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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Mary's Little Lamb.

CHRISTMAS comes but once a year, and, considering the gluttony and wine-bibbing which goes on when it *does* come, it is perhaps a very good thing that the season occurs no oftener. Hundreds of Christmases, and therefore hundreds of years, have rolled by since the first one ushered into the world the most surprising baby that ever suckled and squealed. All the babies born since were commonplace in comparison with this astonishing youngster; and never, except when the stars sang together for joy, in a chorus that would have been well worth a shilling ticket, did nature show such uncommon interest in any event as in the appearance of this little lump of human dough. Nature has probably been sorry for her enthusiasm ever since. She is not easily excited, and her pace is steady as a mule. But as Jove nods, nature has an occasional fling. She went into raptures on the first Christmas, and when the chief person born on that day made his exit from this mortal stage she went black in the face with panic fear or hysterical sorrow. From that time she has conducted herself with exemplary decorum, and no doubt she is heartily ashamed of the indiscretions and eccentricities she was guilty of on the occasions referred to.

The story of the first Christmas is partly written in certain old manuscripts, of questionable date and authorship, which are regarded with extreme veneration by millions of people who know next to nothing about them. But there are many lapses and large deficiencies in the narrative, and we are authorised to supply what is wanting. We claim infallibility, of course, yet we do not deny it to others. Those who dissent from our version are free to make up one of their own, and it will doubtless be as infallible as ours. This may sound strange, but it is quite philosophical for all that. Do not all the Churches differ from each other, yet are they not infallible? Why should one infallible man cut another infallible man's throat or put him in prison? Why cannot two infallible men dwell together in the same street like two greengrocers?

But to our story. It was the first Christmas Eve. A donkey was patiently wending his way to Jerusalem. On his back was seated a lady of some seventeen summers, and by his side walked a sturdy young man. They were husband and wife. The young man evidently belonged to the artisan class, and his better half was in that condition in which ladies love to be who love their lords. Both looked forward with unusual interest to the birth of the expected child. They had settled what name it should be called, so there was no doubt whatever as to its sex.

The day was drawing to an end when they approached Bethlehem. Making their way to an hotel kept by a relative of theirs, they asked for accommodation. Mr. Isaacs shook his head. "I am very sorry, Joe," he said,

"but we are full up, and the worst of it is every hotel in the place is in the same state. Over an hour ago I tried desperately hard to oblige an old customer, a gentleman in the bacon trade, with a bed for the night, but I tried every hotel in Bethlehem without success. Fortunately I rigged up a few extra beds in the stable, and he has taken one of them. If you like another you are welcome, and egad, Joe! that's the best I can do for you."

"Thank you, old fellow," said Joe. "but Mary is in a delicate state, as you see, and I would like to fix her up comfortably. Can't you go in and see if there is any gentleman who will go outside to oblige a lady?"

Mr. Isaacs returned in five minutes, and said it was no use. One gentleman had a bad cold, another had the gout, another the lumbago, and so on. Joseph and Mary were therefore obliged to return to the stable.

While Joseph was grooming the donkey Mr. Isaacs came in and started a curious conversation. "Joe," he began, "I don't wish to interfere with your business, but as a relative and an old friend you will pardon me for saying that I am a little puzzled; you have only been married four months, and if Mary is not a mother in a few days my name isn't Issacs." Joseph did not resent these remarks, his natural meekness being such that no insult could ever disturb it. With a solemn face he replied: "My dear Isaacs, there is nothing to pardon. Mary's baby is not mine. Its father lives in heaven. He is an angel, or something very high there. Mary has often told me all about it, but I have such a bad memory for details. The fact is, however, that Jeshua—we've settled his name—was conceived miraculously, as I've heard say some of the great ones among the heathen were. You may smile, but I've Mary's word for it, and she ought to know."

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Isaacs, "if you're satisfied, of course I am. I don't say Mary's story would go down with me if I were in your place, but I've no right to grumble if you are contented."

Thereupon Joseph, with a still more solemn face, replied: "Well, I was a little incredulous myself at first, but all my doubts were dispelled after that dream I had. I saw an angel at my bedside, and he told me that Mary's story was quite correct, and I was to marry her. Some of the neighbours chattered about a Roman soldier, called Pandera, who used to hang about her house while I was away at work in the south; but I regard it as nothing but gossip, and Mary says they are a pack of liars."

Mr. Isaacs returned to his customers in the hotel, winking and putting his finger to his nose directly his back was turned. Meanwhile Joseph and Mary had supper, after which she felt very unwell, and, as luck or providence would have it, she was confined soon after twelve o'clock of a bouncing boy. Mr. Isaacs resolutely refused to turn any customer out of his bed, so the newborn was cradled in a manger filled with the softest hay.

Soon afterwards a fiery, kite-shaped object was seen in the sky, advancing towards Bethlehem, and finally

it rested on the chimney stack of Mr. Isaacs' hotel, where it gave such a lovely illumination that half the town turned out to see it. Two enterprising spirits who mounted a ladder to inspect closely, and if possible bring it down, were struck as if by lightning, and were with great difficulty restored to consciousness by the skill and efforts of a dozen doctors.

While the people were in a state of bewilderment, six old gentlemen appeared on the scene. They were attired like the priests of Persia, and their venerable appearance and long white beards filled the spectators with reverence. Only one of them could speak Hebrew, and he acted as interpreter for the company. "Where," he inquired in a deep, majestic voice, "is the wondrous baby who is born to-night? We saw his portent in the east, and have followed it hither nearly six hundred miles." Mr. Isaacs informed them that the wondrous babe was in the stable, at which they were greatly astonished. Four of them said they must have made a mistake, and were for going home again; but the other two pointed to the supernatural light on the hotel chimney, and after they had consumed three bottles of Mr. Isaacs' best Eschol they all made for the object of their search. Directly they entered the stable, little Jeshua stood up in the manger and eyed them, and as they advanced he accosted them in their own language. This removed any doubts they entertained, and they at once knelt down and offered him the presents they had brought with them. One gave him a cake of scented soap, another a pretty smelling bottle, another an ivory rattle, another a silver fork, another a gold spoon, and another a cedar plate inlaid with pearl. Little Jeshua took the gifts very politely, and made a graceful little bow and a neat little speech in acknowledgment of their kindness. Then handing them over to his mother, to keep till the morning, he sang with great sweetness "Lay me in my little bed."

Soon after daylight some shepherds came in from the hills, saying they had seen a ghost, who had talked to them in enigmatical language; they could not understand exactly what he meant, but they gathered that good times were coming, when poor shepherds would eat mutton instead of watching it. On hearing of what had happened in the town precisely at the same time they were still more astonished. All Bethlehem was in uproar. Everybody was talking about little Jeshua, and the presents that were brought him by the enthusiastic inhabitants filled three large vans when Joseph and Mary set out again.

G. W. FOOTE.

(Written in 1886.)

THE REVOLUTION IN HUSBANDRY AND MANUFACTURE

UNTIL the middle of the 18th century, England was still an agricultural country. At its close, it was at least a generation ahead of the Continent in scientific production, organisation and distribution of manufactured commodities. But then, as now, agriculture was essential to national well-being. The improvements in husbandry of Townshend, Jethro Tull and other innovators, were continued by such enterprising landowners as Coke of Holkham, Bedford, and even Farmer George, the King himself.

Dr. Grant Robertson, in his invaluable volume, "England under the Hanoverians" (Methuen), observes that: "The cultivation of artificial grasses, of

clover and rye, of seeds, beans, potatoes and roots, of horse-hoeing, scientific and economic ploughing, the study of soils and manures, and the rotation of crops, advanced steadily." Then the stock-breeding experiments of Dishley and Bakewell made our flocks and herds famous everywhere. Bakewell's breeds of sheep produced flesh rather than wool, while cattle and horses were immensely improved. Thus, with heavier crops, and the increased food supplied by livestock, more food was available for our rapidly increasing population.

Still, there was a sinister aspect in this picture of growing prosperity. Wastes and commons were enclosed on a widespread scale and, in the open arable strips, hedges now marked the boundaries of newly-acquired private property. Small farms and allotments were converted into large farms and estates. Between 1702 and 1801, innumerable Enclosure Acts converted 2,500,000 acres of waste into private ownership. That this deprivation of their rights of pasture on the commons inflicted extreme hardship on the peasantry is indisputable. That the changes were inevitable does not excuse the shamefully harsh manner in which they were accomplished. As our historian concedes: "unless we set aside the testimony of witnesses so competent as Young, Eden and Marshall, corroborated by details from many sources and localities, the revolution was, perhaps, inevitably accompanied by much suffering, and no little injustice to the small, weak, and poor commoner. The rapidity and area of the change gave an undue advantage to the strong and the rich." Thus, peasant impoverishment and the extinction of the yeomanry—so long the backbone of rural life—went hand in hand.

Meanwhile, the industrial realm was enriched by a remarkable outburst of inventions which led to large-scale production in textiles, iron, steel, hardware, pottery and other industries. The closing decades of the century produced Hargreave's spinning jenny, Crompton's mule, Cartwright's power-loom and other inventions. The cotton, linen, and woollen industries were revolutionised. Vast strides were made in mechanical engineering and metallurgy. Britain's splendid coal measures formed the foundation of all our varied products, while the green fields of the Midlands, South Wales, North-Eastern England, and Scotland's Clyde, were made sooty and dismal by the smoke of Blake's dark Satanic mills.

Then arose the now world-famous china and earthenware manufactures. Chelsea, Worcester, Derby and Staffordshire wares are pre-eminent, but Darwin's maternal grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, stands supreme among pioneer potters. As Robertson avers: "His works at Burslem and afterwards at Etruria are a red rubric in the history of pottery and porcelain. Great as a worker and organiser, he was greater in his artistic intuition for quality and design. A study of the Wedgwood collection in the Birmingham Museum only emphasises the debt due to his eye for form, and his determination to combine the best material with the skill of the best workmen."

Also, James Watt developed the steam engine which heralded the application of steam to pumps and hammers and then to the mills, while, later, the steamship and the steam train traversed both land and sea. Both Watt, and Humes' friend, Adam Smith, who wrote the *Wealth of Nations*, were indebted to Glasgow University for "the grant of a laboratory for his experiments to the one genius, and the professor's chair to the other, enabled the two greatest Scotsmen of the eighteenth century to be the pioneers of a twin revolution in the world of mechanics and the world of thought."

Our roads had been so sadly neglected that facilities for transport were almost non-existent. Indeed, their condition as described by Arthur Young seems incredible by modern standards. They were patched up here and there, but not until 1773 was a general measure adopted for their improvement. But when Telford and Macadam applied scientific principles to highway construction, a revolution was effected. Again, by the cutting of canals, the cost of transport of bulk goods was reduced. In this we lagged behind France and Holland, where artificial waterways were long in use. The celebrated Bridgewater Canal from Worsley to Manchester, commissioned by the Duke of Bridgewater, was built by Brindley and was a commercial success. Liverpool and its environs were soon linked up and canals were constructed throughout the entire industrial area and these rendered splendid service until they were superseded by the later railway systems.

Imports and exports increased greatly, while the home consumption of commodities also increased. By 1801 the growth of urban centres was remarkable. In 1700 no English counties, save Middlesex and Surrey, averaged more than 60 inhabitants to the square mile. But a century later, outside London, Lancashire, the West Riding and Stafford were the most thickly populated. Norwich had fallen from the third place to the tenth by 1801, while the leading towns of Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands were all the creations of the Industrial Revolution.

With the industrial population herded together in the towns, open-air life was lost. The rapid development of industry and commerce exceeded all expectations. Yet, periods of full employment were sometimes succeeded by painful depressions, especially after the close of the Napoleonic wars. In Robertson's words: "The slow establishment of a reserve of labour that can be called into the working line when trade requires it, and thrust back when it is slack, the problem of the unemployed and the unemployable, are not the least of the economic enigmas forced on Government and humanity by the wage earner of the Industrial Revolution."

In addition to the inventions already dealt with, iron proved an important factor in industrial affairs. The first iron bridge, that over the Severn, was erected by Darby in 1779. He also launched the first iron vessel in 1790, while Rennie replaced the wooden gears originally used in Watt's engines by those made of iron.

The dependence of modern industry and husbandry on science is noteworthy. Indeed, all the leading physical sciences made outstanding contributions. Black, Priestley, Davy, Young, Cavendish, Hutton, and others, all assisted in the Industrial Revolution. When in 1789 the French Revolution arose and developed, panic seized the upper classes in Britain. Among statesmen, Fox stood almost alone in defending the principles which sustained the upheaval in France. Burke joined the reactionaries, and freedom of thought and expression of a popular character were ruthlessly repressed. Thomas Paine bravely bearded Burke in his *Rights of Man*, but a price was put on Paine's head and he escaped to France. The part played by Pitt, the Prime Minister, was pitiful, for *Habeas Corpus* was suspended, and men were imprisoned without trial in the loathsome dungeons that then passed for prisons. All who protested against the persecuting activities of the authorities were branded as the enemies of God and man. Truly, as our historian asserts: "the crushing of free criticism is the crushing of science. Unless it is daily fed by the freedom of speech and freedom of

thought, to which nothing is common and unclean, nothing is dangerous save what in the open air is proved to be untrue, self-government only too easily shrivels into a parody of autocracy—the ghost of aristocracy sitting crowned on the grave of liberty."

T. F. PALMER.

THE PSYCHE

READING spiritualist literature such as "The Two Worlds" one is struck by the modern use of electrical analogy, which seems to ignore the fact that electricity is a department of physical science. It is interesting to reflect how physical notions, of the world at large, have affected men's conceptions of themselves and of this in turn, their behaviour. Presumably we live in the same world, but we have different conceptions of it, and of ourselves. We need to appreciate these differences.

Just as biological evolution is reproduced in the development of the embryo, so is the psychological evolution reproduced in the childhood of the individual; and it is both aesthetic and intellectual. It is dependent upon the cultural development of modes of expression as well as social relations.

Just as music evolves from incantation, and imitative gesture develops into elaborate ritual and masquerade, the development of script from magic inscription through pictograph involves picturesque imagery, which continues as poetic metaphor and analogy, after the advent of alphabetic script and a verbal mode of expression. But abstract thinking is only possible with verbal visualisation, and notions of accuracy came with the development of mathematical methods of calculation and mensuration.

Logical differentiation and clarity is impossible to the primitive. The development is one of theory, but closely related to practice. Archaeological evidence of our primitive ancestors survives through the practice of burying food and implements with the dead; showing no differentiation between sleep and death. And there is the association of the dead with stones or stakes and mounds. Marett has shown primitive theory in the vague term *mana*, which preceded Tyler's animism; Malinowsky shows the emotional content, and Frazer, the psychological aspect in sympathetic magic. Many factors have contributed and we find an evolution from a vague, through a more clear notion, eventuating in dogmatic doctrine.

The primitive characteristic is lack of differentiation. If our ancestors thought of the soul as the shadow, the reflection in the pool, or the dream vision, it is not metaphysical distinction, but mystical association. If the primitive conceives the soul as going on a journey or surviving death, it is not metaphysical separation, but mystical illusion. The cultivation of illusion is a factor in the evolution of religion. With the primitive, there is no metaphysics, because there is no physics. The distinction of body and soul came with the development of physical science; with Greek metaphysics; and with it, the notion of two worlds, here and hereafter, material and immaterial, natural and supernatural.

To the primitive, before and without physics, there is no "body," there is no "death." The concept is that of a double soul; to the ancient Chinese an inferior and superior soul; the inferior and superior person of Confucius. The inferior soul is not dead or inert, it is sentient, conscious, aware of pain, but inactive; the superior soul is the animating principle; and they are inter-related. The same with the Hindu of the Vedas; the pantheistic double soul; as Max Muller showed,

Brahma is the objective soul and Atma, the subjective soul. Everything is transient, comes and goes, like the breath; the individual soul is contained in the pantheistic world soul, breath or air; in intimate relationship.

There is a personal relationship of mystical communion between the It and the That, the me in you and the you in me; between the objective and subjective souls. It is a magic, mystical, animistic concept. The notion of physical contact, of contagious magic, is lost in sympathetic magic. There is no question here of a physical *modus operandi*. Both magic and animism are psychological; and the personal relationships of totem and taboo are social. A psychological question is answered by a social analogy. Thus, the soul is a physical absurdity, but a psychological and social fact; of personal relationship.

In phallicism and ancestor worship this personal relationship is continued in the mystic "seed," connecting past, present and future; involving heritage and paternal responsibility in a mystic communion; with sex complications; masculine authority and filial piety; and looking back to a Golden Age or Garden of Eden. The physical emblem and totemic symbol is replaced by a human, in hero-worship; with vicarious self-glorification in personal identification as compensation for submission to the authority of the Hero God. Compensation for the consequent frustration is also found in a scapegoat; and in the future coming of a Messiah.

Again we find a social fact and a physical absurdity in the social group conceived as a body with the hero as its head, and the individuals as members. In this mystic communion in a humanistic analogue, the "body" is not physical, for "ye are the seed." The magic "word" is spoken through the mouth of the elect. "Wisdom" is like a mist, and the soul is less tangible than the shadow or the blood; to some gnostic sects it was more tenuous than air, more like an odour. And this is further confused by the antithesis of light and darkness. The association with Daniel's "visions of the bed" is further complicated by the visions Ezekiel saw in the sky, which spoke through the mouth of the prophet; the astrological angels, and the "New Jerusalem;" the apocalyptic millennium.

This transition from childish fancy through phallic, ancestor, hero, and astrological cults involves complete inversion, characteristic of adolescence. The simple childish egoism with its paternal attachment, is baffled by a misunderstanding of a wider experience; the complications of a wider and stronger sexual and social influence. Feeling powerless, confused feelings are conceived as external "powers" or "forces;" divine or demonic. The parent is replaced by the hero; fear of the gods, of evil, or of punishment is changed to respect for the hero, and praise of the good. Immediate pleasure gives place to future hopes and fears, and the objective soul becomes intangible, incomprehensible, ethereal spirit. The primitive childish fancy is expanded into a theological phantasmagoria, a dream world.

God is love, says the parson, but, as with the adolescent, love is blind. Possessed by a desire to possess, the social relationships are lost in a personal world of illusion; a maze of poetic imagery expanded into the wildest allegory; complete self-delusion involving self-abnegation in the mystical "religious experience." The social character of the psyche is lost in personal feeling and the social responsibility is completely obscured. Inhibition and frustration leads to a casuistical condemnation of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

H. H. PREECE.

THE JEWS AND THE INQUISITION

PROFESSOR J. B. TREND, in his "The Civilisation of Spain" (Home University Library, 1944), has remarked that the persecution of a Jew will always achieve cheap popularity. It has, indeed, done that throughout many centuries. Then those who have approved or connived at the persecution have often come to regret their action. Persecution is the expression of tyrannical power, and nobody is safe with a tyrant about. In Spain the Tribunal of the Inquisition was first set up in Seville, in 1480, to examine the sincerity of Jewish and Moslem converts, but it soon became as extensively coercive as the ill-famed secret police of some modern States, searching out the politically indiscreet or inconvenient.

Prescott refers to the high regard in which the Jews were once held by the Castilians: eminent Israelites residing in the courts of Christian princes, directing their studies, acting as physicians, or administering their finances, in which latter function they now recognised aptitude was displayed. In politics and finance they were, of course, afforded peculiar facilities by that correspondence maintained with the different countries of Europe, through the medium of their fellows, who acted as brokers for the people among whom they were dispersed.

Royal patronage could, however, not protect the Jews when their fortunes had risen to a height to excite envy; and then the display in equipage and apparel, which appeared congenial to the habit of the Jews, augmented the jealousy.

The Jews were charged with contempt of the Catholic worship, desecration of its holy symbols, of the crucifixion, or other sacrifice, and of Christian children at the celebration of their Passover. The more probable charge of usury and extortion was preferred against them. At last the fanatical populace, at the close of the 10th century, stimulated often by the no less fanatical clergy, made an assault upon this people in Castile and Aragon, breaking into their houses, and most private sanctuaries, scattering their costly collections and furniture, and consigning the wretched owners to indiscriminate slaughter, regardless of age or sex.

In this crisis there remained to the Jews only the remedy of real or feigned conversion. St. Vincent Ferrer, a Dominican of Valencia, performed miracles to further this end, and is credited with having changed the hearts of 35,000 of the stubborn sect, "which," observes Prescott, "doubtless must be reckoned the greatest miracle of all."

Even the converted Jews became prosperous, but their fortune was precarious. Their proselytism was not to be sincere, and the irksomeness of keeping up pretence made many in course of time less circumspect, and casting off the cloak of apostasy they openly walked the paths of Judaism.

The clergy, especially the Dominicans, soon sounded the alarm, and the superstitious populace, easily roused to violence in the cause of religion, began to rage, and in fact massacred the Constable of Castile, when he tried to suppress them at Jaen, the year before Isabella came to the throne.

The complaints against the Jews became more insistent, and the throne was beset with petitions for their extirpation. "This accursed race," wrote the curate of Los Palacios, "were either unwilling to bring their children to be baptised, or if they did, they washed away the stain on returning home. They dressed their stews or other dishes with oil instead of lard; abstained

from pork; kept the Passover; ate meat in Lent; and sent oil to replenish the lamps of their synagogues; with many other abominable ceremonies of their religion. They entertained no respect for monastic life, and frequently profaned the sanctity of religious houses by the violation or seduction of their inmates. They were an exceedingly politic and ambitious people, engrossing the most lucrative municipal offices, and preferred to get their livelihood by traffic, in which they made exorbitant gains, rather than by manual labour or mechanical arts. They considered themselves in the hands of the Egyptians, whom it was a merit to deceive and plunder. By these wicked contrivances they amassed great wealth, and thus were often able to ally themselves by marriage with noble families."

"It seems," remarked Prescott, "that the zeal of the most orthodox was considerably sharpened by worldly motives."

The presumptive proofs by which the charge of Judaism was established are curious. It was good evidence to show that the accused wore cleaner linen or clothes on the Sabbath than on other days; if his house was fireless on the preceding evening; if he sat at table with Jews, or ate the flesh of animals slaughtered by them; if he washed a corpse with warm water, or in dying turned his face to the wall; or if he gave Hebrew names to his children. (A law of Henry II had prohibited him from giving them Christian names.)

The Inquisitors acted with dispatch, for on January 2, 1481, it opened operations by the publication of an edict, requiring all persons to aid in apprehending and accusing all such as they might know or suspect of heresy. On January 6, six persons suffered at the stake. Seventeen more were executed in March, and by November 4, 298 had been sacrificed in the autos da fe of Seville. In addition, the remains of many who had been tried and condemned after their death were torn from the graves, and placed upon the common funeral pyre. This was prepared on a stone scaffold, erected in the suburbs of the city, with the statues of four prophets at the corners, to which the unhappy sufferers were bound for the sacrifice, and which the worthy curate of Los Palacios celebrated as the spot "where heretics were burnt, and ought to be burnt as long as any can be found."

Professor Trend, summarising the various ideas as to the decadence of Spain, sets out Buckle's diagnosis that the predominant states of mind there were loyalty and superstition. Loyalty and reverence caused habits of mind which if carried into religion gave rise to superstition, and into politics, despotism. A secular and scientific spirit became impossible. "Everyone believed, no one inquired." The chief cause of the decadence in politics and backwardness in science was the exaggerated development of religious and quasi-religious institutions, especially the Inquisition, which had sterilised the finest products of the Spanish mind. The docile, the intolerant, and the hidebound survived.

Professor Trend remarks that the theory has had its critics. It was, for example, not men of science who suffered in the Inquisition, but Jews, Moslems, and Protestants. There was much persecution elsewhere: Catalan, who perceived the circulation of the blood 100 years before Harvey, was burnt at Geneva, not in Spain.

It is, of course, impossible precisely to assess the factors that go to the making of any event. Spain made certain great economic blunders; with two of them the Inquisition had much to do—the expulsion of the Jews and the Moriscos.

J. G. LUPTON.

"THE NEGRO IN FILMS"

(Skelton Robinson; 15s. net.)

WELL illustrated with appendices and a most comprehensive index, "The Negro in Films" contains sufficient subject matter to both act as an eye-opener to countless cinemagoers up and down the country who have for so long regarded the screen "nigger" as a funny man, and gladden the hearts of those progressive folk who, realising that a fellow human being, constantly portrayed as a figure of fun in the most popular medium of mass entertainment, is suffering a very deep social injury. Consequently Peter Noble's book which traces the rise of the coloured people in this medium, with appropriate comments by the author in a correspondence with the late D. W. Griffith, in which incidentally the famous producer of "The Birth of a Nation" gets much the worst of the argument, will do much to further a cause which all those of us who urgently require a new and better world in the future should actively do something about. More than that it should arouse wide interest among sociologists by its comment on the mind of the average Hollywood executive. The latter has in the past pandered to the unhappy convention: "One law for the black and another for the white", and Mr. Noble steps into the first rank of those all too few socially conscious writers on the subject, who see the Cinema as a gigantic force in its relation to life as lived by ordinary men and women and is willing to present a social document at the expense of his sales.

The author examines the development of a false and prejudiced conception entertained by many white people at the instigation of Hollywood film-makers, that the negro people have a monopoly of the idiots, villains, sub-humans and shiftless louts in the world. From this unjust treatment of the Negro in the past we reached the enlightened period during the second World War when for the first time it was possible to see coloured men and women depicted as real human beings, workers, scientists, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers and soldiers. In this timely study, the work and career of such outstanding Negro artistes as Paul Robeson and Katherine Dunham is examined and it is to be hoped that such an enjoyable contribution to the entertainment of cinema fans will be welcomed as much by those who pop in to see a Disney or Betty Grable opus, as the admirers of the best in screen art who can reel off the best of Chaplin in the same way, as I am told, the late G. W. Foote could reel off the best of Shakespeare. They will then be eschewing a certain amount of the subtle propaganda they have subconsciously swallowed for many years past: propaganda which has emanated from the same type of minds as those responsible for creating a Committee for Un-American Activities—distilled as it is by the entertainment factory of reaction, slickness, big business and "brotherly love"; the sort of love that is propagated on the condition that none of the brothers shall be black ones.

PETER COTES.

THERE WAS ONCE . . .

A LEARNED JUDGE. He prided himself greatly on his strict sense of justice. Walking along the street one day he thought to himself "My judgements are always absolutely impartial."

At the same time he bowed to a rich banker and elbowed a poor matchseller off the pavement.

W. H. W.

ACID DROPS

Missionaries will have to work a little harder if they wish to impress the world. The Bishop of Chekiang, who had started missionary work in China 42 years ago, told a Muswell Hill congregation that there were 11,000 baptised Christians in his diocese. Arithmetic was never our strong point, so we will leave readers to work out the proportion of work and finance over 42 years to the number of converts. The "Church of England Newspaper" reports that the hospital and schools in Hangchow have been rebuilt, and we would be interested to know the proportion of "Rice Christians." We suggest that the proportion is large, for we can never believe that the Chinese, who were civilised whilst we were still dressed in little more than woad, could wholeheartedly accept the Christian God.

We have noted that two religious newspapers are appealing for more simplicity in religious phraseology. This is something we have advocated for years, obviously, however, not for the same reason as our religious contemporaries. We hope we shall get the credit if this is accomplished, but we doubt that very much. Imagine the Catholic Mass spoken in English, or the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, or the Immaculate Conception, or the Word was made Flesh, or such words as Omniscient and Omnipotent reduced to simple terminology. Why, the mass of worshippers *might* understand what it is all about, and where would the Priesthood be?

We have always maintained that Freethinkers have not got a monopoly of all the vices, yet at the same time we have noticed that very few find their way to the Police Courts. This observation is prompted by a case in the Marlborough Street Magistrate's Court when Mr. Paul Bennett, V.C., said to a shop-lifter: "This is defying a Commandment—when did you last go to Church?" The implied suggestion that Church-going is likely to prevent immorality is laughable particularly when we realise that the majority of criminals have professed religion, which does not exactly enhance the so-called moral code of Christianity.

We hope we will be forgiven if we repeat the following incident, for we feel sure that it will be new to some readers. Prisoners are allowed visits by a clergyman of their own denomination. We once made an application to the Home Secretary for permission to visit in the same capacity as a clergyman, for the purpose of offering consolation and advice to Freethinkers in prison. Judge our amusement when we received an official answer from the Home Secretary that as there were so few Freethinkers in prison the scheme would be impracticable!

The Rural Dean of East Birmingham writes in the "Modern Churchman" of a Church in a new housing estate where after 10 years' work, the Sunday congregation numbers only one per cent. of the population. The Dean asserts that "consequently, the lives of 99 per cent. are impoverished socially, culturally, and spiritually." To us it seems that the Dean is viewing the matter as if from the wrong end of a telescope, and the suggestion that everyone is out of step except the one per cent. is rather good.

For our part, we congratulate the 99 per cent. on their wisdom.

The following news item has about it an air of profanity, even if not blasphemy:—

"Holy water carried by home-going Mecca pilgrims was disinfected at Durban."

Query.—At what point of the adding of disinfectant does the efficacy weaken, and the magical properties of holy water become nil? We will not be drawn into comparisons between the respective virtues of Mohammedan and Catholic brands of holy water, except that, with salt added, the Catholic brand has been used to exorcise evil spirits and poltergeists, and at Mecca most of the water from wells is undrinkable and tainted with sewerage.

Was Christ a Roman Catholic? This momentous question was recently asked of the "Universe," and strictly adhering to the truth as becomes a good Roman Catholic journal, the puzzled inquirer was gently told he was not—not exactly, of course. He was something even better and bigger, if possible. He was the "Divine Head" of the Church. He is also the Head of the "Mystical Body," that is "ourselves." We expect He is also the "Divine Head" of the Protestant Church, and the Anglican Church, and lots of other Churches like the Mormon, and that of Mrs. Eddy. And, alas, there are actually people who *sneer* at the whole outfit. What a wicked world it is!

The same journal does its best to explain the "mysteries" of the Church to its readers. It is "a truth above reason," which is a smack in the eye for Rationalists. It is a "truth" revealed by God. So Transubstantiation is a mystery; so is the Sacrifice of the Mass; and of course, the Holy Trinity. The only mystery about it all is how can intelligent people fall for this farrago of nonsense?

And what about the "miracles" of other Churches besides the Roman Church? Well, it is not denied that on occasions, "God may grant special favours" to non-Catholics, but never, never in any way "to confirm the truth of a non-Catholic religion." Anglicans, Calvinists, and Seventh-Day Adventists, will be so pleased with this generous concession.

We were pleased to see an article on Hell in the "Church Times"—an article which made it quite clear that there really was a Hell. The Modernist idea that Hell is something "within you," should be sternly repudiated by all good Christians; it is simply mocking God Almighty. Mr. Frank Biggart, the writer of the article, insists that "there is one fact of arresting significance which must be faced," namely, "after death, the judgment." It means "the day of the great divide," those who will have eternal life, and those "whose lot will be tribulation and anguish." He also insists that "all places shall be Hell where God is not," which is magnificent religious doctrine. Indeed, Mr. Biggart calls it the "Christian doctrine of Hell," and an "integral part of the Gospel."

Mr. Biggart also points out that "the gnashing of teeth, the worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched," while metaphors, mean "intense suffering." And we are glad to see he does not shirk his explaining. Hell is Hell, a real place of eternal burning, fixating, and roasting—and God be thanked that there are still Christians who believe in it.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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SUGAR PLUMS

The heartiest of Seasonal Greetings to all our readers.

The N.S.S. Annual Dinner on January 29 in the Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus, is not confined to members of the Society. Freethinkers and their friends can attend so long as accommodation is available. For that reason it is important that an early application is made, with cash included, to the General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London W.C. 1. Tickets are 12s 6d. each.

"Exploiting a child's credulity by keeping up the myth of Santa Claus is criminal," says the Rev. A. D. Hodgson, vicar of St. John's Church, Bromley, Kent. "But if a child asks you whether Father Christmas is real, tell him the truth. Otherwise he will never be able wholly to trust you again." The Rev. Mr. Hodgson had better be careful when exposing certain myths and superstitions, otherwise some of his congregation may follow his advice to its logical conclusion and challenge all superstitions, which would leave the reverend gentleman without the most important weapon in his armoury, for credulity is the basis of religion. Start a child doubting may mean that it will dispense altogether with belief. On second thoughts, we hope the parson does not heed our warning, he is doing good Freethought propaganda.

In Giuliano Romano, a village 20 miles south of Rome, a 19-year-old farmer's lad, with the help of three friends, killed his old aunt. The whole village declared that she was a witch and in league with the Devil. It was maintained that the deceased had ten years previously bewitched the mother of the young lad, and had driven her to her death. From that time the village had never given the boy's aunt any peace until the murder brought to an end this ten-year-old 'witch persecution.'

Our Swiss contemporary, "Der Freidenker," comments: "This report was circulated throughout the (Swiss) Press. Have the readers asked themselves the question, 'Whose is the responsibility for the atmosphere that makes such an act possible?'"

PERSONAL

For many years I have had the pleasure of writing an article every week for the "Freethinker" and I regret that my contribution has had to be suspended for a short time. My wife was suddenly taken seriously ill, and for a period it was touch and go whether death would be held at bay. In these circumstances, I have found it difficult writing articles. Thanks to the loyal co-operation of our staff, the "Freethinker" appears as usual. My wife is on the road to recovery and will return home as soon as circumstances permit. I shall then resume my usual "Views and Opinions" with a more settled mind.

C. C.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAPACY

"The Church is an anvil which has broken many hammers."—CALVIN.

THE present age is essentially the age of the decline of religion. The ancient animistic doctrine which in one shape or another has haunted the credulous imagination of an immature mankind is now at long last becoming dispelled in the growing light of knowledge. For our age which has as its decisive characteristic the entry of the hitherto inarticulate masses into history, now witnesses for the first time the spread of irreligion amongst the masses. This represents an absolutely new phenomenon. For prior to the French Revolution, that greatest of historical events, scientific enlightenment and the atheistic and secularistic views of the universe and of society which accompany it, adhered exclusively to enlightened aristocratic cliques and to solitary thinkers who took their lives in their hands and lived obscurely and, often enough, died violently.

The contemporary spread of irreligion amongst the broad masses of the people is, we repeat, something absolutely new, and it spells the doom of religion and of the churches which embody it. Religion to-day can only continue to exist in the more backward areas of mankind. The further progress of humanity infallibly spells its doom.

The Churches themselves understand this very well. And the Church of Rome, the oldest and most experienced of them all, understands it perfectly well; the Papacy is, after all, not "infallible" for nothing! Whatever it may or may not know about the next world, it undeniably knows a great deal about this one, it has had 19 centuries of experience. We may, in fact, say that it is precisely this knowledge which determines its present, and will decide its future.

The greatest of all the many paradoxes in the constitution of the Papacy is to be found in the fact that whilst fundamentally a political institution, it is yet founded on a religious belief the loss of which would be fatal to it. Whilst the Popes themselves may regard Christianity as (in the words ascribed to Leo X) "a profitable superstition for Popes"—and such undoubtedly it has been as a matter of historical fact—yet the Vatican is dependent on this belief. Rome would undoubtedly follow God into oblivion.

Consequently, the contemporary collapse of religious belief in all the more advanced areas in the world, which follows inevitably in the wake of economic industrialism, political liberalism, and secular scientific and historical education, inevitably spells the ultimate end of the Papacy. Only a speedy reversion to a Dark Age can now

save the Church of Rome, and its leader, the Papacy. Otherwise it will surely face the doom which overtook its historic predecessors, the Pagan Priesthoods of Antiquity. The continued expansion of modern secular civilisation and its progressive democratisation amongst the masses who are just now consciously entering history for the first time means the end of the Vatican, and the Vatican knows it! The Popes did not keep their stakes and inquisitors busy for centuries stifling such enlightenment as then existed for nothing. And it was not for nothing that already within the lifetime of our oldest contemporaries, Pope Pius IX proclaimed in his famous "Syllabus of Condemned Errors" (1864), "Let him be anathema who affirms that the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to come to terms with progress, Liberalism, and with modern civilisation."

And one can relevantly add, even if Rome were willing to compromise with modern civilisation, modern civilisation from its very nature as a culture, the life-blood of which is scientific understanding, could not possibly compromise with the Vatican, founded as it is and always has been, upon a pre-scientific culture compounded of ignorance, misunderstanding, and credulity in relation to the external universe and to the life of Man.

As the great Bradlaugh so far-sightedly proclaimed: "The final struggle will be between Rome and Reason," the latter embodied in modern secular culture, and it will be a struggle to the death.

To-day Rome is busily engaged in preparing for what she well knows is the final struggle, and all her present-day actions are determined by it. At present, the major part of her energies, in the Old World at least, are devoted to the event for which she is now busily exhorting the Catholic world to prepare; the coming "Crusade" against Russia, "the war for Christian civilisation" against Russian-inspired Communism.

For the political power of Russia, one of the two world powers of our era, and the quasi-religious discipline, dynamism and fanaticism which are associated with the ideology of present-day Communism constitutes it as "Public Enemy No. 1," in the computation of the Vatican, and Rome traditionally believes in taking her enemies one at a time.

What successively, Manicheanism, Mohammedanism, Calvinism and Liberalism have been in the past, that is Communism to-day, the "heresy" of the twentieth century; and Rome is mustering all her forces, and those of her secular allies to fight it to the finish—her own or that of the rival "Church of Moscow."

And she will stick at nothing to achieve her ends when her survival is at stake. Let no one have any doubt about that! These is no need to hark back to the "crusading" armies of Simon de Montfort, the butcher of the Albigenses, the Duke of Alva, or St. Bartholomew's Eve, one need only look at the methods by which the present Pope's "beloved son," General Franco, came to power in Spain, with the world-wide backing of militant Catholicism in the Civil War in Spain (1936-9) and at the ruthless methods by which this same "Christian General" still retains power to-day, with the whole power of the Catholic Church enlisted on behalf of his bloodthirsty régime. Incidentally, if Franco succeeds in his present attempt to secure admission to U.N.O. as his fellow Catholic—Dictator Peron—has already done, it will be simultaneously, a triumph, one of the most brilliant of Catholic diplomacy, and one of the greatest crimes even of our crime-strewn age; the ghosts of untold millions of Fascist victims would assuredly turn in their graves.

The whole present policy of the Papacy is centred upon the coming "crusade." In Rome, heavy with the memory of the centuries, they take long views. The coming anti-Communist crusade takes its place in the archives of the Vatican along with those earlier crusades against the successive enemies of the Church which we have enumerated above.

But Rome prepares for all eventualities, including defeat, that is of course, temporary defeat, for the Papacy, the self-styled "Pilgrim of Eternity" can never admit that its defeat can ever be permanent and final; for such an admission would mark the Church as what it actually is, a product of time, and not of eternity, of earth, and not of heaven. Nonetheless, there are signs available for those who can read—between the lines—that Rome herself is unsure of the result of the approaching clash.

It is to this unsureness that we may ascribe the persistent rumours that the Papacy is about to quit Communist-infested Rome for some safer seat. Had Communism won the Italian General Election on April 18 last, we were credibly assured that the exodus would already have eventuated to either Madrid or Buenos Aires. But the Church won its Italian opening round in its struggle with Communism.

Still more it can be discerned in the frantic eagerness that Rome is now displaying to acclimatise Catholicism in other continents besides her traditional but now precarious headquarters, Europe.

It is to this last desire that we must ascribe certain epoch-marking recent developments within the Catholic Church; the creation of Chinese cardinals and African bishops—the extraordinary solicitude manifested by the Vatican for the conversion of Japan—a desire which has produced some curious and diverting twists and turns in Papal policy. To the same cause must be ascribed the now official policy of concentrating in every missionary country upon the development of a "native" clergy as an essential condition for the establishment of national Catholic churches in non-European lands.

All such developments when viewed as Rome herself views them, in the grand perspective of world strategy, can only mean one thing, the centres of world power, in the opinion of the Vatican, are shifting from decrepit Europe. To keep pace with the times the Vicars of Christ must move too. Had St. Peter, the "first Pope," been advised of future development, he would have made his way to America and not to Rome! (His future successors may well be Americans.)

For there can be no doubt at all that it is towards the Western Hemisphere, to the "New World" originally presented by the Papacy to the Catholic Powers, Spain and Portugal, that Rome is looking for her salvation to-day. Rome makes her own, to-day, the historic words of George Canning about "calling in the New World to redress the balance of the Old."

At present, the Vatican's "marriage of convenience" with Fascism has been succeeded by the present alliance with the American plutocracy of Wall Street. It is U.S.A. that is cast for the role of "Crusader No. 1," when the "crusade for Christian civilisation" does eventually get going. The Cross to-day depends for its effective survival upon the monopolist of the atomic bomb, and a Protestant monopolist at that, with a Federal Constitution which wholly ignores the supernatural.

That is, Anglo-Saxon America, the present greatest world-power, Rome's chosen "sword" against "godless Russia." But there is also Catholic America as well in the Latin South, probably the Vatican's most ambitious project to-day is concerned with Argentine, the Clerical.

Fascist Empire of Peron, which is Latin America's greatest power. By means of a vast immigration scheme confined to Latin and Catholic races, administered by a Priest and blessed by the Church, Peron aims to build up Argentina as a world Power.

Perhaps the ambitious dictator and his Vatican backers dream already of the coming centuries when the Catholic South will succeed the Protestant North as the master of the Western Hemisphere, or even as the leading world-Power! Perhaps even too as Rome's successor as the headquarters of world Catholicism.

Be that as it may, Rome is to-day preparing for her coming struggle with the Communist "heresy" upon which her very existence depends. If she loses, she is finished. But even if she and her secular backers win, she will only have obtained a respite, and probably only a brief one. For her fundamental enemy is not Communism, but that modern secular civilisation of which Russian Communism is only one form, and not, we hope, either the last or the best.

Sooner or later Rome must destroy that civilisation if she wishes to survive at all. If in order to destroy that inimical civilisation it will be necessary to destroy civilisation itself—well and good—so much the worse for civilisation.

Rome has faced Dark Ages before; the last one made her fortune, and in this respect history may repeat itself. Rome may again return to power on the ruins of human culture. At least, this is her sole remaining chance of survival. She must now kill civilisation, or else civilisation will certainly kill her.

Civilisation will have to kill her. For Rome is tenacious of life. We may, indeed, say of the Roman theocracy what Lenin once said of the Moscow theocracy of the Czars. "It will never die naturally; you will have to kill it."

F. A. RIDLEY.

A DOCTOR ON RELIGION

IV.

IN "Why Believe?" the author, Dr. A. Rendle Short, claims that it is "utterly unthinkable" to say that the four gospels are "impudent fabrications." If he had been defending the "Arabian Nights" he would have used precisely the same language. It is "utterly unthinkable" to say that the story of Jesus being carried about by a Devil is an "impudent fabrication." It is "utterly unthinkable" to say that the story of Aladdin being carried by a genie is an "impudent fabrication." I have never been able to see any difference in the stories, and while it is true that Aladdin could always rub his lamp to be helped to perform the most incredible and miraculous feats, so in exactly the same way Jesus would appeal to his "Father which art in Heaven" to help him in performing "miracles." These stories of miracle-mongering come down to us on precisely the same evidence whether it is Jesus or Aladdin who has the gift to perform them. And here I may as well say that in the ultimate, miracles do not depend on "evidence." A miracle is quite impossible and has never been performed. No evidence could prove that a clock could strike less than one, or that dead saints could come out of their graves and carry on as if death was just a little after-dinner snooze.

Dr. Short says that the gospel writers had to write for "an enormous public who had themselves been eyewitnesses of the incidents, had themselves listened to the sermons." It would be interesting to know how he makes out in the first place "an enormous public." Does he count in millions or what? And is not the whole crux

of the problem to produce the evidence that the gospel writers were appealing to an audience who had heard Jesus?

Now if there is anything quite certain, it is that the gospels, as we have them, were quite unknown before the year A.D. 150 and quite possibly before the year A.D. 180. And it is also quite certain, if any certainty exists about anything relating to the gospels, that they were written not for an "enormous public" but for various small groups of Christians; and these four "canonical" ones have no more validity than the Apocryphal ones. The only reason I have been able to discover why there should be only four gospels in the eyes of their sponsors is that there are four winds coming from the four corners of the earth. It was not at all because they had to appeal to "an enormous public." Dr. Short has a simple way of proving the truth of the Virgin Birth:—

"Matthew, by some process not known to us, has obtained Joseph's narrative of the events; and Luke, probably by actual personal interview, has obtained Mary's. No one else could have known the true facts from the beginning. Jesus was indeed conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God, the perfect Man."

I have read a great many "proofs" of the Virgin Birth, but this passage would be hard to beat for sheer unmitigated balderdash. How a doctor could have written it is beyond my comprehension. One thing is certain. I doubt if even the most fervent Roman Catholic doctor would believe either a Joseph or a Mary *these days*. Fancy any man saying that what an "angel" said to him in a dream must be true; or that when a girl says the father of her child is the Holy Ghost, that also must be true. What a blight religion casts on intelligence!

Dr. Short's defence of the Resurrection follows the usual lines—it must be true because it must be true. There are six "independent" witnesses, Matthew and Co., and it is quite unthinkable that they should tell a lie. Moreover, how can you explain the "empty tomb?" Jesus was put into the tomb, and three days later it was empty, and if that does not prove the Resurrection to you—really you must be beyond reason. Did not Jesus die? Was he not buried? And were not the grave clothes left in the empty tomb? Had not the guard fled? Is it not an undeniable fact that "angels took their place," and the Jewish "authorities" could not produce the body?

This appeal to "angels" obsesses Dr. Short, but of course any man who believes in devils is bound to believe in angels. And with the aid of angels one can prove anything.

"The Resurrection appearances break every known law of visions" says Dr. Short. They certainly do—they even break every known law. The Resurrection is sheer myth for which there is no more evidence than for the Virgin Birth. It is a fiction made up by the gospel writers. Dr. Short says the gospels were written for "an enormous public"—who were mostly Jews; and it is the Jews who have consistently denied the Resurrection. In fact, as I have already pointed out in these articles, one of them, according to the Christian authority, Justin Martyr, laughingly declared that the whole story of Jesus was an "invention" and that it was he, Justin Martyr, who said that there had been a crucifixion. The Jews at the supposed time of Jesus were living witnesses of all the marvels believed in by Dr. Short, and yet they have, in spite of the most terrible persecution at the

hands of the followers of gentle Jesus (who never cease boasting how splendidly they follow him) always rejected the absurd claims made for the "only Son of the Living God."

The Jews also laugh at the so-called prophecies of Jesus in their Old Testament—prophecies put into the chapter headings of the translation used by Christians called the Authorised Version. Not being able to invent the incidents to put into their life of Jesus, the gospel writers "pinched" them from the Old Testament; and people like Dr. Short call them "prophecies." Nothing can be easier than to write prophecies in this way.

There is nothing original whatever in this preposterous story of a Son of God. Everything about him had been said in some form or other long before his supposed birth. Virgin births and Mothers of God were commonplace in the East. Gods almost always died at Easter, and began to live again. They were nearly always born about the end of December. The births were bound to be "supernatural." They rarely did any work but roved about "doing good." More often than not they were initiated into "mysteries," and thenceforth delivered harangues much in the style of the long speeches made up by John which he put into the mouth of Jesus. The God or Hero always had enemies who eventually killed him or had him killed. And he nearly always went visiting the damned in hell before flying up to heaven.

If the reader would like proof that this is so, let him read "The Myth of the Magus," by Prof. E. M. Butler (Cambridge University Press, 1948), where a number of Gods and Magicians are gathered together and their ridiculous pretensions blown sky-high. I do not know how much Prof. Butler believes of the story of Jesus, but she lumps him in between Appollonius of Tyana and Simon Magus, and appears no more to credit his "history" than that of Zoroaster, Moses or Pythagoras. In fact, to find "Christ," as she calls him, in the same company with Dr. Faust, Friar Bacon and Mme. Blavatsky will not be particularly pleasing to the generality of Christians, and certainly not to Dr. Short. Long ago I came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was a fictional character grafted on to the God Almighty of the Gnostics who, in Heaven, was not much use; and so he was brought down to earth—probably by Marcion. That is what may have happened, though of course it is just "speculation" on my part. Jesus Christ may have had another origin but it is difficult to trace.

When it comes to "prophecies" of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, Dr. Short swallows the lot; when it comes however to obeying the commands in the same book known as the Mosaic law, overboard it goes. "It has been set aside," he tells us, "for Christians." Of course. Summarily to throw it overboard is a necessity for Christians, for otherwise they could not explain why they worship Jesus on the day of the Sun, and why they do not follow Moses in his dietary laws. And many Christians, like Dr. Barnes, are ready to throw overboard most of the New Testament as well.

During the past 40 years, I have read dozens of "apologetic" works but I have rarely read anything quite as silly as this "Why Believe?" by Dr. Rendle Short. I suppose it has been written to convince Christians in some way. I can fancy the more intelligent of them roaring with laughter at some of the infantile arguments.

The Christian Church has had able writers and defenders in the past. It must be in a very bad way if this is the kind of work it produces now to convince the unbeliever.

H. CUTNER.

CHRISTMAS

THE custom of celebrating the birth of the mythical figure, Jesus Christ, has no foundation, reason or even excuse for its existence. The Jesus story is nothing more than a myth which was taken from and copied after many fabulous tales which were the bases of other religious systems, known in the Christian world as pagan religions. They were all essentially the same story with different time and place settings. We of the occident have accepted the latest of these fables, the Jesus story, as being a true account of the birth, life and death of the Saviour of mankind. Other peoples, of the Orient, who have accepted earlier versions of the same story, condemn the Jesus story as being heathen and false. Each group of adherents to one story must of necessity condemn the beliefs of each of the other groups. This is the inherent nature of all religions, namely that individuals of any one religious group believe that their religion is the only one true and bona fide faith—all others they claim to be false.

The whole Jesus story, with its "original sin" lie, its "miraculous birth" lie and its "redemption" nonsense, is utterly ridiculous, preposterous and repugnant to the rational mind. It is fit to be handed out as truth only to the mentally weak.

This story is inculcated as truth into the minds of children who cannot reason. This is one manifestation of the fraudulence and pusillanimity of organised religion (the churches) and the clergy. They take advantage of humanity before it reaches the age of reason in order to perpetuate their fraudulent commerce from generation to generation.

JAMES C. CATHINGS (Sr.)

EPITAPHS IN RHYME

A SUDDEN shower of rain flooding out of the grey November sky the other afternoon drove me to shelter in Southwark Cathedral, where I consoled myself with the thought that the downfall of rain could not last long and wandered round looking at the tombs and effigies. John Gower, the poet, is buried here and his bones have been moved three times since his original interment in this spot. There are one or two items of interest here, particularly to the lover of old London, but my attention was speedily taken by a reclining stone figure and I made my way towards it.

This turned out to be one Lockyer, a quack doctor of London in the seventeenth century. He was apparently famous for his piety and pills, and the rhymed epitaph that stands above his tomb is an amusing testimony to both these qualities, and, incidentally, to the fact that he must have been in his day a well-known figure; it runs as follows:—

Here Lockyer lies interr'd, enough; his name
Speakes one hath few competitors in fame:
A Name soe Greute, so Generall may scorne
Inscriptions which do vulgar tombs adorne
A diminution 'tis to write in verse
His eulogies, which most men's mouths rehearse.
His virtues and his PILLS are soe well known
That envy can't confine them under stone,
But they'll survive his dust and not expire
Till all things else at th'universal fire.
This verse is lost: his PILL Embalmes him safe
To future times without an Epitaph.

Lockyer died in 1672, this epitaph which was presumably written then, was in some way damaged.

and the present plate bears the words "Repaired October, 1741."

Rather earlier than Lockyer's tomb is a plaque that was erected to commemorate the death of a young girl, Susanna Barford, who died in 1652 at the tender age of ten years and thirteen weeks. Special mention is made of her piety and virtue, and the rhyme in her memory is quaint and not without beauty:—

And death and envye both must say 'twas fitt
Her memory should thus in brass be writ.
Here lies interred within this bed of dust
A virgin pure, not stained by carnall lust;
Such grace the King of Kings bestowed upon her
That now she lives with him a maid of honour
Her stage was short, her thread was quickly spun,
Drawne out and cut, got heaven, her worke was done.
This world to her was but a traged play;
She came and saw't, dislik't and passed away.

What a curious light on religious belief this gives!
And how typical it is of the seventeenth century.

James the First was married here in Southwark Cathedral, and there is a rhyme in memory of one of his gentlemen on a very ornate tomb on which are the figures of the said gentleman and his wife. It is clearly labelled; apparently the anonymous writer of the epitaph wanted to make quite sure that there was no doubt who it was for:—

An Epitaph upon James Trehearne, Gentleman Portar to King James the First.

Had Kings the power to lend their subjects breath
Trehearne thous shouldst not be cast down by death.
Thy Royal Master still would keep thee then
But length of days are beyond the reach of men.
Nor wealth, nor strength or great mens' love can

The wound death's arrows make for thow hast these.
In thy King's court good place to thee is given
Whence thow shalt go to Ye King's court in heaven.

Another revealing sidelight on belief, belonging as unmistakably as the first to the seventeenth century.

Having jotted these three epitaphs down, it occurred to me how hard Pettigrew must have worked when he compiled his collection of them. This volume published during the last century has long been out of print, and it is too much to hope that some publisher will ever reprint it. With these and similar thoughts running through my head, I noticed it had stopped raining, and made my way into the bustle of Borough High Street.

VICTOR E. NEUBURG.

THE GODS DO NOTHING NOW!

The genealogies of all the Gods
Reach back to man's first feeble frightened guess,
At what dread Powers controlled the fiendish odds
'Gainst which he warred to ease his grim duress.
The urge that spins Orion's swirl of suns
With equal blindness breeds the cancer's spawn;
It lights the lusts of Visigoths and Huns,
It spreads the calm effulgence of the dawn.
"The gods do nothing now," complain the pious,
While sceptics doubt they ever eased our pains;
No prayer has yet provoked a heavenly bias,
The reign of law man's destiny ordains.
Across the crumbling kingdoms of the Past,
There creep the ghostly caravans of death,
The corpses are of Gods who breathed their last,
And perished with the last believer's breath.

"PIONEER."

ROPING THEM IN

A New Society for Christian Publicity has just been formed with its own special journal called, "The Christian Commentary," and part of its work is to be "publishing periodicals for those outside the life and work of the Church." We hope every encouragement will be given to the new venture for it is difficult these days for us to find worthy opponents. If the new Society really means business, we shall try our best to give it plenty of work to do. It is about time that Christians should show some little courage in meeting those outside "the life and work of the Church."

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held December 16, 1948

In the absence of the president, owing to the illness of Mrs. Cohen, Mr. W. Griffiths was elected to the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Seibert, Bryant, Wood, Ebury, Lupton, Woodley, Page, Morris, Taylor, Barker, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton and the Secretary.

Minutes of the previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

A resolution was passed expressing sincere sympathy with Mrs. Cohen in her illness, and wishing her a speedy and complete recovery, and sympathy with the president in the trying time he was passing through owing to Mrs. Cohen's illness.

New members were admitted to Bradford, Glasgow and to the Parent Society. Lecture reports and future arrangements concerning Stratford, Conway Hall, Newcastle, Nottingham and Merseyside Branches were dealt with.

Report of the proceedings of the meeting of the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers was presented, with details of arrangements to date, with likely costs, number of business sessions, public meetings, etc.

A resolution was passed on the proposed national campaign against crime, pointing out that the prominence being given to the churches was misleading. Ample evidence is available that religion is not a remedy for crime.

The first notice concerning the Annual Conference for 1949 was ordered to be sent to branches.

Progress in the arrangements for the Annual Dinner on 29th January was reported, and the importance of an early application for tickets stressed in order to avoid disappointment.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for 27th January and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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, December 28, 7 p.m.: "Christian Ethics." Mr. W. MURRAY.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Germany—the Key to Europe." Mr. R. FLETCHER.

SECOND-HAND BOOKS. Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 21 Rosslyn Hill, N.W. 3.

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