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## IEWS AND OPINIONS

### Intolerance

THE question of how far the Roman Church endorses the policy of religious persecution is only a minor aspect of a much larger subject. This is, "Why should intolerance, with its consequent persecution, be so generally and so universally associated with religion?" This is not something that is peculiar to Christianity, it exists with nearly all kinds of religion. It is the first thing that strikes one who comes to the study of religion. Intolerance, the determination to suppress anyone who acts so as to give offence to the gods, is one of the oldest, the most general, the least questioned manifestation of religious feeling.

So far as Christendom is concerned, until very recent times the right to persecute was hardly ever questioned. Roman Catholics might resent Protestant persecution, as Protestants might resent that of the Roman Church; but hardly anyone questioned the position that the suppression of heretical opinion was the first duty of the true believer. The Roman Church, on one side, elaborated the most minute rules for the detection and punishment of heresy, and developed the most brutal methods of torture known to any system. On the other hand, Protestants were agreed that it was the duty of the civil power to root out heresy, even at the cost of the death of the heretic. As usual, whenever Christians agreed upon anything, it was nearly always upon something that was either idiotic or damnable.

From this primitive mental condition, Roman and Greek civilisations were almost free. Roman life, as Gibbon has said, was nearer complete emancipation than the Greek, although there was not, in either case, anything in the nature of the systematic legal persecution such as existed under Christian rule. If anyone questions this, he need only compare the freedom and the quality of the discussions of the gods, such as meet us in either Greek or Roman literature, with the horror with which Christians shrank from anyone who questioned either the being or the conduct of their deity. Here, again, the growth of Christianity meant a reversion to a lower level of life and thought. The thought becomes more primitive, the spirit more intolerant. It heralded, as Gibbon somewhere says, that triumph of barbarism and religion over ancient culture which was to prepare the way for the "Dark Ages." Religious persecution was not an act of intolerance. It was an expression of the highest religious and social duty. If Christianity be true, that attitude is logical and impregnable. If it be true that one cannot be a good citizen in the absence of Christian or religious belief, if—as was held for long by all believers, and by a very large number of Christians to-day—to reject the belief in God is to weaken morality and destroy the basis of social life, and if, in addition, the avowed unbeliever is one who endangers the immortal welfare of all around, then his removal is as justifiable as is the destruction of the germs of an epidemic disease.

The only escape from this conclusion is to admit that it does not seriously matter whether a man believes in the gods or not. And what Christian can, or dare, admit that? It would be a confession that his belief is a more or less amiable speculation that no one is the better for holding or the worse for rejecting.

As a matter of fact, the decline of the spirit of intolerance has always taken place as a consequence of the weakening of religious belief. Historically it is not true that Protestantism was either based on the belief in freedom of inquiry or the wish to attain it. What was claimed was primarily the right to differ from the Roman Church, but it was at one with the Roman Church on the duty of true Christianity to suppress all that was against it. All over the civilised world toleration in religion is only an expression of the growth of unbelief. The real actions of the greatest Churches were finely described by H. C. Lea, in his series of books dealing with actions and qualities. Here is a sample:—

It came at a time when the old order of things was giving way to the new—when the ancient customs of the barbarians, the ordeal, the wager of law, the wergild, were growing obsolete in the increasing intelligence of the age, when a new system was springing into life under the revived study of Roman law . . . The whole judicial system of the European monarchies was undergoing reconstruction, and the happiness of future generations depended on the character of the new institutions. That in this reorganisation, the worst features of the imperial jurisprudence—the use of torture and the inquisitorial process—should be eagerly, nay, almost exclusively adopted, should be divested of the safeguards which in Rome restricted their abuse, should be exaggerated in all their evil tendencies and should, for five centuries, become the prominent characteristic of the criminal jurisprudence of Europe, may safely be ascribed to the fact that they received the sanction of the Church . . . Of all the curses which the Inquisition brought in its train this, perhaps, was the greatest—that until the closing years of the eighteenth century, throughout the greater part of Europe, the inquisitorial process, as developed for the destruction of heresy, became the customary method of dealing with all who were under accusation; that the accused was treated as one having no rights, whose guilt was assumed in advance, and from whom confession was to be extorted by guile or force. L. H. C. Lea: *History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages*. pp. 559-60.)

On the one side, the Church legalised and moralised brutality. On the other, it legalised and moralised intolerance and persecution. And just as the brutality of its legal methods reflected itself in social life, so intolerance became more than it would have been otherwise in things that were outside the scope of religion. The godly were not ashamed of being intolerant, they took pride in it. Not to listen to the other side became a mark

of strong character. Remember that for many generations the peoples of Europe lived under a rule that made honesty of thought and speech two of the greatest offences that any man could make. The Church had compassionate words for the thief, for the murderer, the wife-beater, the drunkard. There was but one unforgivable offence, disbelief in religion accompanied by honesty of speech. It did not persecute hypocrites, they were beyond its reach, even if it had troubled about them. It was the man who said honestly what he believed that suffered. The brave and mentally honest men who doubted were weeded out, the cowards, the liars were sure of getting to heaven. That state of things is not yet ended. The Church has made hypocrisy so much a part of our public life; men who stand forward in public life are not alarmed at not telling the truth about their religious opinions.

This is part of the price we have had to pay for the existence of the Christian Church. But the great, lasting evil worked by the Church was not on the dead, but upon the living. As with a disease, it is not the one that kills, but the one that maims that does most harm. So with the Church and heresy, it was not to those who died at the stake that the chief evil was done, but to the mental type that remained. We owe it chiefly to the Church that so much of our social life to-day is riddled with insincerity and hypocrisy. It was the law of the Christian Church which damned the honest thinker and crowned the cowardly conformist.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## CHRISTIANITY AND PROGRESS

(Concluded from page 202)

FROM the standpoint of the social historian the history of Christianity can be most conveniently divided into three distinctive periods, each of which was marked by a particular relationship with society and with its contemporary social progress, the first of which periods we commented on in the preceding article. It was there suggested that religions, to exist and still more to expand, must solve their contemporary social problems and that, in pursuance of this sociological principle, early Christianity did actually do so.

We arrived, accordingly, at the conclusion that, during its initial period, roughly corresponding to the first four centuries of Christianity, the Christian Church discharged a social role which was not completely reactionary, but which did, in fact, correspond, in part at least, with contemporary social needs, e.g., the Christian Church, along with the Roman Empire, did actually unify the then Western World, and this was indubitably progressive under the concrete circumstances of the day.

The second period in the consecutive history of Christianity was expressed in its millenium of "totalitarian" rule over mediæval "Christendom." During this long era—C. 500-1500—which represents the golden, the classical age of Christianity in relation to its maximum social influence, we observed a gradual transformation of the Church from a relatively progressive to an entirely reactionary role.

For during the period of the actual "Dark Age" (C. 500-1000), the role of the Church still remained a relatively progressive one. I do not see how it can reasonably be denied that the Benedictine and other Christian missionaries discharged a civilising and, accordingly, a generally progressive role throughout the Europe of the "Dark Ages." Or that, if the Christian civilisation of the age was primitive, that of the pagan barbarians without it, would have been even more

so. (N.B.—A masterly survey of this problem from the Rationalist angle, the survey of an objective historian and not of a mere partisan, can be found in the remarkable book of the late Dr. Delisle Burns, "The First Europe," to which the interested readers' attention is, herewith, directed.)

When, however, "The Dark Ages" passed (in the era of the Crusades—C. 1100) into "The Middle Ages" properly so called, the reactionary social role of Christianity began to become more pronounced. As Mr. Bertrand Russell (in his pre-B.B.C. period) has aptly put it: ever since the 13th century the age of Dante and of the great cathedrals, the grip of the Church upon European culture has, more and more, come to resemble the grip of the dead hand, and, thereafter, all that was vital in European society was caught up in a growing revolt against the Church and its social and intellectual stranglehold.

One may relevantly add that it was, in no way, an accident that it was precisely at this era that the Church of Rome first evolved its mediæval "Gestapo" (founded early 13th century), the Inquisition, to arrest the spread of heresy, the Church, that is, set itself the Canute-like task of forcibly arresting the incoming tide of intellectual progress: a point always reached, sooner or later, by every ecclesiastical culture founded upon a static interpretation of history.

With the Renaissance, which originated modern culture, and the Reformation, which summarily put an end to the "totalitarian" Church of the Middle Ages. It we arrive at the third, modern era of Christianity, it is hardly necessary, writing in "The Freethinker," to indicate again the profoundly reactionary character of modern Christianity. Some of the more radical ultra-Protestant sects, such as the Calvinist "Independents" in the 17th century, and the Unitarians in more recent times, have periodically fulfilled a socially progressive role. But, in general, and in particular reference to the larger and more powerful Churches, the historic role of modern Christianity in relation to human progress has been the traditional role of King Canute vainly seeking to arrest the incoming tide of secularly-inspired culture.

Since the Reformation Christianity has been an anachronism; since the French Revolution, a social and intellectual absurdity: its part in the solution of social problems upon progressive lines has been absolutely nil. Whilst all the master achievements of the modern intellect, from Copernicus to Darwin and Freud, have been effected in the teeth of bitter and usually active Christian hostility. Incidentally, it is from the most powerful of the Churches, the Church of Rome, that the most determined and continuous hostility has come to all the major achievements of the secular intellect of modern times.

I remarked above, and I repeat here, that a totally negative and totally reactionary religion represents something which cannot possibly survive: for the basic principle of "the survival of the fittest" includes also the Supernatural and its devotees in its social incidence. As already observed, if Christianity succeeded in the first instance, that could only have been the case because it did really stand for something in part, at least, progressive, under the concrete conditions of that now remote age.

To-day, contrarily, Christianity stands for nothing, and solves nothing under the so different circumstances of our era. Intellectually, Christian theology had a certain rationality in a pre-Copernican Universe and a pre-Darwinian humanity. But that was a long time ago. To-day, Christian theology, like the fabled coffin of

Mohammed, is suspended insecurely in the void. The attempt made, to-day, in certain academic circles to construe human progress in terms of Christian tradition, constitutes an obvious absurdity and, one may reasonably suspect, not even an honest absurdity.

Without function in the present, and without meaning for the future, Christianity is then doomed: it is without further significance for human progress. Failing for some atomic disaster (perhaps deliberately provoked by itself as a unique means of salvation) it seems a reasonably safe assumption that another century will witness the end of Christianity in the centres of human culture, even if, like paganism before it, it lingers on for some time longer in the backwoods.

However, it would be entirely false, it would be, in fact, the height of absurdity, to suppose that the need for a militant freethought movement will disappear with the now inevitable collapse of Christianity. For, to suppose this, would be to assume the automatic evolution of human progress. But to make such an entirely unwarrantable assumption would be to repeat the error of some of the early too optimistic champions of human evolution. The present age and, in particular, the recent history of Europe, should be amply sufficient to disprove any undue optimism with regard to the inevitability of human progress.

In actual fact, not speculative theory, Christianity, and in our own day, was all but succeeded by an even worse religion than itself at its worst. For Nazi Hitlerism was, in reality, not so much a political as a religious ideology which narrowly failed to conquer the world and, consequently, to succeed and to displace Christianity; and compared with its horrors, those of the Inquisition fade into utter insignificance. For Hitler was a genuine Messianic type, a "Nordic" prophet, and Nazism had all the characteristics of a religion of warriors; that is, all except one, it had not quite enough warriors.

We repeat: Christianity is certainly doomed, but this does not inevitably mean the automatic furtherance of human progress. Here the conscious intervention of the human will in the form of a militant freethought will still remain as absolutely necessary as in the past—Christian world as it is now.

For we repeat: human progress is never automatic, and Christianity may equally be succeeded by something worse as by something better. To borrow a useful phrase from Mr. Joseph MacCabe, we ought not to say that human progress will replace Christianity: rather should we say it shall replace it.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### A FAMOUS FORGERY

*The following is the text of one of the Christian Church's most impudent forgeries—a forgery which is even now trotted out as genuine wherever ignorance of Christian claims prevails. We give it here in full.)*

Publius Lentulus,

President in Judea in the Reign of Tiberius Cæsar.

To the Senate of Rome.

Conscrip't Fathers,  
There appeared in these our days a man of great virtue, named Jesus Christ, who is yet living among us, and of the Gentiles is accepted for a Prophet of Truth; but his own disciples call him the Son of God. He raiseth the dead and cureth all manner of diseases. A man of stature somewhat tall and comely, and in proportion of body well shaped; his hands and arms delectable to behold; with a very reverend countenance, such as the beholders may

both love and fear. His hair is of the colour of a filbert full ripe to his ears, whence downward it is more orient of colour, somewhat curling or waving about his shoulders. In the midst of his head is a seam or partition of his hair, after the Nazarites. His forehead is plain and delicate. His face without spot or wrinkle, beautified with a comely red. His nose and mouth are exactly formed. His beard is thick, the colour of his hair, not of any great length, but forked. His look, innocent and mature. His eyes grey, clear, and quick. In reproving he is awful; in admonishing, courteous and friendly; in speaking very temperate, modest, and wise. It cannot be remembered that any have seen him laugh, but many have seen him weep. A man for his singular beauty surpassing the children of man.

*This Famous Forgery* was first quoted by Eusebius, the notorious liar and Father of the Christian Church, born about A.D. 260, and became Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. This Christian Father of Lies was imprisoned as a villain, and his character is fully stated in Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," chapter XVI. In this forgery, as a Christian testimony, a very vulgar one, it is seen how spurious evidences were fabricated by lying for the glory of God and Church preferment. This forgery is admitted by honest scholars to be an impudent imposture. They have examined the Greek MSS. of Josephus's "Jewish Antiquities." With these Christian critics, the names of Dr. Lardner and Bishop Warburton are prominent as pronouncers that the famous passage is a rank forgery. In all of Josephus's works,\* the original ones, the word Christ is never written.

Josephus did not acknowledge Christ and how could a pious Jew write of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the World, when the Jews hanged Christ when condemned by trial as an impostor and blasphemer?

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

\* Vide page 1,081, Josephus, Vol. II.

### HOLY MOMENTS!

THE PRIEST IN GREECE: "Easter Sunday, and Old Sixty Hairs, the priest with the small beard, is busy collecting eggs. Some, who dare not refuse, will still mutter the worst curse of all: 'I would destroy the whole world with this, and give my soul to my friend.' Evening, and the sea is silk. The ship which serves the island is illuminated in the bay, moving slowly in chugging circles. Lights spring up on the watch tower. From the churches, with their ikons of beaten silver in which holes are cut for painted faces, come the processions with their candles, some climbing up and over the cobbled streets of the town, others moving twice by the water's mirror, all with a Christmas-cake affair on high, a kernel in which is hidden the crucifix. Wax drips everywhere. In the square, where hundreds of fingers of light pause, Old Sixty Hairs can hardly be heard above the jokes and laughter. One procession is late, coming from a far-off chapel. As it appears the lights on the ship fuse. An old woman cries, 'Why have you slighted our procession?'"

THE PRIEST IN FRANCE: "The first glimpse of morning brings the landworkers to the cafés in the Place for rank coffee and orange-flavoured bread fashioned in the shape of a grid in memory, and a grim one at that, of St. Lawrence. . . . Then the church bell, which lives securely in an iron cage, brings the wives of the bourgeoisie into the square to the priest who can be spied at night listening to the mechanical music of the buvette, reading his breviary and stamping his feet under his skirts in time with the marching tunes. Then, after the sacred wafers, the shops open in the Place—the horse meat, the tarts filled with a glue of wild spinach, the bon-bons tied with butterfly wings for a birthday. And out slips the priest's housekeeper to buy the papers—where is 'Monsieur de Paris,' the name of any public executioner, and the next public execution?"

OSWELL BLAKESTON

(from *Holidays and Happy Days*, Phoenix House, 10s. 6d.)

## ACID DROPS

The Mission to London is now in full swing, and Dr. Wand will soon be adding up the victories and will no doubt forget the defeats. This is not the first time the hosts of the Lord have gone forth to battle, and it will not be the last, and if by any chance they cause a ripple on the surface of London, London will get over it and in its usual fashion consign it to the limbo of forgotten things.

Missionary affairs seem to be in a bit of a pickle in Korea. If things did not improve, declared the Rev. C. Hunt, who had known Korea for thirty years, the Church would "have to withdraw," an awful possibility which not even the power of God Almighty could help. It appears that all the Japanese priests had left, and the country was divided by an "iron curtain" which prevented any help being given to Christians behind it. The theological college was housed in a dilapidated hospital, partially destroyed, but—alas—there were now not enough priests to carry on Christ's work which meant, perhaps, that the Cathedral may have to become (horrid thought) a cinema. It seems rather strange that of Dr. Wand's helpers in his "Mission" to London, numbering tens of thousands of enthusiastic workers, none will venture their happiness and comfort for the Lord's sake in Korea. Has God ceased his divine calls?

Very cold water was poured on to "rapid" conversions by the Rev. C. E. Young at the Chelmsford Diocesan Church Union. He found that some of the clergy are a bit too quick in their "conversions," and thought that the converts were rarely properly instructed. That is quite true, of course, but instructed or not, they rarely seemed to know their religion, say, like a good, hearty Atheist. Perhaps that is the reason why they still believe in Christianity.

The Bishop of Croydon told a lunch-time meeting at the Guildhall the other day that "people will not see Christ in the Blessed Sacrament until they see him in you and me." That is to say, if people recognise in the Bishop of Croydon a Christ-like character, they would immediately see the change in "the Blessed Sacrament"—a wafer into a real Jesus—as soon as the priest in charge uttered his magical formula. How any intelligent person can listen to such drivel without roaring with laughter is beyond us.

That singularly ineffective body, the Christian Evidence Society, had another Annual Meeting pass almost unnoticed even to their brethren in Christ. A note in the *Church Times* tells us that a Miss Knight Bruce spoke of the "dreadful inertia of the laity" with regard to Christianity, and she added that it was "tragic" that so few Church people helped the priests in Hyde Park. She thought that the Church would have to do "a mighty lot of thinking" if it wanted to combat Communism. But she might have added that the Church has still to do a much mightier lot of thinking to combat Freethought.

Most people know how the word "literally" is misused, but a gem comes from Dr. Walter Carey who culled it from a parish magazine—"Our beloved vicar has just resigned. He was literally the father of every child in the parish."

The Vatican radio shrilly objects to the way Zionists show "their scornful hatred of Christianity"—as if the almost unceasing persecution of the Jews at the hands of Roman Catholics for nearly 2,000 years should now be completely forgotten. The Vatican also objects to Israel being "constitutionally based on Jewish religious law," while claiming at the same time the right of Roman Catholics to Christian constitutional law. For many centuries, the Pope, supported by military mercenaries, forced his religion with unparalleled ferocity on to unarmed peoples; he is now complaining when the people he so cruelly tortured are now in a position to tell him to go to—well, the wonderful place Christ reserved for unbelievers.

A Mr. W. J. Loughrey, almost with tears in his eyes, complained that "many men in the Communist Party bear good Catholic names" and added that words failed him to describe what their fathers, who would have died for their Faith, would have said "if they knew what their children were doing." But don't the fathers know? As good Catholics are they not now sitting at the feet—or is it the right hand?—of Jesus living for ever up in Paradise? Really, Mr. Loughrey will be hauled up before his Bishop if he is not careful.

Beauty, it is true, is in the eyes of the beholder. But imagination is somewhat strained when we are informed by the Rev. Dr. Cowan that, although many people do not normally go near a church, they nevertheless desire "baptism because of the sheer beauty of the service." Those who have been present at a baptism will be able to recall the scene, the squalling infant held by an overdressed priest and the "god-parents" answering stupid questions and promising on the infant's behalf to renounce the devil and all his works and pomps, with perhaps a crowning indignity of naming the infant which in later life it does its best to hide.

On the face of it, it looks as if the Christian fetish book is falling into proper perspective, and this relic of a bygone age no longer inspires the fear it once did, except amongst the most primitive. For instance, a woman complained to the Chairman of the Fulham Bench Tribunal that her landlord had lied, and should be made to give evidence on the Bible. That this procedure is not any more likely to produce the truth than is the breaking of a plate was evidently supported by the Chairman, who said that evidence given on the Bible makes very little difference, in fact, "I often think it makes them lie all the more."

This does not mean, however, that Freethinkers can relax their criticisms of the Bible. There is still the vast majority who regard the Word of God as literally true, and the most powerful section of Christians—the Roman Catholics—are not likely to encourage critics. In fact, efforts are being made at the present time to bind their adherents even more closely, and the Publishers of the Holy See, Burns and Oates, have just published *The Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church*. As can be expected, the chapter devoted to eternal punishment is long and exhaustive; one sentence runs, "the pain of hell exceeds in horror all that man can imagine." It should be borne in mind that this is an article of faith. It would be interesting to know what recent converts think about this horrible doctrine. But perhaps they think, as does the author of the book, "The motive of fear will always be as potent for good as for evil."

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

S. GRAY.—We published an article criticising Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine* by Mr. W. Kent shortly after it was published. Re the "Americanisms" you quote, do not forget that Paine lived in America for many years.

W. CLEARY.—Most of Nietzsche's work was anti-Christian. Try *Beyond Good and Evil*.

R. F. TURNEY.—We are always pleased to supply back issue *Freethinkers* for distribution.

We are asked to point out that the yearly subscription to the *Limes Courier* is 5s., not 2s. 6d. as we recorded it.

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.

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.

## SUGAR PLUMS

All is now in readiness for the Annual Conference of the N.S.S. at Nottingham during the Whit week-end. There is every prospect of a good muster of delegates and members of the Society. To repeat the arrangements for the benefit of those leaving things late: There will be a reception in the Victoria Station Hotel, Nottingham, on Saturday evening at 7-30 for members and friends. Business sessions in the same hotel on Sunday, June 5 at 10-30 a.m. to 12-30 p.m. and 2-30 p.m. to 4-30 p.m. for members of the N.S.S. only, who will need the current card of membership. Lunch at 1 p.m. At 7 p.m. there will be a Freethought demonstration in the Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street, Nottingham. Admission free, with some reserved seats at 1s. each. All members of the N.S.S. within range of Nottingham are cordially invited to the whole proceedings.

Mr. F. A. Ridley reports a very successful meeting in Romford when he took the positive position in a debate with the Rev. R. Ward, B.D., on the question of "That Religion is of no Vital Significance To-day." The meeting held under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. was crowded, and as could be expected, with a majority of Christians, who, judging by the interest displayed, heard the Freethought case for the first time. As is usual in the meetings a vote was taken, the verdict as could be expected was adverse, but this gave our speaker an opportunity of asking whether the question of truth can be decided by a majority decision.

The Jubilee of the Rationalist Press Association has brought with it *The Story of the R.P.A.* (Watts, 5s.) written by Adam Gowans Whyte—one of the original signatories of the memorandum when the Association was formed in 1899. It recounts an interesting narrative and full justice is done to all the pioneers whose work made the R.P.A. a success; in particular to the late Charles A. Watts, whose ability as its publisher and organiser had such signal rewards. No one worked harder to make the R.P.A. a force in liberal thought.

Both the R.P.A. cheap reprints of Huxley, Tindall, Spencer, Ingersoll and many other world-famous Freethinkers, and the later Thinker's Library had huge circulations, and they must have influenced many people in rejecting not only Christianity but religion in general. In addition there were also lectures and debates held all over the country—all with great effect on the religious mind.

The list of names of Directors, Honorary Associates, etc., of the R.P.A. prove how strongly it attracted well known scholars, and publicists. And altogether the R.P.A. can be proud of its 50 years' work. We think that perhaps a little more might have been made of the "nobodies"—the unknown private soldiers, who bought the R.P.A. reprints in the past and who—unhonoured and unsung—are now buying the Thinker's Library; who attend the lectures and debates as did their fathers and whose loyalty to the cause of freedom of thought made not only the R.P.A. but all Freethought societies possible. Perhaps one day their work will be also recognised and honoured.

We were glad to see Mr. Bayard Simmons asserting himself in the *London Evening News* a few days ago, as thus:—

## UNION MAN?

I am not taking my usual copy of the *Evening News* until next Monday. As an old journalist, I wonder whether Dr. Ward has a National Union of Journalists card. And I shall look next Monday, when I again pay my penny, for your statement of how many new readers your generosity has secured.—  
BAYARD SIMMONS, Heathfield Road, Croydon, Surrey.

Readers will, of course, remember the fine poems contributed to this journal by Mr. Simmons for so many years. We understand that he is translating Pushkin among other things—a congenial task for a fellow poet, and wish him every success.

## THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION

### II

ONE of the charges we Freethinkers have always made against Christianity is the utter unreliability of its documents. We have denied the validity of its "history." We claimed, and fought bitterly for our claim, that the record of its miracles written down many years after the events are supposed to have taken place, was not merely unreliable but was completely untrue. There could be no "evidence" of a miracle, for example, certainly no evidence from an eye-witness, for miracles simply do not take place.

On this question of "history," Lord Raglan in *The Hero* has some very pertinent things to say, and he makes mincemeat of many claims put forward by historians. I have more than once in these columns shown how often these claims cannot be justified, but unfortunately one's audience is small and what one says is soon forgotten. It is only the pertinacity of Freethinkers which has made the Church—or perhaps I ought to say some Churchmen like Dr. Barnes—admit that history, as such, has no place in the beginnings of Christianity; only Faith (with a capital F). Lord Raglan has little to say on this particular subject, but what he says about history in general should be taken to heart by all Freethinkers.

What are the materials of history? You have, he points out, "accounts written at the time by persons who were present at the events which they describe." You have also those written by eye-witnesses "but not

written down until some time after the event." Then there is "the archaeological evidence" which "indicates the presence or absence of certain groups at certain places." Fourthly, "are accounts written by people who obtained their information from actors or spectators shortly after the event," which would not be perhaps accepted in a court of law "but are very often accepted by the court of history." And finally, there are the accounts "obtained by questioning people as to what happened a long time before, or accounts obtained at second or third hand."

Of course, there is also "tradition," and as in the case of Christians "proving" the Resurrection to be absolutely true, you have Faith—the beautiful Faith of the early Christians.

Let the reader now try to imagine how we got our history by one or more of these ways and see how much of it is absolutely reliable.

Who wrote, for instance, *at the time* the long discourses given to Moses by the Lord? Did Moses take them down in Hebrew shorthand, or what? Were all the minute particulars relating to the building of Solomon's Temple put down by the architect carefully preserved and scrupulously handed down to the "elders" of Jewry? Who knew of the encounter between Jesus and the Devil when His Infernal Majesty carried the Son of God through the air and put him on the pinnacle of the Temple? Did Jesus relate the incident to Matthew, or was it the Devil? Were the speeches of Jesus in John, and those of Peter and Paul in Acts, all carefully recorded as they were being delivered, or did God Almighty reveal them long afterwards to "inspired" writers? Or is it not a fact that we now know that all this "sacred" history is pure invention, and that most, if not all, the events related in the Bible never took place?

In *The Hero* Lord Raglan prefers to go outside the Bible, and outside the origin of Christianity, for his illustrations, but no one can read what he has to say without noticing at once how all his argument can be made to apply not only to religions in general but to Christianity in particular.

Lord Raglan takes his own case as an instance:—

"Every incident begins to fade from the minds of both actors and spectators as soon as it has occurred. As long as some of them are alive a record of the incident may be preserved in their subconscious minds, even if they do not consciously remember it. Of this we cannot be certain, but what is quite certain is that facts cannot be transmitted from one person to another by means of the subconscious mind. The only facts which I can transmit to my children, writing apart, are those of which I am conscious; these require an effort on my part to transmit, and a greater effort on my children's part to remember. Conceit may lead me to transmit to my children, probably in a not quite accurate form, certain selected incidents from my own career, but what inducement have my children to remember them and pass them on? And if people do not, as in fact they usually do not, take the trouble to preserve facts about their own immediate relatives, why should they take so much trouble about more remote persons?"

I suppose if this argument was pressed home with Christians, we would be told that Matthew and company knew all the time that Jesus was really God Almighty, that they took the utmost care to report the truth and the truth only—and nobody but a blatant Materialist would try and make capital out of the undoubted fact

that if Jesus spoke as Matthew or Mark reports him, he could never have spoken as John reports him.

In any case, Lord Raglan shows how often our historians "seem to assume that the details of battles and floods, court intrigues, and even domestic conversations, transmit themselves down the ages quite independently of human effort, or even of human volition." How is it done? Sir E. K. Chambers calls it "folk-memory," as does Prof. Myers, while Prof. T. H. Robinson calls it "race-memory"—the story of the Flood as it stands in Genesis "is a race memory of a remote historical event." Even Prof. Gordon Childe writes, "the ancient Sumerian creation legend, wherein order is conjured out of the primeval chaos by the separation of land from water, preserves a vivid recollection of the tasks imposed upon the first colonists."

Faced with such pronouncements from such authorities, what is the ordinary reader to say? In all probability he accepts them, and henceforth talks learnedly on "race—or folk-memory" to account for the transmission of some kinds of history. Not so Lord Raglan. He criticises Prof. Childe who "can hardly suppose that the writers of the legend had seen in real life anything like what the legend describes, and if they had not seen it, how could they preserve a vivid recollection of it? Such terms seem to me to be quite meaningless . . ."

This close examination of "history"—and one must read the whole of *The Hero* to appreciate what this means—is never more necessary than when we deal with Gods, Devils, and Miracles. Lord Raglan shows us how we have accepted all sorts of "historical" events for which there is not the slightest evidence. In a sense it is not of any moment whether we believe that the story of King Alfred and his burnt cakes is true or not; it is not blasphemy to disbelieve it, and in any case, it does not matter. But we have a very huge and powerful organisation in the Christian Church, and it is blasphemy contemptuously to deny some of the yarns it puts out about its Gods and their adventures on evidence far less credible than the story of Alfred and his burnt cakes. Millions of sorely needed pounds are spent in perpetuating the myths of the Church with eminent professors and historians giving their authority to legends and fairy tales silly enough to shame a Hottentot for believing. And not only religious myths. Our histories are packed with stories for which there is literally no evidence—they are based on tradition, or hearsay, or even made up by a copyist of older manuscripts.

But it will be interesting to see what Lord Raglan has to say about myths and myth makers. I will reserve that for another article.

H. CUTNER.

## THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN his leader on the 4th Century (May 1), Mr. Ridley asks why the collapse of the Roman Empire was inevitable, "when the still older Chinese Empire . . . lasted almost unaltered down to our own times?"

For the following reasons Oriental societies cannot be compared with European societies:—

In the temperate, corn-growing zones food production allows sufficient leisure for the development of individualities. In the Eastern marshlands, however, where rice is bound to be the staple food, the tending and cultivating of paddy-fields is a matter of communal toil that leaves no leisure for the development of a culture other than one based on old-established tradition. (At present this barrier is worn down through industrial growth and world trade, but up to this point collective labour was necessary for the maintenance of water works,

irrigation and canals; this could not be done individually, but was a task for whole village communities. Hence the fossilisation of social relations and conditions along strict patterns of collectivist behaviour).

The lacking of landed real property is the key to the Orient having lagged behind for centuries in comparison to Europe (and North America). Artificial irrigation is the precondition of agrarian cultivation; it cannot but be tackled by collective efforts directed by provincial (the mandarins, in the beginning, were water supervisors) or the central government. If—through war or a sudden calamity—the water works dilapidate, waste stretches of land fall waste and go depopulated for centuries.

The Roman Empire, this unique reservoir for the pooling of human experiences all over the world, only benefited from this through the superficial expansion of civilisation. The market for goods widened, but it did not deepen. Slavery impeded a real science. The leisured classes were enabled to make practical inventions, but so far as mechanical devices were concerned, no one felt induced to have them substantiated. By making slave-saving machinery unprofitable, this institution contributed to impoverishing all producers by keeping down the purchasing power of the internal market. The ruling class maintained itself, not by developing the mode of production, but by expanding its slave basis; for the multiplication of slave workers—who had no chance of rearing large families—the States were engrossed in senseless wars and self-destruction.

The slave has no incentive to improve his technique; entrusted with coarse tools only, he lacks the theoretical knowledge. By dispossessing the indigenous peasantry, the Roman slave-owners were undermining the foundation of internal purchase power as well as the basis of their army. They had to resort to the hiring of mercenaries, recruited from the barbarians who, in this way, were made familiar with the handling of tools and weapons.

In the long run, the Roman provinces, continually ransacked by dispossessed gangs of robbers and pirates, fell an easy prey to the barbarians.

Progress required the destruction of the slave economy, and that the slaves could not do; it could merely be done from outside, by the barbarians who were faced with the alternative of either being the serfs or the masters of the Empire.

Why Christianity proved the best weapon for this purpose is to be read in Gordon Childe's *What Happened in History*, that excellent Pelican book that every Freethinker ought to know.

PERCY G. ROY.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**KINGSHIP**

Sir,—I congratulate you on the printing of that excellent little essay, "The Conquest of Canaan," with the contents of which I wholeheartedly agree. The only point I should like to supplement is whether the term of "king" can be applied to those personages who may be accepted as historical.

During the greater part of their history, the Hebrews were mainly nomadic clansmen and shepherds. At this stage of development there was no need for writing; tribal law, lore and ritual—memorised in poetical form—was a matter of tradition, handed down through individual initiation. He who was considered most versed in those knowledges, was elected chieftain; in the beginning, he was priest, judge and war leader in one.

As numbers increased due to the ensuing confederation of tribes, it became necessary to split these functions and the head of the Council of tribal chiefs assumed the title of *mōlek*. He being the political leader of the confederation, *mōlek*, like the Greek *basileus*, has erroneously been translated as "king."

The Assyrians actually had a king—*sharru*—whilst *malika* or *malku* denoted a tribal chief with a certain degree of authority. A man who derives his influence through wealth is a *Ba'al* = Lord; literally this means "Owner" (mainly of sheep). In the Abyssinian and north semitic languages *Ba'al* is equivalent to M-L-KH (Molokh, mōlek, etc.), but neither covers the meaning of "king."—Yours, etc.,

P. G. R.

**OBITUARY**

**JOHN GALLERY**

The West Ham Branch, one of the oldest Branches of the N.S.S. lost one of its oldest and most respected members by the death of John Gallery in his 88th year. One of the old guard he took his Freethought seriously and moulded his thoughts, actions, and life in conformity with Freethought principles. Quiet and modest in manner, charming in conversation, tolerant to opponents, but with a courage and determination of purpose, he was always among the first on parade when a fight for freedom and Freethought had to be faced. He was a constant reader of "The Freethinker" and ever faithful to the Society, its work, and its workers. The last scene took place in West Ham Cemetery on Monday, May 16, when before an assembly of relatives and friends, including a number of members of the West Ham Branch N.S.S. a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary of the Society.

R. H. R.

**LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.**

**LONDON—OUTDOOR**

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m. Messrs. E. BRYANT, F. WOOD and E. PAGE.

**LONDON—INDOOR**

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Problem of Democratic Leadership." Mr. GEO. O'DELL.

**COUNTRY—OUTDOOR**

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. H. DAY.

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

Crawshawboth.—Friday, May 27, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Great Harwood.—Saturday, May 28, 6 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Hapton.—Wednesday, June 1, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. WINTER, WHITAKER and BARKER.

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

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

**COUNTRY—INDOOR**

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Life of Col. R. G. Ingersoll," Mr. HENRY LENNARD.

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Loco. Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E.15).—8 p.m., Branch Meeting.

**SECOND-HAND BOOKS.** Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 30, Parliament Hill, N.W.3.

**AGE OF REASON.** By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s.; paper 2s.; postage 3d.

**AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY.** A Survey of Positions. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK.** By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 3s.; postage 2½d. Ninth edition.

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

## WHAT IS AN ATHEIST ?

ACCORDING to my dictionary—Webster, 1946—the meaning of the word "Atheist" is "one who disbelieves or denies the existence of a God." Just that. There is no mention that an atheist must, of necessity, believe that this life is the be-all and end-all of existence; yet certain writers to "The Freethinker" seem to imagine that no one can possibly be an atheist who dares to question whether death is the final curtain on Life's drama or merely the end of Act One.

I have called myself an atheist because I do not believe in the existence of any God—Christian or otherwise. My disbelief is based on the evidence of history, which shows that gods were the invention of ignorant primitive minds; they did not come into existence after Man became intellectually advanced. Furthermore, it is only by the suppression of inquiry and investigation that belief in any deity can be maintained.

Freethinkers, I had imagined, were a fairly intellectual and broad-minded fraternity, eager to learn and understand the meaning and purpose of Life, and to fathom the hidden secrets and unsolved problems of human existence. To my mind the greatest mystery of all is death. Is there any reason then why atheists should be so positive and dogmatic on a matter regarding which, as yet, so little is known? Every man must have the right to believe as he chooses—or what is the meaning of freethinking? But I do not concede that he has the right to condemn those whose ideas on any subject do not happen to coincide with his own.

Why must an atheist refuse to consider the possibility of an after-life in the absence of any conclusive proof one way or the other? Does he condemn scientific inquiry into the unsolved mystery of death merely to maintain his own belief that death is final and complete extinction?

Because I have an open mind on the subject and am in favour of investigation, instead of a narrow and bigoted prejudice against the possibility of survival, I am condemned as a bad atheist. Because I choose the right to think freely and individually, instead of being bound by the views of other atheists, I should not be permitted to call myself a freethinker—I am a black-leg and a traitor to the Cause! But surely, if freethinkers object to free thought, it is *they* who have no right to be called freethinkers.

Because I write an article on the beliefs of Spiritualists, while clearly stating that I preserve an open mind on the subject, I am immediately accused of being converted to religion. I am afraid that many so-called freethinkers are really no more tolerant of views differing from their own than are the majority of Christians. It is fortunate indeed that the publishers of this paper are not so prejudiced or our search for truth and enlightenment—which I still believe is the aim of all true freethinkers—would be seriously handicapped.

This lack of tolerance is surely one of the main reasons why Christianity has become stagnant. The good Christian will not tolerate any view differing from his own. Must we now see the good atheist following the same narrow road or does he consider himself so completely cognisant of all there is to know, so super-informed that there is no problem left worthy of his consideration?

I, personally, have an inquiring mind and there is still much that I would gladly learn about life and death, space and time, and the working of the human mind with its hidden powers and forces. I believe that all psychic

phenomena can be explained when we have mastered more of Nature's laws and realise that there is far more happening all around us than what we are able to see, hear and feel with our present faculties. Science has already discovered that there is no such thing as a solid and that so-called solid matter is really composed of atoms and molecules in constant vibration. This alone should give all materialists something serious to think about. What has already been discovered is but a particle of what has yet to be discovered and what we know is as nothing compared with what we do not know. Because I have had no super-normal experiences and have no extra-sensory perception myself I am not prepared to regard those who have as liars or lunatics. Such reasoning is worthy of the early ages when Man was ignorant of all the wonders that are a commonplace to-day. Call me irrational, if you like, but would any rationalist have believed in radio, radar, television, supersonic flying, etc., one hundred years ago? And what is a hundred years in the limitless span of Time? If so much can be discovered in so short a time who would dare to predict the discoveries of the next five hundred years?

No. If our rationalists are so smugly satisfied with what they think they know concerning life and death and the few natural laws so far understood then, definitely, I am not a rationalist. But as a freethinker, I reserve the right to think and to reason freely, to welcome scientific research into problems as yet unsolved and to preserve an open mind in the absence of conclusive evidence and proof.

W. H. WOOD.

## TELLING THEM

Archbishop Downey, as becomes a celibate priest, gave women a good talking to the other day. He told them straight that they were advocating their own moral degradation by propagating free love, legalised abortion, easier divorce, and "of course," birth control. All this and lots more was hurled at Catholic mothers—but we'd wage a Freethought book to a string of holy beads that many of the ladies present would gladly have stood up for their right to use their own judgment on these things, and not wait for advice from a man who has never been married, though he may have God's help. The truth is that Catholic women do practise birth control, abortion, they want easier divorce, and don't mind, in some cases, a spot of free love. And the Archbishop knows it.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
Co-operative Hall, Parliament St., Nottingham

## A FREETHOUGHT DEMONSTRATION

on WHIT-SUNDAY, JUNE 5th, 1949

Chairman: R. H. ROSETTI

Speakers:

J. T. BRIGHTON (Chester-le-Street)	J. CLAYTON (Burnley)
H. DAY (Bradford)	L. EBURY (London)
T. M. MOSLEY (Nottingham)	F. A. RIDLEY (London)

Doors open 6-30 p.m. — Commence 7 p.m.  
Admission free. — Reserved seats 1s. each.