these things, with many more, come down to us, and all the hundred and one beliefs, in dress, above all.

More, it is tolerably certain that many of the clergy do not believe in these things. Press them to explain what they mean by a miracle and they reply that ancient miracles were either magnified or misunderstood natural causes. Press them as to what is meant by an answer to prayer, and the reply is that prayer is answered, not by any alteration in the courses of objective nature, but by a strengthening of the mind of him who prays. Inspiration is, in a similar manner, toned down until it implies no more than is meant by the inspiration of a poet or painter, while creation is a mere poetic phrase without pretence to scientific exactitude.

Now, if there is one certain thing it is that had these phrases never meant any more than the clergy—on compulsion—make them mean, they would never have been of the least religious significance. Religiously, people prayed because they believed their petitions would have the effect of altering the course of events. What is the meaning of all the prayers for good harvests, safe voyages, the success of armies, or the cure of disease, if it is not this? The human animal may have a genius for absurdity, but he was never ridiculous enough to expect to secure a good harvest by a self-administered mental tonic. Religiously, too, a miracle meant nothing more nor less than the interference with the normal course of nature by a supernatural being. Men may believe these things and be honest—though stupid. Now although I am a firm believer in the hypocrisy of the modern clergy, yet I do not believe for a moment that this hypocrisy is wholly of a conscious and deliberate kind. Some of it may be, but human nature is not so organised that it could sustain so elaborate a humbuggery were all who practise it conscious of their parts. If the Christian religion, as at present existing, were fed by contemporary knowledge and responded to contemporary needs, its profession might be unaccompanied by either hypocrisy or dishonesty. But when a body of men find themselves committed to a religion springing from and rooted in a dead past, the great object is not to find

new formulas for fresh facts, but twist fresh facts into harmony with old formula. In this way, stupidity, bigotry and self-interest sheltered itself behind a cloud of moral phrases, and does it so effectively as to impose upon the clergy themselves.

In truth, ideas are like organisms inasmuch as adaptation to environment is the condition of their existence. Under healthy conditions beliefs, being more or less a product of the environment, stand in little need of protection, they protect themselves in virtue of their "fitness." But with religion in a civilised community the case is far otherwise, if these beliefs are to live, some sort of an artificial environment must be created. Primarily, this is created by the clergy in the maintenance of religion in the schools and in working through the parents on the plastic mind of childhood. The oft-made statement, that if a child is allowed to grow up without religious instruction it will develop into an Atheist, is, properly considered, an admission that a modern environment is fatal to religious beliefs. But throughout all, and dominating all, is the distrust of new ideas and developing knowledge, and the desire to keep the present as far as possible in line with the past. In fact, given a religion such as Christianity with a numerous priesthood, a profession serving as a means of advancement in life for thousands, and intellectual straight-forwardness is a practical impossibility. Conscious dishonesty there may not always be, indeed the condition of its permanency is that it shall be largely unconscious. But it is there, and the more unconscious it is, the greater is the degradation inflicted by Christianity upon its votaries.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE PAPACY AND THE COUNTER REFORMATION

"No Jesuit was ever elected Pope, for they assumed that every Pope would be a Jesuit."—

HERMANN MUELLER.

THE Middle Ages may be said to have ended about A.D. 1500, when almost simultaneously, a succession of new and intensely revolutionary forces broke in upon the stagnant feudal-clerical civilisation which had dominated Europe since the Crusades. Almost concurrently, a geographical, a cultural, an economic and a religious revolution broke in upon the Agrarian Medieval culture and combined effectively to destroy its traditional world.

We have here only space to describe in the very briefest outline the main causes of the revolutionary era of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Suffice it here to say that between about 1450 and 1550, that century of stupendous discovery, the Era of the Voyages of Discovery to East and West, the world was literally "put on the map" and the world market opened up by the simultaneous discovery of America and the sea route to the East (1492-8).

The economic results of this marvellous expansion were staggering. The eminent economic historian, Alexander Del Mar, has calculated that about 2,000 million dollars worth of bullion (gold and silver) were dumped into Europe during the sixteenth century. We may, in fact say, that the unseen "pull" of the newly-discovered world-market represented the most powerful force making for social, and even for religious change throughout this self-same period.

The concurrent and intellectual and religious revolutions are better known; the Renaissance, the rediscovery of classical antiquity and the creation of a secular

humanistic culture independent of the Church, and the religious revolution against the "dead hand" of the totalitarian Church of the Middle Ages started by Martin Luther in 1517. In their relationship to our proper subject the Papacy, only one point need here be added, the Reformation was not, as is sometimes supposed, a continuation of the Renaissance, quite the contrary. The Popes welcomed the Renaissance, but they fought the Reformation to the finish.

Actually the Reformation started as a revolt against the Renaissance. For it was the ruthless exploitation of Germany by the Renaissance Papacy which caused the German people to welcome Luther, and, on the whole, the early Protestant Reformers, were not more, but less liberal in their cultural outlook than were the Renaissance Popes.

One must reject the conclusion that there was anything new in itself about the religious revolution of the sixteenth century. Actually, the Protestant Reformers did not go as far in their Church "Reformation" as some of their medieval predecessors had done. It was the revolutionary social changes alluded to above, to which must be added certain technical changes, primarily, the contemporary invention of printing, that made the Bible universally accessible, which explains the success of the Reformers.

The Reformation took the Papacy by surprise, and its initial resistance was feeble, so much so that by the middle of the sixteenth century, it looked very much as if the Roman Church was doomed to make a hasty exit from History. The Roman See was weakened by the schisms in the last centuries of the medieval era, when disputed successions, and even anti-popes were a regular occurrence.

Whilst the Popes of the Renaissance era were going humanists whose personal morals were often the reverse of Christian, and who were not above poisoning an inconvenient rival,* such Popes were obviously not fanatics. If they—Leo included—defended the Church with fanaticism against the Reformers, it was, as Karl Kautsky, the German historian, aptly observed, "a fanaticism of avarice masquerading under the mask of faith."

It is well known that the Roman Catholic Church was saved from what seemed a certain destruction by the Counter Reformation of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Popes however, were the figure-heads rather than the actual leaders of the movement, the actual directors of which were the Jesuits; the General of which Order was known as the "Black Pope" and seems frequently to have been the real leader of the Church. The study of the Counter Reformation is far more the study of the Jesuit "Company" than of its nominal leader, the Papacy.

Between about 1550 and 1650 the Counter Reformation under the effective leadership of the Jesuits checked and even drove back the Reformation by a combination of "jesuitical" demagoguery and open terrorism.

A word may usefully be added on the origins and nature of the famous Spanish "Company of Jesus." Its founder was the Spanish soldier, Ignatius of Loyola (1490-1556), who founded the Company, as its name in Spanish implies, on military lines, with the original object of recovering Palestine by a new Crusade from the Turks.

* The Borgia Pope, Alexander VI (1492-1503), had a particularly bad reputation in this last respect. Another Medici Pope, Leo X, the actual Pope under whom the Reformation started (1513-1521), is said to have observed "What a profitable superstition for Popes is this fable of Christ."

Circumstances, however, turned the Spanish order principally into the chief weapon of Rome against the Reformation. Its discipline, strict but flexible, is said to have been modelled on that of the Dervish religious orders of Mohammedan (Moorish) Spain. The famous motto "*Ad maiorem dei gloriam*"—"To the greater glory of God"—is taken from the same source.

Under the nominal leadership of the Papacy, but under the real direction of their autocratic General, the Jesuits devoted themselves to teaching and preaching, and developed all the arts of religious demagoguery. Their system of dialectics and of moral casuistry excited the indignation of old-fashioned Catholics like Pascal, who made a most effective attack on them in his "*Provincial Letters*" (1656-7), but proved most useful to the Church, particularly in the economic sphere, where it enabled the Church to discard its medieval prohibitions of "usury" which were becoming impossible to continue in the rapidly expanding commercial age.

Briefly, one can say that the Jesuits were the shock troops, the *corps d'élite*, or in current phraseology, the "S.S. men" of the Papacy, and down to the present time they have remained the arch-strategists of militant Catholicism†.

The Papacy however, did not rely entirely upon the Jesuits and their famous casuistry of "ends and means" ("the end justifies the means") in its dealings with the Reformation. It also used a host of more carnal weapons, from religious terrorism organised in the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions (both founded in this period) to literary censorship‡. These weapons against "heresy" were adequately supplemented by the "Invincible Armadas" and armies of the Kings of Spain, the fighting standard bearers of the Counter Reformation.

The result of a century of physical and ideological struggle which culminated in the terrible "Thirty Years War" (1618-48), was to leave Europe divided on lines which remained substantially unaltered until 1789, when Free thought may be said to have succeeded Protestantism as the chief rival of the Church of Rome.

The Reformation which ended the Middle Ages themselves, ended concurrently, the Totalitarian Papacy of the Middle Ages. Modern, unlike medieval Catholicism, has been a defensive Catholicism, and the modern Papacy, no longer the unchallenged master of Europe has been reduced to fighting for its existence against the ever-mounting modern secular tide of heresy. But Rome has, notwithstanding, managed to delay her final exit from History, and still to-day fights on, haunted by the vanished dream of her former medieval grandeur.

F. A. RIDLEY.

† In my book, "*The Jesuits—A Study in Counter-Revolution*", I have traced in a detail not possible here the influence exercised by the Jesuits upon modern as distinct from medieval Catholicism.

‡ The famous "*Index of Prohibited Books*" belongs also to the era of the Counter-Reformation.

MORAL GOODNESS AND SIN

I AM in complete accord with the (Rev.) John L. Broom, who, in your issue of August 8, states that sin is necessary and that moral goodness must entail moral evil. Will not your reverend contributor carry his argument to its logical end by admitting that, if, in a world without sin, life would be simply an animal existence, the self-same postulate must be accepted for the Christian Heaven?

I can imagine no more dreadful punishment for a good life here than the Biblical "reward" of an eternity of

moonlight around on a cloud, getting rheumatism in one's wings, and grovelling in perpetual adoration of non-sin and non-goodness. Of course, in the Christian Science heaven there will be no rheumatism, which may be an improvement on the original Christianity.

Could anything yet conceived by the mind of man be more utterly boring than this Christian heaven? From sheer ennui, some spirit, slightly less cowardly than the average human, would be compelled to rebel. Then we would witness another "*Paradise Lost*." In such case, sin having entered, Heaven would no longer be Heaven and Omnipotence not always Omnipotent, a manifest absurdity.

Obviously, Mr. Broom is an intelligent man, and if he can accept the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting in a sinless Christian heaven (without mental reservation) he must be able to reconcile such an animal-like existence with good-ness as it follows that the Heavenly Host cannot know good if it does not know bad and it therefore does not know the greatest good, or God. What then, is God's position? Is it not simply that He is much better off with millions of sinful people on earth, trying to be good and praising Him here, than He is with those same millions translated to eternity, without knowledge of good or evil and therefore without knowledge of Him, although in His presence? Whom, in that case, do they praise?

I can anticipate Mr. Broom's reply, which will doubtless be on the lines that human nature will be transformed. But this does not get over the boredom of an eternity, not only for resurrected sinners, but for God himself, who has to sit for ever listening to all this praise for an admittedly animal-like existence, much worse, in fact than the earthly one.

I am assuming that Mr. Broom is able to accept the anthropomorphic God of the Bible. Failing such acceptance, of course, the argument will lose itself in a cloud of metaphysics.

F. W. RENNIE.

THE GENTLE SAVAGE

HE came into the office, a tall black figure, his face extensively patterned with tribal marks. He laughed lightheartedly as he spoke of his efforts to obtain work as a kitchen porter at a nearby hotel—work needed to enable him to continue his studies.

He holds an M.B. degree and speaks four languages but these apparently are not qualifications considered desirable in a kitchen porter.

Our talk turned to war. In that wild and savage land from which he hails, Nigeria, the warriors are trained to throw their spears merely to wound the enemy. Should they kill, then they forfeit their own lives. I asked if women and children are killed? "What" he cried, raising two pink palms in horror, "Kill our women and children? We would not dream of it."

We spoke of books. I asked him what he read. He gave a list of technical books which he studies but added that the Bible was always by his side. "And do you believe it?" I enquired. Two pink palms were again raised, this time in amusement. "Do you" he asked laughing heartily, "Do you believe 'Alice in Wonderland'?"

E. CHEVERTON TRASK.

WHAT IS RELIGION? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

Mr. Bevin, at the United Nations Assembly, said, "I still place my faith in the ordinary people." But the "Record" apparently does not, and chides Mr. Bevin and warns him that he had better not do so, "because they will let him down." The ordinary people, after all, "count for so little and can easily be swayed, being without Religion and Tradition." We hope the "Record" will pardon our (and Mr. Bevin's) ignorance, but we always thought, and with some justification, that it was precisely because of Religion and Tradition that the "ordinary people" can be swayed this way and that.

The Rev. H. Warren complains (in the "Daily Mirror") of women who touch a lamp post when they see him coming because they are frightened that the "eye of God will seek out their sins." The vicar adds that "Religion is going out, and superstition is coming in." We like that distinction without a difference, but no doubt the Vicar is concerned as to what kind of superstition is believed in. So long as the people believe in the same kind of superstition as he himself, he would not find anything to complain of. We take it that the Vicar would not regard the blessing of crops, or the sea, the incantations over a piece of bread and a glass of wine as superstitions; these are, of course, Religion, and not "superstition."

A student asked the editor of "The Daily Mail" whether Psychology can take the place of religion? The editor replied that it will not take the place of religion, its functions are different." The poor editor! He had to say something, but the answer was very poor. So at a chance he fell back on a clash of "Functions." But a function is just something that is to be performed. Just that and nothing more. He did his best. It is not a very important question, but it does illustrate the power of words which may mean nothing at all.

Mr. Richard O'Sullivan, K.C., is another Catholic who has just discovered that "we are being borne along on a current, anti-Christian and definitely anti-Catholic." If he had read "The Freethinker" he would have known this positively many years ago, but he was perhaps hoping it wasn't true, and so hid his head in the sand. Now he is almost beside himself when he sees birth control advocated, secular marriages, divorce and cremation all around him. He even blames the Foreign Office because "there is a lack of knowledge of Christian principles among our politicians"—in fact everything that the mass of people in England prefer, Mr. O'Sullivan bewails. He will have to go on bewailing.

The Church Missionary Society celebrated its third jubilee the other week, but the interesting thing to note is that while an illiterate native abroad may be converted here and there to the most childish form of Fundamentalism, the more intelligent Christians in England are doing their utmost to "rationalise" miracles, and to make their religion square with science. In fact, they protest unceasingly that there is no quarrel between science and religion—religion gracefully giving in, of course. What they think of the primitive nonsense taught to coloured people can be left to the imagination, though it may well be that modernist Christians continue to subscribe for their conversion.

The B.B.C.'s religious activities will form the subject for an inquiry by the British Council of Churches, but if Sir William Haley is reported aright, he is proving a worthy successor to the first Director-General, Lord Reith. Sir William admits that the B.B.C. should be tolerant in all matters, but on the question of religion it cannot be neutral. "We are, after all," he declares, "citizens of a Christian country, and the B.B.C., as an institution set up by the State, bases its policy on a positive duty towards Christian values." If that is the declared policy of the B.B.C., then we Freethinkers know where we stand.

Sir William is naturally backed up by the Rev. F. H. House who is the Director of Religious Broadcasting. For him, the danger is in giving listeners a "simplified" Christianity to which he is opposed. B.B.C. religion must be "the faith as it is actually found in the Bible." In other words, millions of listeners have preached to them Bible Christianity in its crudest form—yet we find quite a number of Rationalists who object to "Bible-banging" as being completely out of date. What is their answer to the Rev. Mr. House?

More correspondents to the "Universe" have been telling tales out of school—the said tales being the extraordinary laxity of Catholics in the Forces to religion. In Egypt this year, for example, "in a large but isolated camp," out of 55 Catholics, only eight on an average attended Mass. The men were given every opportunity to go, but "sheer apathy" kept them away. And they made things actually worse by "spreading scandal" (whatever that means) among non-Catholics "at a rate which was undoing any good we tried to do." No wonder the Pope, aided, of course, by Cardinal Griffin, never stops begging his sheep to stay in the fold, and never, never stray into the bog of apathy, indifferentism, and even downright infidelity.

In a survey of miners and their work given in his book, "Men in the Pits," the author, Dr. Zweig, found after very careful inquiry that only about ten per cent. go to Church while even among Catholics it is only 30 per cent. at the most. He found that the Church of England had the lowest attendance—as an example, he cites one Church capable of seating 200 people attended by three elderly people and a younger parishioner. As a rule, the miner believes that the Universe is controlled by God and the Devil—the "supreme" good and "supreme" evil, but this is not the kind of Christianity parsons and priests want people to believe in. At least, not unless "expounded" or "explained" by a priest or parson.

Mr. Hugh Redwood is a very religious person. Apparently he knows God well, and he tries to get others to know him. Mr. Redwood also says that the best prayer to God is "Thy will be done." Excellent, the fewer words the better. We might ask, "Is there a God?" what is he like and in what way are we to get hold of him. For all we know he might be at this moment standing at our side, and if that were the case we would make it known as early as possible. At any rate we cannot be blamed for not worshipping something that may not exist.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

KEYS (Paddington).—We are glad to note that "The Freethinker" plays its part in Irish affairs. We have many readers in Ireland who manage to get "The Freethinker," despite the clerical censorship.

J. DANFORTH TAYLOR, M.D.—Thanks; greetings reciprocated.

REVOLVENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of 10s. from R. Cronin.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

A National Secular Society Handbook has been published by the Executive. It contains thirty-two pages of information useful and interesting to all Freethinkers. Besides details concerning the N.S.S. there are sections on Civil marriage ceremony, naming of infants, affirmations, disabilities of Freethinkers, Secular funerals, religion in the armed forces, Prisoners for Blasphemy, Religion and the use of public funds, Tithes, Queen Anne's Bounty, withdrawal of children from religious instruction in schools, education and the schools, etc., etc. The production is neat, the printing bold and easy to read. Copies are obtainable from The Pioneer Press or the offices of the N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, price 6d. per copy, postage, 1d.

We had reason some time ago to comment on "Public Opinion Polls," particularly in connection with questions on religion, and claimed that these Opinion Polls were more or less valueless, because people are rather diffident when questioned on some subjects. We have received a protest that our comment was unfair, nevertheless we still stick to our comment and add to it that not only in matters of religion are these Public Opinion Polls almost valueless but in view of the forecasts of the American Presidential Election, they are on political questions also. Is it not a fact that Dr. Gallup himself is going to hold a Gallup Poll on his own Gallup Poll?

It is time that Religious education in schools was discontinued, for even education authorities admit that it is difficult to find a form of religious teaching suitable to all school children; and the corporate act of worship, compulsory under the Education Act, 1944, is a farce. Ever since 1870, when State schools were introduced, the schools have been a battle ground for various religious denominations, and the chief sufferer is the child. There is only one way to deal with this question, ban religious teaching altogether from public schools. Education must be secular, and leave religion to be taught outside school hours. America has shown the way.

CALVARY'S HILL

I lost it on Calvary's Hill,
It tumbled and tumbled until,
It rolled out of sight,
I was happy that night,
I lost it on Calvary's Hill.

YES, these were the exact words, and the two singers were otherwise sensible looking men. One played a concertina, the other a mandoline. They stood on a raised platform and comported themselves like acknowledged low comedians. It was at Dambore by the sea, and a Sunday evening. Having time to stop and stare, I found myself one of the crowd. Bill and Joe were professional evangelists and they did their stuff well. And now, said Joe, will some brother or sister give us a text. . .

“And God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son . . .”

Lovely. Where do you come from, brother? Belfast? Lovely. And how long since you were saved? Forty-seven years? Lovely. Yes, sister?

“Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden. . .”

Lovely. When were you saved, sister? When you were a wee girl? Lovely. God bless you.

And so the merry game went on. Young nervous boys, shy maidens, some not so shy, females neither shy nor maidenly, and croaking old men. All had a go. All the nice pleasant bits of the Bible were quoted, all were lovely. No one thought out an unpleasant passage, but the only verse that rose to my lips was “Jesus wept.”

The concertina creaked, and a sweet golden-haired girl sang of the fountain filled with blood, allusion was made to a bleeding lamb, something was said about a hell-deserving sinner, then we crashed again into our theme song “I lost it on Calvary's Hill.”

That number was a palpable hit. On my right was a big middle-aged woman with prominent teeth and a slight moustache, who sang with deep feeling in a rich contralto. She had a hymn book and I noticed her name, “Maria” something or other. Heavens, could this be Maria Monk? But surely Catholic priests have better taste! She was in deadly earnest when she bellowed out that she lost it on Calvary's Hill.

I was perturbed. Everyone is usually depressed by a loss; but here they were all elated. As I gazed round at the foolish faces, I caught the eye of Alec McConkey, my old stooge. In a few seconds we worked our way out of the meeting, and were laughing about the performance. We walked along the sea front, then adjourned for fish and chips. Alec remarked that feeding five thousand with a few fishes would be no miracle in Dambore so we had a second helping. Then to “the club,” where we had a couple of bottles of stout, and a good “crack.”

“Do you know, Jack,” said my companion, “I'm seriously thinking of you and me running a show like that. There's always a lot of dough in religion. I can play the banjo, and you have the gift of the gab. . .”

“No, Alec,” I replied unctuously, “Genesis is bad for you.”

I went home—that is to the boarding house where I spend the week-ends. Mrs. Skimmer was waiting for me.

“Oh, Mr. Eiffel,” she said in her “young men taken in here” voice, “these people from Dublin arrived unexpectedly, and I knew you wouldn't mind me shifting you for one night into the little room at the top. It's quite cosy. I'll just show you the way. . .”

Your modern psychologists have nothing to teach a seaside landlady.

The room was quite comfortable. Texts and religious pictures were on the walls. At the foot of the bed was a photograph of a gigantic negro in picturesque war paint.

"Is this the devil?" I asked.

"No," said Mrs. Skinner, "that's the king of the Ballykazoos. You see, my late husband was a missionary to them savages, and this chief tried to kill James three times."

Once would have been enough, I reflected. Then I asked "Why keep the ruffian's portrait? I wouldn't like my wife to cherish the likeness of a man who tried to do me in, even once."

"Oh, but James brought him to the Cross," answered the landlady. "He became as a little child, and the Ballykazoos are now a Christian people, and very loyal."

I was soon in dreamland, literally. For the fish and chips and stout, the evangelistic exhortations, the Dambore fanatics, the precious blood, Maria Monk and the Ballykazoo Christians were all stirred up together in my interior.

The dream was in glorious Disney-colour, the location was Central Africa, and the atmosphere was sultry. Scores of naked natives were dancing about, clapping hands and singing. To maintain decency, the men wore tall hats, and the women garish head scarves. Doubtless, the missionary had had a side line. Alec McConkey and I stood upon an elevation and conducted the "meeting." Being white men we wore bathing drawers, and we also had clerical collars to show we were men of God. I noticed that "Maria Monk" was in the gathering, and I rejoiced that she wore a new-look garment of straw. I played a concertina and Alec his banjo.

Now then, brothers and sisters, let us sing:

"I lost it on Calvary's Hill"

Again and again, and then more, and louder and louder.

I tried them with the text quiz. Merciful God, they knew the answers, they must have studied "The Bible Handbook." Not the best, but the worst. They revelled in all manner of Biblical beastliness. Seas of blood, oceans of frogs, lands of lice, smiting and drowning, murder, arson, rape, sodomy, curses, smut, boils, and blains and murrains—all were quoted chapter and verse. Alec and I took turn about saying "Lovely," but we couldn't keep pace with them. The women favoured texts concerning a Jewish surgical operation, but I drowned their voices with my music, for Alec and I are Gentiles.

Maria gave us a new version of our hymn:—

"I lost it on Carricky Hill,
I tumbled and tumbled until
I rolled out of sight;
I was happy that night,
I lost it on Carricky Hill."

Many versions followed; nearly all the women lost it at a different place, Bullyhome, Donaghadee, Ballymena, Ballycarrott, St. Peter's Hill and heaven only knows where else. But it is comforting that they were all happy on the night of their loss.

During the testimony of the ladies, the males had faded out of the picture, but they now returned, distributing ice cream cones and custard pies. These were freely accepted and exchanged in the good old style. Stooges, Crazy Gangs, Grouchos and Carmen were nothing to this. Wiping one of my eyes clear of custard, and wrenching a cone from Alec's nose, I called for a text.

"A bloody husband thou art to me," shrieked Maria, "and Zipporah seized a sharp stone and . . ."

A shower of ice-cream cones fell at my feet and I felt that Bible study and symbolism could go too far. Alec was seized, and, screaming, was borne away to be sacrificed, while Maria clung to me in a voluptuous embrace. She squeezed my concertina till with a discordant screech, it burst and ended this fearsome orgy.

And so I awoke. I gazed at the lovely picture of "The Return from Calvary," and the portrait of the king of the Ballykazoos. Then I arose, and girt up my loins—no, I put my trousers on, for, thank God, I am not as the heathens. But while shaving I reflected: about Dambore and Ballykazoo, and the only difference I could see between the two sets of Christians was that the darkies put up the better show. After all, my conscience is a bit of a nuisance, for Alec and I could put some colour and pep into religion.

Breakfast was unexciting. I regarded the sausages, and worked off the old lodger's joke, quoting the Apostle, chapter and verse. But nobody knew it ("Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever") so I ate a little toast in silence.

"You've lost your appetite, Mr. Effel," said Mrs. Skinner.

Yes, I lost it on Calvary's Hill!

J. EFFEL.

PRAGMATISM

ONCE I was commissioned to expose Kosher Slaughtering as a cruelty based on primitive conceptions of Animism. The only angry reaction came from a Jewish "Freethinker" who himself was quick to find faults in Christianity.

So when I raised the discussion on the political aspect in our Anglo-Saxon Freethought Movement, I was prepared to meet with opposition from the non-political camp. What I did not expect, however, was a Racial Inquisition.

Hair-splitting Mr. Preece seemed purposely to misunderstand, so he picked on my "incidentally, German," though it should be clear from the context that the German, with his personal experiences, had deeper understanding of the vital problems than could be expected from the Western delegates.

My premise read: "The existing relations of production . . . determine the *Political*, religious and cultural modes of any given stage of civilisation." H.P.P. comments: "If economic conditions determine politics . . . then we should logically consider economics and not politics." "Logically" it should stand to reason that, since we cannot help being affected by the economic conditions, we cannot *escape* their political consequences. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

Yet, subjectively, H.H.P. dislikes the conclusions that *must* be drawn as a consequence from the premise, hence his sneering remarks on the "categorical imperative," as though I had the *power* to make him think logically.

He says, for instance, that I "appeal to authority and not to evidence." Why? Because I reject the partisan press as "evidence" and refuse to have my mind moulded according to that which the authorities consider fit for me.

My admonition to exercise "utter criticism" is fully in line with Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason":

"Reason must be subject in all its operations to criticism, which must always be permitted to exercise its functions without restraint; otherwise its interests are imperilled, and its influence obnoxious to suspicion." (P. 423).

Mr. Preece is conversant with philosophy, so I expected him able to discriminate between phenomena and noumena, form and content, empirical and speculative. Whether a given Truth has *at any moment* objective Truth is a question that can never be settled by abstract argumentation. It is practice that continually converts "unknowable" noumena into "phenomena" known, so that in the long run, even the Church is forced to adapt itself to the "Relative Knowability" of the so-called "Unknowable."

Practice, however, is something different from opinion. A navigator achieves accuracy in his reckoning by using three chronometers. If he used only one he would be at the mercy of its temporary or permanent aberrations; if only two, he would be unable to determine which had varied. But for the formation of a political opinion, many people are satisfied with the "representation" given by a single set of people, newspapers, etc.

When I concluded that *attacking religion* on a "purely intellectual basis" is a palliative only, my misinterpreter commented: "One wonders why he writes articles if the 'purely intellectual basis' is only a palliative." He simply juggled away the subject of the whole sentence! And another critic, Mr. R. H. Brown, in a typical Preudman slip of the pen, renamed my article "Non-Political or Anti-Political"—the exact opposite to that which I had said.

It would be a waste of the short space available to go further into these odd misinterpretations. For political reasons and in their eagerness to refute Materialism (Marxism), open and camouflaged Idealists have always sought to evade or misrepresent the Criterion of Practice. The last philosophical fashion is the whole school of Pragmatists, whose formula is: "A belief is true if it works."

For the Pragmatists Truth is merely a *subjective* moral "valuation" of beliefs as "good" or "bad." A doctrine is "proved" to be true "for You" if You find "in practice" that it is "good for you." Guinness is good for you, so it is the Ultimate Truth.

It is not a matter of chance that the rise of the Pragmatic-subjectivist schools has coincided with a rapid growth in the number of intellectuals becoming Catholic converts. Catholicism is, in fact, the last consequence of Red-Baiting.

In the pragmatic saying a belief (say, the belief in the inevitability of another World War) is "true if it works." In actual life and practice the Pragmatists prove that what they mean is that "any argument is good enough to use against a Marxist if only you can get away with it."

PERCY G. ROY.

MENDICANT PRIESTS

The following may interest readers, it is from Plato's "Republic":—

"Mendicant priests go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power granted to them from the Gods of making atonement for their sins or those of their fathers, by sacrifices and charms. And they produce a host of books written by the Muses and Orpheus, according to which they perform ritual, and persuade, not only individuals, but whole cities; and there are atonements and explanations for sin by means of sacrifice while they are alive and after they are dead, that what they call the mysteries deliver us from suffering in the other world, but if we omit to sacrifice, awful things, they say, await us yonder."

We wonder whether the people of to-day would find the clergy of ancient Greece very different in essentials?

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 23, 7 p.m.: "The Rights of Man," Mr. JOHN MURPHY.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, November 22, 7 p.m.: "Current Theories of Personality." 2nd lecture: "Characterology in the Past," Dr. FRIEDA GOLDMAN.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Survival of Civilisation," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Can Civilisation Survive?" Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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

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

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS and others.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackpool Debating Society (46, Adelaide Street).—Tuesday, November 23: "The Marshall Plan," Mr. E. GREENWOOD.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Beliefs of an Unbeliever," Mr. W. R. TOMLINSON.

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Where Are We Going?" Mr. VICTOR SHORTT.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Rooms, St. James Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture, Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Primitive Folk Lore" (with illustrations in Folk Song), Mr. BASIL L. GIMSON.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Communism and Youth," Mr. W. BROOKS.

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THE DARK PATH

MR. LEWIS SPENCE opens his work, "The Problem of Atlantis," with the statement that the student of tradition will not readily encounter in the annals of his science a legend so persistent, or so powerful in its appeal to human imagination, as that of a great island continent sunk fathoms deep beneath the waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

I have as yet read no more than the first page or two of his book, but, in considering the student of tradition examining religious tales, such as those of virgin-born saviours, and the sacrificial deaths of gods, it is hard to believe he will not surely encounter stories as persistent, and attractive to imagination, as that of Atlantis. I daresay Mr. Spence meant something different to what I am extracting from his words, and, if it were important to find his intention, a problem of interpretation would arise.

Mr. Spence is a reputable author, and accordingly tries to make plain his meaning, but he is a man, therefore, fallible. Fortunately, our salvation does not depend upon our accurate appreciation of his teaching. If, after due consideration we mistook his meaning, we would not be greatly shaken, not even if someone rudely told us the fault was ours. Mr. Spence has done something very helpful. He has put down what he had to teach in durable form.

There was, however, once a man of another stamp—Jesus. He was a poor author, for the only writing he seems to have done was upon the sand. The method he chiefly employed to express his thoughts was oral delivery, a method fruitful of misunderstanding, for listeners are not all equally percipient. Those people, for example, who flocked out into the desert on the occasion when he provided an al fresco lunch for all, were probably somewhat tired before the preaching began, yet his were divine words on which their salvation depended, and ours too. Jesus might have supplied competent stenographers, who could have carried his very words to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; but he did not. We cannot say, therefore, that the Son of God did his best to make his meaning clear to us, the wretched sinners he came to redeem.

"Judge not," said he, "that ye be not judged." These are beautiful words, some consider, and we should follow them. Jesus, however, also said, and in the same sermon, "for with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." These two sayings are, on a fair interpretation, contrary, for no reputable judge would fear to fulfil his judicial function because a similar judgement might be passed on him, in the event of his becoming a breaker of contracts, a tort-feasor, or a malefactor; nor would a decent shopkeeper fear accurately to measure out the portion paid for, because he, in another shop, would be dealt with likewise.

Jesus did not say "measure not"; but since he did not, why have we a warning about measuring tacked to one about judging? But, as already stated, the enlarged purported reason for not judging is contrary to the injunction not to judge, which has its own reason closely following, "that ye be not judged." To get a rational rendering we might read, "judge not unjustly, that ye be not judged unjustly."

The amended injunction with its consequent is not only in harmony with the reason, that like judgment follows a prior judgment, but it has a certain sense, in that it may be enlarged upon, so as to show that fraudulent judg-

ments tend to the shakings of the foundations of honesty upon which civilization rests, for dishonesty begets lack of confidence between men, and that leads to disintegration of the community.

Did Jesus mean this? No one knows that he did, but it is certain that millions have believed the Gospels inspired in every word and mark. Therefore many have thought all legal judgment wrong; while, as we know, many have thought that Jesus could not have condemned such.

Our immortal bliss depends, according to much Christian teaching, on our correct understanding of the Jesuine ideas; and Jesus was a God, a being all-good, all-wise and all-powerful. Why then, did he darken the path of salvation with such cloud?

While considering this matter we have been extremely gentle with Jesus, that is, we have taken a text from its context, for the purpose of making it rational by some amendment. The words form, however, part of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, and cannot fairly be divorced from the rest, the beatitudes, and other less tender remarks. Now, the general tenor of the sermon is that of non-resistance to evil, so that seeking to interpret the "judge not" injunction in the light of the whole, it is reasonable to infer that "judge not," is intended. What a pretty state of things!

Those who have tried to laud Christianity, and have yet wished not to express belief in the New Testament miracles, have recommended the Sermon on the Mount as consummate ethical thought; and to do this they have, of course, had to forget most of it. How lovely, they say, are the beatitudes, and the golden rule, "Do as you would be done by."

Now, referring to this rule, and ignoring all else, it is no bad idea to have before us the remarks of P. H. Huxley, who neither wrote only on sand, nor often expressed himself obscurely. However much, he wrote, we may admire the generosity of the rule that sympathy should be the only rule, and however confident we may be that average men may be depended on not to carry it out to its full consequences, it should be recognised that these consequences are incompatible with the existence of a civil state, under any circumstances of this world which have obtained, or, as far as can be seen, are likely to come about.

"Do as you would be done by," would be a very comfortable rule for the robber. What would he most desire if caught stealing? Would he not wish that the judge should mentally change places, and, seeing that the robber desired to escape punishment, let him escape?

Strictly speaking, wrote the great scientist, "the golden rule involves the negation of law by the refusal to operate it against law breakers; and in the external relations of a polity, it implies the refusal to continue the struggle for existence. It can be obeyed, even partially, only under the protection of a society which repudiates it. Without such shelter, the followers of the rule may indulge in hopes of heaven, but they must reckon with the certainty that other people will be masters of the earth."

"What," he asks, "would become of a garden if the gardener treated all the weeds and slugs and birds and trespassers as he would like to be treated, if he were in their place?"

J. G. LUPTON.

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