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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Religion and Sex

I SUPPOSE I may take it for granted that very few people now read the books of Isaac D'Israeli, father of the famous Earl of Beaconsfield, so well known both for politics and literature. D'Israeli was not a first class writer, but he was an interesting one, and now and again I take down one of his books and "dip in." In *Literary Recreations*, which appeared in 1796, is an essay with the title *The Alliance Between Love and Religion*, a title that created some trouble, which is what one might expect. The inner side of the Christian religion is one that comparatively few people know anything about. Christians least of all. To suggest to a Christian that there is an utterly indecent idea at the bottom of the Christian doctrine of the Virgin birth, or that the Christian religion has and does, nourish a quite sexually unclean temperament, is to come near to insulting him. Yet it is a statement that a knowledge of psychology and history would amply support. The attractions of sex have been responsible for more religious fervour than the world is aware, and it may be questioned if the idea of a God would have perpetuated itself to the extent it has done in the absence of male and female personifications of the deity. D'Israeli says, shrewdly enough, that the female representatives of the ancient creed, must have communicated a more celestial inspiration.

Beyond doubt much of which orthodox historians treat as expressions of religion are little more than expressions of disordered sexual instincts. The lives of the saints alone are enough to prove this. "Poets are amorous, lovers are poetical, but saints are both," says D'Israeli, and one need not travel far to find proofs of the salacious character of the latter class. Perhaps the commonest gesture of all with the saints of the Christian religion is their irregular sexual life before conversion, and their frequent lapses afterwards. And where there is not an actual relapse in action, there is in thought. The most frequent figure in which the devil appears to tempt a saint, is that of a naked woman. And in the case of female saints, the favourite disguise is that of a handsome young man, also "dressed mit noddings on" as Hans Breitmann has it. In the monasteries the prayers of the Saints, "were invariably directed to the Virgin" in the Nunneries they were as regularly directed to the Son of God. Instinct expresses itself even though it be cloaked and hooded by religious extravagance.

There is a vein of satire, and some historical warranty for the following from D'Israeli:—

"The Catholic religion is an academy of love. The effusions of a Spaniard to the Virgin, and a repentant frail one addressing Mary Magdalene, with an 'Ora pro nobis' employ language which compares as little with piety as modesty. I have even heard a pretty *Arian* speak with some conviction of the divinity of Jesus, after having read the beautiful

description of his person in Josephus, and which was interpolated by some monk, well knew that even the Son of God would come recommended to the ladies by the charms of his person! The illustrious pious are always represented as beautiful; from the Oriental obscenities of Solomon, the Jewish Ovid, to the grossness of Zinzendorf, and the indecencies of Whitfield."

As for example:—

"Over the burning pillow of the monk hovers a phantom of melancholy lust. His fancy was the scourge of innumerable visions which disturb the day and night. Their homilies were manuals of love, and the more religious they become, the more depraved they were. In the nunnery the love of Jesus was the most abandoned of passions, and the ideal espousal was indulged at the cost of the feeble heart of many a solitary beauty. Several manuscript diaries have been preserved in which the embraces and sensations of spiritual love are not distinguishable from those of a material nature. . . . Tisset has given a case of this nature; a young woman had yielded herself up to all the extravagances of love and religion; during six months that he attended her she could only ejaculate at intervals 'My beloved Lamb, come to my arms.'"

He also describes a copy of verses written by a nun, Marie le Cocque, who describes her betrothal to Jesus with "great lubricity of imagination." Dissenting hymn-books, equally with Catholic manuals might be quoted to the same end. Many young girls would be heartily ashamed to address to their lovers the sentiments that they are found expressing in song to Jesus. It is not, of course, claimed that the singers are always, or even generally, evidence of the same sexual impulse; but it is certain their origin and influence owes much to its presence. Dr. Maudesley may be well cited here as evidence on behalf of D'Israeli's contention. He says, after characterising much of what is described at present as "deep religious feeling," as being "morbid self-feeling, springing at bottom from unsatisfied instinct or other uterine action upon mind":—

"The ecstatic trances of such saintly women as Catherine de Sienne and St. Theresa, in which they believed themselves to be visited by their Saviour, and to be received as veritable spouses into his bosom, were, though they knew it not, little else than vicarious sexual organism a condition of things which the intense contemplation of the naked male figure, carved or sculptured in all its proportions on a cross, is more fitted to produce in young women of susceptible nervous temperament than people are apt to consider. . . . The fanatical religious sects which spring up from time to time in communities, and disgust them by the offensive way in which they mingle love and religion, are inspired in great measure by sexual feeling. On the one hand there

is probably the cunning of a hypocritical knave or the self-deceiving duplicity of a half-insane one using the weaknesses of women to minister to his vanity or to his lust under a religious guise; on the other hand, there is an exaggerated self-feeling, rooted often in sexual passion. . . . In such cases the holy kiss of love owes its warmth to the sexual impulse which inspires it consciously or unconsciously, and the mystical union of the sexes is fitted to issue in a less spiritual union."

The man of letters and the medical psychologist are in agreement upon this point, and both might call in the historian to their support. One of the most groundless of superstitious current in the Christian world is that which pictures the early generations of believers as preaching and practising a most austere morality. Those who have studied primitive Christianity know how false all this is. The truth is, that from the first glimpse we get of Christianity as a definite body of religious doctrines we find it associated with charges of licentiousness, and licentious practices. Antinomianism was its besetting sin. The principal apologist of the Christians, as early as the second century, was only able to meet the charge of licentious practices by the damning defence that it was not true of all, but only of some. The very asceticism of the early Christians is, in its way, a confession of sexual uncleanness and extravagance. The "unelean virtue" of asceticism could never make headway among a people who were morally healthy, and there is a certain sly humour in D'Israeli's remark that "If one part of ascetic Christianity threatened, if universally adopted, to depopulate the world, the other, of mystical Christianity, appears resolute in rectifying that political error"—a remark which he follows up by saying that "no Society so small as Methodism (he was writing in 1796) has produced to the State so many additional members."

The alliance between salacity and religion continues right through European history. The first rule for the knight in the days of chivalry was concerned with the love of God and the ladies; and it was in no spirit of irreverence that Boccaccio returns thanks to God and the ladies for the success of his tales. A writer quoted by D'Israeli well remarks that in the romances of the Middle Ages "Jesus Christ and Apollo, Cupid and the Holy Ghost, Venus and the Virgin, went hand in hand in the early productions of this kind." The very prayer-books of the great were, in the sixteenth century, ornamented with the figures of mistresses of kings, nobles, and the "dignified clergy," while the illustrations accompanying them are of a character more easily imagined than described. Some idea of their character may be guessed by any who have closely examined the carvings in the more secluded portions of some of our own old minsters, churches, and other religious establishments.

The inquiry opens up a wide field of investigation for those who care to follow it. Many investigations—those of Mercier and Starbuck, for instance—go to show how close is the connection between purely sexual conditions and such religious phenomena as conversion. Max O'Rell's observation that in England he observed that ladies often gave their hearts to Jesus when no one else had shown any great anxiety to become their possessor had a much deeper significance than he probably imagined. St. Paul's warning that married people thought less of the things of God than single ones were likely to do was also an unconscious recognition of the

truth that under abnormal sexual conditions religion profits most.

However, I set out to call attention to one of the suggestive essays that *did* appear in the early editions of D'Israeli's writings, but which does not appear in later ones. Whether its excision is due to the author or publisher, I know not; but either way, the fact of its being dropped out is significant of the fate apt to overtake any writing that helps to set religion before the people in its true light.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

WITCHCRAFT AND RELIGION

AFTER reading the attempted rational explanation of witchcraft by W. Seabrook, *Witchcraft and Magic in Africa* by Frederick Kaigh, may be either amusing or portentous; it has its readers and may even be evidence of Seabrook's assertion that more than half the literate white population of the world to-day believe. It seems to cater for the more simple minded Catholics and the illustrations are as childishy crude as the contents. An introduction by Montague Summers referring to historic persons who believed, prepares the reader.

The book opens quite interestingly with a consideration of the problem of Africa a very elaborate statement having economic, political and cultural, as well as religious aspects, so that there is a two-fold argument running through the book, to establish the reality of magic and witchcraft, and an attempted solution of the problem. But the technique is as simple as the thesis put forward. It consists of suggestion and repetition; persistent assertion. While professing to merely state the facts, actually persistently suggesting the marvellous.

Here and there, chapters are inserted, dealing with the scenery, the climatic conditions, and so on; ostensibly as a kind of comedy relief to offset the tragedy, but really to emphasise the basic suggestion. The "magic" of the scenery, climate, and so on, is a "fit setting" for the "mysteries" of the "dark continent." We are thus impressed by the magic even of the natural conditions, apart from any consideration of the supernatural magic of the practices of the natives. And even the immensity of the geographical area and the variety of the numerous peoples and cultures; the magnitude of the problem; is used to emphasise the same suggestion.

With regard to beliefs, his method is equally simple. He states what he "saw" and then defies the reader to give any explanation, scientific, philosophical, factual, metaphysical, or any other; ending by saying that the religious explanation is "as good as any," it does "at least give a syllogism." This is repeated again and again until, with his *pièce de résistance*; at a jockey dance he "saw" a man and woman turn into jockals; with the question "did this thing really happen," he then refuses to accept any explanation whatever, except the religious one.

But all this is incidental to his main argument. The white man's governments of, exploitation of, and interference with, the native, is disastrous. The Government's suppression of the nganga or medicine man (he does not call him witch-doctor for a reason that comes later) only serves to drive him underground, where he incites the natives against the white man. And further, the sectarian rivalry of the missionaries is even worse. Not only does it leave the black man puzzled but even leads directly to immorality. Giving examples, our author says that the missionaries admit this to be so.

His solution to the problem is just as simple as the rest. The native medicine man is an integral part of

primitive social organisation, just as are our own priesthood in ours. And in suppressing them it breaks up the native economy. Besides, they are "members of a priesthood far older than our own." So he says, a better plan would be to give them some sort of official status; to incorporate them with our own, and to educate them; so that they would have a beneficent influence on their peoples, just as our own priesthood. It seems an excellent plan, for the priesthood, and may be practical politics in the indirect rule policy.

But our author is caught on the horns of a dilemma. And his struggle to establish his case is ludicrous. His attempts to whitewash the black medicine man are funny. In some cases, for instance, the jackal dance, he describes the hideous, horrible, beastly immorality; he has to admit the medicine man is concerned in some very ugly business, even involving poison, murder; that he is a very astute and tricky customer; that he needs very careful watching; that he is not to be trusted; and is an inveterate liar. But after all he is not a bad sort, quite a likeable fellow, and he does work for God. He himself says so.

Our author is threading a very intricate maze and to show what he means, he asserts that the nganga is not a witch. A witch is one who has dealings with the Evil One. But the African black man "has not met the Prince of Darkness." The savage is like a child, he needs proper education. He does not know the difference between right and wrong. But he can be taught, through his medicine men, if they are educated, just as we are by our own priesthood. Indeed, these are the ones to teach him. Then the black man would learn to respect, and to live together with, the white man. It is a very pleasing picture.

One wonders what the shade of Sir James Frazer would think of it. Considering Frazer's Folklore in the Old Testament and the research that has established the evolution of religion from primitive beliefs and practices up to Christian doctrines, ceremonial and ritual, it is amazing to find our author calmly reversing the process, drawing parallels and giving biblical quotations in justification of the African nganga. Of course, he knows right and wrong. He gets it from his Bible and from his Church.

Although he does not say, one does not have to be very familiar with missionary tactics, with ideas and doctrines, to appreciate which priesthood is indicated.

H. H. PREECE.

LET US INVESTIGATE

SOME readers of this journal have been good enough to ask me to say something about the recent discussion on Spiritualism between our esteemed contributor, Mr. W. H. Wood, and a few unbelievers in spiritualistic claims.

Frankly, I should have preferred saying nothing at this stage, for I am sure the various combatants are all capable of looking after themselves. However, as a confirmed disbeliever, I should like to say that, in the first place, I am entirely with Mr. Wood when he insists that Freethinkers should not be afraid of unbiased investigation into any philosophy. I am entirely for the free expression of opinion without, as far as possible, any personalities being dragged in. I have nothing but the greatest contempt for the Christian belief in Devils and Miracles, but I have found many parsons charming, cultured, and intelligent men. I should never, in debate

with one of them, call him an idiot because he believes things against which my reason hotly protests.

But my real difficulty, when I am against Spiritualism, is to get this unbiased investigation going. How does one proceed?

For example, in a book in which he explains what made him a Spiritualist, the late Mr. Will Goldston, a well known conjuror, claims to have met a medium who got on top of a very heavy table. A dozen men did the same, and they kicked him all over the face and body (I am quoting from memory) while the table slowly floated up to the ceiling—and floated back again. The medium was not, in any way, hurt—and the surprising thing is that the incident which, if I had seen it would have converted me forthwith, did *not* convert Mr. Goldston; it was something else which placed him on the side of the spirits.

Now how can I investigate this story? In what way is it possible for me to show that it is true or untrue?

Then I think it was Mr. Hannen Swaffer who claimed that the grand piano in his flat was raised by spirits and broken to pieces in mid-air. How can one investigate this?

For years between the wars, I tried well-known spiritualists without success, to get spirits on the film in my camera. The spirit photographers all fled with their spirits directly I asked them to use my camera and my film. If Mr. Wood knows any spirit photographer who is ready to be put to the test, I am his man.

Then take the famous haunted Borley Rectory, about which the late Harry Price and (I think) Dr. Joad took such an interest. It was burnt to the ground but the spirits, we are told, still haunt it. Yet I read the other day, not only that there was not a word of truth in the story as put forward by these eminent gentlemen, but that Mr. Price himself believed in it no more than he believed in his talking mongoose. In fact, one of his closest friends claimed that he was an out-and-out unbeliever in Spiritualism, in spite of anything he said to the contrary in his published books. But again, how is one to "investigate" the hauntings? I simply do not know.

Then take the "telepathic" findings of Dr. Rhine. Some years ago, some stringent criticisms were made on Dr. Rhine and his methods, by such a publicist as Mr. Haldeman Julius in the *American Freeman*—and, if my memory serves me, also by a number of eminent professors. How telepathy proves spirits survive in Summerland, I am at a loss to know; but, even if what is claimed for it is true, why should one be surprised if the mind of man changes in the course of Evolution? I do not for a moment believe that Evolution has finished with Man and his Mind, and if they advance towards telepathy, it would not surprise me. But I certainly refuse to believe, as Mr. Wood does, in any "non-physical entity," so long as telepathy requires a *living* body for this to function. If, as Mr. Wood believes, we give off "a mysterious energy"—so what? Let Dr. Rhine and believers in telepathy produce this "mysterious energy" from *dead* bodies, if they wish to move that Materialism is false and Spiritualism is true. And what if "auras" can be photographed by infra-red rays? How does this prove that "spirits" of dead people are alive?

Nothing amuses me more than when I read of experiments or investigations with mediums "under the most exacting scientific tests." Does Mr. Wood claim that, because an average professor undertakes the test, it is most rigorously "scientific?" Any competent conjuror would roar with laughter at the idea that our

professors are the most capable investigators of mediums. May I say that, in sober truth, they are quite the most easily bamboozled people it is possible to conceive—it would be far more difficult to diddle a schoolboy. Ask any conjuror.

When we are told that "those who have seen the best mediums will dismiss any suggestion of trickery and fraud," I can only gasp. So far, almost every rigorously tested medium has been caught in fraud, though I am quite prepared to assent to the statement that not all mediums *consciously* fraud unless we understand what we both mean by fraud in their connection. I have seen mediums go off in a trance and say things and I am sure they never knew what they said. They were not exactly "frauds." But will Mr. Wood give me the names of some well-known mediums who have been "rigorously tested" and who were never caught in fraud? Would he tell us what is the proportion of genuine mediums to fraudulent ones? And why are any of them frauds?

I happen to be one of those "hard boiled" Materialists so disliked by Spiritualists (and Mr. Wood) who has read any number of the reports of the Society for Psychical Research, and dozens of books for and against Spiritualism, and I certainly "scoff" at 99 per cent. of the marvels I have read about. I don't believe them. But I am always ready to "investigate." Perhaps Mr. Wood will therefore help me in the special case he himself reports.

He tells us that a few days after the R.101 airship disaster, Mrs. Estelle Roberts contacted the dead Commander Irwin, and through him "gave a detailed account of the disaster and its cause, in highly technical terms." Will Mr. Wood tell us where we can read an account of this seance or, if he has a printed account, lend it to me? I will then be able to compare it with the official account which was, I understand, published later, and which Mr. Wood can refer me to, with the date, or lend me. The details "given by Mrs. Roberts were found to be absolutely correct," and, of course, here the word "absolutely" means absolutely. Until I get these two accounts in front of me I cannot investigate Mr. Wood's claims.

In passing, there is just one thing I wish to say about Mrs. Estelle Roberts, who is, I believe, having a triumphant tour through England. I do not want to do her an injustice and perhaps my memory has failed me. But I think it was Mrs. Roberts who was the presiding medium chosen for the Great Demonstration at the Albert Hall, in memory of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, just after his death. There was an empty chair on the platform, and Mrs. Roberts pointed this chair out to the huge audience, for sitting in it, she said, was the spirit of Sir Arthur complete in evening dress—unseen, of course, by everybody present, except the medium. She saw him exactly as in the flesh. Does Mr. Wood believe this—does he claim that it was the "mysterious energy" discovered by Dr. Rhine in his telepathy experiments, still surviving as Sir Arthur's unseen, ghostly shade or wraith?

Will he forgive me if I say that I do not believe it.

H. CUTNER.

FROM WHENCE COMETH MY HELP!

THE parson in Müsli preached to his flock every Sunday about God's wrath, or God's mercy, and, possibly, long, the earthly life of any of them would be happy, long, and prosperous, in proportion to his goodness; but evil chance was about to happen to his people, without regard to the piety of any.

About a mile from Müsli was a mountain mass, whose last buttress was the Plattenbergkopf, a hill with a precipitous side, and a flat, wooded summit. On September 11, 1881, this hill fell.

The cause of its fall was human interference. Concessions had been granted by the Commune for working a bed of slate in the hill, but no stipulations had been made as to the method of operation. In the course of time, a hole, 180 metres wide was made in the hill, and no pillars were left to support the roof.

By August, 1881 everyone was of the opinion that the mountain would some day fall, but there was then no anxiety. The end of August and the beginning of September were very wet. On September 7 masses of rock began to fall from the hill, more fell on the 8th, and the rock seemed to groan within. On the 10th, a commission of incompetents reported that there was no immediate danger, but that further quarryings should cease until the spring.

The 11th of September was a wet Sunday, and, in the rain, rock kept falling from the Plattenberg. The village boys, agog with excitement, worried their parents by venturing near the falls. In the afternoon some men gathered at an inn in the upper village to watch the movements on the hillside. They called to Meinrad Rhyner to join them, but he refused, not caring, they understood, to jeopardise the cheese he was carrying. A party had assembled in a relative's house for a christening. At 4 o'clock, the schoolmaster was at his window, timing the falls with his watch. Huntsman Elmer was on his doorstep, watching through his telescope.

Most of those in the lower village, called Müsli, were uninterested. They were making coffee, milking cows, or doing their other small affairs. The parson may have been reading his bible, dreaming of paradise, or wishing he were younger, and could wed one of the village milkmaids.

Suddenly, at 5.15 p.m., a mass of the mountain fell away. The ground bent and broke up, the trees nodded, folded together, and the rock engulfed them in its bosom as it crashed over the quarry, shot across the streams, dashing their water in the air, and spread itself upon the flat. A gloomy cloud hovered over the chaos and slowly vanished. No one was killed.

The people in the upper village began to be afraid. They started to prepare for moving the aged and the sick, and some of their own effects. People from lower down came to help, or to talk. Some went into the houses to shut out the dust. No one was in a hurry.

Less than 17 minutes later the other side of the mountain fell. The rifts of the two falls united below the peak, and left its huge mass without support. The schoolmaster then forgot to time the falls. This second fall overwhelmed the inn and four other houses, and killed a score of persons. Everyone now fled, most making for the Düniberg, the opposite hill. Huntsman Elmer could see, through his glass, the people racing up this hill "like a herd of terrified chamois."

Then came a third fall. It overwhelmed all but six of

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LISTEN TO THE PREACHERS

ACCORDING to an old allegation there's no sentiment in business. Either your customer or your competitor, or both, may become unscrupulous. Why not, therefore, cast out sentiment, or even become unscrupulous yourself? A preacher cited as an example of such a method may appear rather strange unless we realise how difficult it is to change certain of our habits of thought. For instance, the Churches are not regarded as business premises nor the parsons as businessmen.

Many a business firm would delight in the protection afforded by the following laws:—

- (1) That when their premises were open for business, no counter-attraction would be permitted except under legal penalties.
- (2) That in all State Schools the excellence of the firm's chief commodities be instilled into the children's minds daily from the earliest age with no mention of rival firms.
- (3) That prosecution and imprisonment may be inflicted upon anyone whose criticisms of the firm's commodities were unbearable to the Directors.

But similar laws have assisted in the establishing of the Christian Church and they are still in operation.

About Easter time, the weekly *Radio Times* was more than usually devoted to supporting the Christian life and theory; a splendid advertising opportunity duly appropriated by the Churches and no space left for their critics. Some of the Sunday broadcasting preachers are getting quite desperate in their striving to impress the listener, as though legal protection and numerous facilities had failed to bring them the desired results. I cite the Rev. Douglas Griffiths of the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, who, some weeks ago, reached the following climax:—

"You must have a God of some sort. If you haven't a God, well, in a fortnight's time you won't be trusted round the corner with sixpence."

The preacher, of course, should speak only of his own preferences and weaknesses, and the following theological compliment in return seems to be indicated:—

"Oh God, if there is a God of some sort, we ask Thee to occupy at all times the mind of Thy servant the Rev. Douglas Griffiths. Let him never stand alone, for without Thy support he could not be trusted with sixpence. Thy creatures, Thou knowest, have many weaknesses. Keep Thou, therefore, a hold on the coat-lapel of Thy servant Griffiths more especially when he is about and no visible policeman is near. We ask this for the sake of a long-suffering community, and for the sake of the pockets of even the Youth of the Methodist Clubs. Amen."

The real problem is a far greater one. Honesty is certainly involved and the pockets and incomes of all the theologians on this planet are affected.

This is it. Is the future of mankind in the hands of man or in the hands of God? If it is discovered that man's future is in his own hands, then for all practical purposes, the parsons are useless. If the future is in God's hands the theologians' incomes are safe and they will continue to appropriate the Radio as they have appropriated the great achievements of civilisation without doing anything towards their achievement, except what can be done by talking about nothing.

Listen in to the preachers for yourself. But don't expect to hear their real critics; there's no sentiment in business.

J. G. BURDON.

the people on the Düniberg. These six had fled empty-handed. The others, possibly more covetous, or more famane, were destroyed by the same ruin. Those who were watching the mountain at a distance beheld now the upper part of the Plattenberg, 10,000,000 cubic metres of rock, suddenly shoot from the hillside. The forest bent "like a field of corn in a wind. The trees became mingled like a flock of sheep." The hillside moved, "and all its parts were playing together." The mass shot down with great velocity till its foot reached the quarry. Then the upper part pitched forward horizontally, straight across the valley on to the Düniberg. People in suitable positions could see through the flying mass on to the hillside beyond. They could see also the people in the upper village and on the Düniberg rushing wildly about.

The schoolmaster thought the mass was going to fill up the valley. A cloud of dust accompanied the fall, and a great wind was flung before it. This wind swept across the valley, overthrowing the houses in its path, "like haystacks." The roofs were lifted first, and flung afar, and then the wooden parts of the houses were borne bodily through the air, as, in autumn, first the leaves are whipped from the trees, and then dead branches. Some said the trees were blown about like matches, houses lifted like feathers, and thrown like cards against the hillside. Hay, furniture, and the bodies of men mingled with the house debris in the air.

The avalanche, pitching on to the Düniberg, struck it obliquely, and was deflected down the level and fertile valley floor, which it covered in a few seconds, to the length of nearly a mile, and over its entire width, with debris over thirty feet thick. Most of the people on the hillside were instantly killed, crushed flat, "as an insect is crushed into a red streak under a man's foot."

Only when the avalanche had struck the Düniberg, and began to turn aside from it, which was the work of a second or two, did the people in Müsli, far down the level plain, have any suspicion that they were in danger. Twenty seconds later all was over. Most were killed where they stood. The avalanche swept way half the village. Its sharply defined edge cut one house in two. The huntsman and the schoolmaster, whose houses were just beyond the area of ruin, beheld the dust cloud rolling along, "like smoke from a cannon's mouth, but black."

The parson thought at first it was only the dust that had come so far as Müsli. His horror when the cloud was dissipated and he beheld the solid grey carpet, beneath which 150 of his flock were buried, with their houses and fields, may be imagined. He had more than once quoted from the Psalm, "I will turn my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Lo, the familiar mountain had vanished, and a hole was in its place.

Those who had beheld the catastrophe from a distance hurried down to look for their friends. Burkhard Rhyner, whose house was untouched at the edge of the debris, ran to it and found, "the doors open, a fire burning in the kitchen, the table laid, and coffee hot in the coffee-pot, but no living person left." All had run out, to help, or to see, and been overwhelmed—wife, daughter, son, son's wife, and two grandchildren. "I am," he said, "the only survivor of my family."

The merciful earth had covered most of the dead, but on one spot were the crushed remains of a youth, still guarding with fragmentary arms the body of a child.

J. G. LUPTON.

ACID DROPS

Now he has become a pious Christian, Dr. Joad was asked in the *Sunday Dispatch* the other week whether he believed in the efficacy of prayer, and whether, if one prayed for rain after a long drought, the prayer would be granted? Dr. Joad—in spite of the assurance of the Christian Churches that God always answers prayer—gloomily admitted that it was a “difficult question.” He also admitted that unless one believed in the existence of the Christian God, the question “becomes meaningless.” And he thought it “obvious nonsense” to suggest that God will give everything asked for. Alas, after his notable conversion, Dr. Joad should show so little Faith, smaller than even the proverbial mustard seed.

However, suddenly bethinking himself, and anxious not to run counter to “plain statements” by Christ and the “teaching” of the Christian Church, he was obliged to admit that God does answer prayer, and you do get what you ask for “provided that what you pray for is good for you.” What a hopeless muddle of bad thinking and superstitious credulous Faith in Christianity reduces even people of the intellectual calibre of Dr. Joad.

The expedition to bring to light the veritable Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat has been banned by Turkey—Russia also objecting as it meant “spying on our borders”—a warlike move too awful to contemplate. It must be a sad blow to Mr. Egerton Sykes for, of course, Noah's Ark would have been a veritable Godsend in these days of blatant infidelity. The *Sunday Dispatch*, which reports all this, adds a few details of its own for which it gives no evidence whatever. It appears that Czarist Russia, as far back as 1829, organised the first expedition and it made an “unsuccessful search.” Then it was a “Russian pilot” who saw the Ark from the air when flying over Ararat in 1916 but his evidence was suppressed by the newly founded Soviet. There is no evidence that any Russian officer saw the Ark, or that his discovery was suppressed by the Soviet. And, of course, there is no Ark.

Leading his own pilgrims at Lourdes, Bishop Poskitt of Leeds collapsed and had to be taken in an invalid chair to an hotel where he is now confined to bed. This is a particularly sad piece of news not so much for the Bishop, who has our sympathy, but for Lourdes and his own pilgrims. Why was he not taken at once to the Holy Grotto, dipped, and prayed over? An instantaneous cure of the Bishop would have been broadcast the world over, and Lourdes would thus have received a fillip not even Fatima could overcome.

It is astonishing how the Virgin at Lourdes resolutely refuses to cure Bishops—or even Cardinals. For example, Cardinal Griffin has been very ill for months, and is only now convalescing. How is it he was not whisked over to Lourdes and cured in a jiffy? In fact, he just went into hospital like any ordinary unbeliever, and had to bide his time to be cured. This is one of those impenetrable divine mysteries to which we are always calling attention and to which the Roman Catholic Church stubbornly refuses an answer.

A 15-year-old boy cycled 260 miles to fetch Holy Water from Walsingham (the English “Lourdes”) for his sick grandfather; but the boy's terrific effort was in vain, for his grandfather died. The boy obviously was soaked in the Catholic superstition about the efficacy of Holy Water.

A pamphlet sent out by the hierarchy is entitled, “The Voice of the Catholic Church—The Harmony of Faith and Reason.” The subtle humour here involved will strike even the most solemn. The idea that you can harmonise reason with talking serpents, naughty Devils, Virgin Births, and even modest miracles, can only appeal to the myth-sodden Catholics whose reason has been completely sapped by the Vatican.

We are also gravely asked whether G. K. Chesterton, Ronald Knox, Douglas Hyde, Arnold Lunn, Clara (sic) Booth Luce, and others “were foolish” in going over to Roman Catholicism? We would use a much stronger word than foolish and say “yes.” When Chesterton was once asked about the Serpent talking good Hebrew to Eve, he said he believed it because the Church told him to. Stupidity could hardly go further than that.

A poor 11-year-old boy was trapped beneath some falling wreckage of a disused building. He was given the “last rites” and then died. We ask in all earnestness—how can such mummary be tolerated? Would the boy have gone straight to a lake of eternal fire without the drivel of “last rites?”

The Passionists of Middleton Lodge Monastery look like having to build another monastery because of “dry rot”—not the dry rot of their faith and prayers, but the little insect which undermines wood. Commonsense would have suggested to them a miracle from God as a cure, but while priests are always pressing lay people to pray when they want God to give them something, they rarely pray themselves in such cases as “dry rot.” They know there would be no answer whatever to that kind (or any other kind) of prayer.

“Rebel Earl Joins the Exclusive 24” (Order of Merit) runs a headline in the *Daily Express*, and in two columns it gives extracts from Bertrand Russell's many books. We looked in vain for extracts from his “Why I am not a Christian,” a report of a lecture given in South London many years ago. Freethinkers will not be particularly proud of this once forthright “rebel” who does not seem to be able to make up his mind whether to consider himself an Atheist, Agnostic, Rationalist, Pacifist or Socialist. Where does he stand? It might be worth while to have his final considered opinions.

Logic has never been a Christian's strong point; if it were, God's houses, and His representatives on earth would be perfectly safe from His wrath: lightning would strike well-known atheist's dwellings, and Freethought speakers would be struck dumb and meetings would be flooded out, which makes the case of the two Christian Alpine climbers, “curiouser and curiouser.” John Smiley, theological student, and Father Hartley, on their descent from Vanil Noir Mountain, found themselves in difficulty, Father Hartley said, “Let us say a prayer so that our steps shall be guided.” As they finished the prayer the priest, representative of God, took a step forward, slipped and hurtled to his death. To repeat, if logic were a strong point with Christians, then God is to blame for the death of Father Hartley, and by ordinary standards, a father who ignores such a plea from his children is not fit to live. Verily, He moves in mysterious ways. . . .

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Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning. 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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. calling. New premises have been booked at Sati's Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street, and on the last Sunday in every month until and including November a lecture will be held at 7 p.m. To-day (June 26) is the opening date, and a joint meeting between the local N.S.S. Branch and Birmingham Committee of the Marriage Law Reform Movement has been arranged, with Mr. Pollard, J.P., as a speaker. We understand the new premises are very comfortable, and the branch will look to local saints for full support.

Where open air work is carried on, N.S.S. branches and speakers are taking full advantage of the spell of fine weather and encouraging reports come from various quarters. There is plenty of room on the N.S.S. platform for more speakers and the open air platform provides a good opportunity for taking the first step of "taking the chair."

Judging by Herbert Morrison's and Aneurin Bevan's effusions at the Labour Party Congress, some of Dr. Wand's missionaries have been getting at them. As a politician and administrator, Morrison may be in the top class, but when he descends to such religious drivel as for example: "If we (the Labour Party) had the right religious spirit, we shall beat the Tory millions. . . . Put not only your money but your soul into the fight." Or consider Mr. Bevan's bunk, "Never in the history of mankind have the best religious ideals found more concrete expression than in our (Labour Party) programme." The Labour Party must be getting anxious to descend to such puerilities.

Christian "evidence" has always been noted for the fact that it is not "evidence" and the lack of evidence seems to make Christians more certain. Sir F. Kenyon, the "Bible Champion," really surpasses himself in his book *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*. On page 22, writing of certain papyri recently dug up he says: "The fragments include records of four incidents in our Lord's life: one of these is otherwise unknown: it is apparently a miracle wrought on the banks of the Jordan, but unfortunately the papyrus is so much mutilated that its exact character is uncertain." Faith will move mountains too.

TRIBUTES

(The following is a selection of some of the personal tributes paid to Mr. Chapman Cohen on his resignation from the Presidency of the National Secular Society. A further selection will be given in due course.)

FROM THE EXECUTIVE OF THE N.S.S.

THE following statement from members of the National Secular Society Executive was attached to the Annual Report for 1949 and read at the Conference in Nottingham last Whit week-end:—

"From the Conference Agenda it will be seen that Mr. Chapman Cohen is not standing for re-election as President of the N.S.S. That ushers in the twilight of a long, unbroken and brilliant record of service to this Society in particular, and to the Freethought Movement in general.

It is a record which began in 1889 and has lasted for 60 years, following Charles Bradlaugh and G. W. Foote, two giants on the platform and with the pen. In 1915, the death of G. W. Foote opened the way for Chapman Cohen, and only a lion-hearted man would have undertaken to fill the vacant chair after two such outstanding warriors.

Chapman Cohen did more than follow on. He proved himself a brilliant leader, writer, speaker, possessing a superb judgment, and a shrewd business capacity.

Under his able guidance, Freethought propaganda began to take on a more scientific and philosophic turn from which it has never turned back. His ability and the confidence he inspired, soon began to bear fruit in another direction. Sympathisers in the Movement felt safe in leaving money to the Society, and to-day, the National Secular Society can spend on its propaganda more than ever before in its history.

The name of Chapman Cohen is known, and honoured by Freethinkers all over the world. He has won the loyalty of the overwhelming majority of our members; and if it be true that close association with a person is necessary to judge character, then the best testimony to him is the proved loyalty of every member of the Executive who has worked with him, and trusted him over many years as colleagues.

Chapman Cohen has given his very best to our Society and to the movement. We express our affectionate gratitude for all he has done, and wish him as long a life in his well-earned rest as he will find enjoyment and health in living.

Those of us who live the longest will never forget his name, and in the years to come, when those of us living to-day have crossed the border in the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns, the name of Chapman Cohen will retain its place among the greatest warriors of the Freethought Movement."

FROM CHARLES BRADLAUGH BONNER

DEAR MR. COHEN,

I see in "The Freethinker" that you are laying down the Hammer of the N.S.S. after sixty years of militant Freethought. Permit me, as representing Freethinkers all the world over, to salute you with all the guns at my command, and to express our admiration for the immense energy you have given to the task, the outstanding ability to write and speak, and the power to direct; the sum of which has been a monumental work of which we are all

very proud, and which has made you a great successor to Foote and Bradlaugh, and makes the election of a new President a major event in the story of British Secularism.

I will not speak of our regret at the striking of this inevitable hour, but rejoice that we shall still read you in the columns of "The Freethinker."

May I add a personal word of appreciation of the privilege of working with you as occasion called during the past two decades.

Yours in the Fellowship of Freedom of Thought,

CHARLES BRADLAUGH BONNER,

President, Union Mondiale De Libres Penseurs (World Union of Freethinkers).

June 5, 1949.

FROM MR. J. T. BRIGHTON, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE N.S.S.

May I claim the honour to pay a tribute to Mr. Cohen, an honour indeed, yet one I am sorry to have to give. We are all so sorry the time has come for him to resign the leadership of our Movement. We would gladly give all we could if we could put back the clock for 20 years, and give ourselves another 20 years of Mr. Cohen's wonderful work and guidance. However, time always marches on, and has taken its toll, and will continue to do so, yet even time cannot dim the memories we all will have of our leader and his work for the best of all causes.

We all respect him, nay, it is more than just a respect we have for him and Mrs. Cohen, it is affection! They were regarded more as father and mother to us all and to the cause.

Many people have contributed to the success of the National Secular Society and Freethought in the years past. We are not forgetful of the work put in by the founder, Charles Bradlaugh, and his wonderful power of voice and pen and legal outlook; nor do we forget G. W. Foote with his masterly writing and speeches. Yet I say that Mr. Cohen has done even more in his long term of office. He has been writer, speaker, lawyer, and fighter, and the remarkable success which has followed him was itself a tribute to his devotion, ability, and sincerity. Not only nationally, but internationally his work has had effect, especially his scientific and philosophic approach to Freethought. We all owe a debt to him for what he has done in that direction; it has cleared our minds to such an extent that we can help to clear the minds of others. Personally, I say that but for my association with Mr. Cohen, I might well have been content with a racing dog, or a loft of homing pigeons, instead of a library of good books, and an interest in life and Freethought, born of a desire to help to liberate mankind from the follies and superstitions of the past.

His concern for those of us who had the desire to help was remarkable and extensive. One cannot forget that with him in all this great work was Mrs. Cohen. She, too, then has our appreciation and thanks.

We all hope their retirement may be long and happy. Their interest in us will go on, and our successes will gladden them as much as they please us. I conclude then, although I have not said all that could, or should be said, in praise and thanks for the work they have done, by again wishing them health and happiness in their well earned retirement.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON.

FROM PETER COTES

As a reader of "The Freethinker" for the last sixteen years, I should like to place on record my appreciation and esteem for Mr. Chapman Cohen, and regret only that he is no longer able to fulfil the Presidency which he has held so magnificently since 1915. Few men have done more for the entire progressive movement in recent years than he, and his life-time of service to Freethought, his selflessness so far as worldly gain is concerned, his manifold talents, his devotion to duty and generosity of spirit at all times should ensure him a place along with Shaw, Wells, the Hammonds, and the Webbs, in the gallery of those champions of liberty who by their service to progressive movements have painted their names in indelible colours on the memory of mankind. It should also inspire those who follow in the steps of a great President that they may, whilst remembering his magnificent life's work, attempt to emulate his spirit for the future on behalf of a movement which needs renewed inspiration.

THE INGERSOLLS' BELIEFS

Ineffectual Efforts Made by the Believers of All Kinds of Religion to Convert the Colonel's Family

WHEN Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll died, hundreds of persons throughout the country asked a question which clearly showed that they had no conception of the real state of affairs in the Ingersoll household. It was: "Is Mrs. Ingersoll really an Agnostic also?" or "Do his wife and family share his views? Will they not change now?" Ever since Colonel Ingersoll's death letters have poured in from all parts of the earth from people who write to inquire concerning the religious faith of the family, and to urge upon them the commonly-accepted beliefs of the Christian world—beliefs long rejected by every one of Colonel Ingersoll's family, including his widow, his daughters, Mrs. Brown, and Miss Maud Ingersoll, his brother-in-law, Mr. Farrell, and his son-in-law, Walston Brown. How many thousands of these letters, tracts, and relics have arrived it is impossible to estimate. Here are some extracts from the letters:—

"Are you converted now?"

"Do you now see the folly of your late husband's Agnosticism?"

"Although your husband is now in hell, there is yet time for you to escape from the wrath to come. Renounce his pernicious doctrine before it is forever too late."

"You are now punished for being the wife of an unbeliever. He must suffer eternal damnation for the doctrine he preaches, and you will endure the same fate unless you accept the Bible, and turn away from the damnable theory of Ingersollism."

Thousands upon thousands of tracts have come in. A few copies taken at random are entitled: *God's Word to the Bereaved Unbeliever; The Fate of the Damned; A Thousand Years in Hell; Where will you Spend Eternity? Finger-Posts to Heaven; The Unbeliever's Deathbed; Ingersollism a Fraud; What is the Soul? What Say the Scriptures about Hell? To-morrow in Hell; Hope for the Infidel; Come to Jesus; Why Ingersoll was Wrong; The Plan of the Ages; Why Immortality is True; The Fallacies of the Sceptic.*

Catholics have sent bits of relics, scapulars, and other articles. Spiritualists send assurances that they have received messages sent by Colonel Ingersoll from the spirit world. They ask for a sitting. Few of these letters are answered at all.

A comparatively small proportion of the letters come from people who, in their own way attempt to comfort the family. One was written by a woman of Atlanta, Ga., and part of it is as follows:—

MY DEAR MRS. INGERSOLL,—The cry of your grief-stricken heart has come to me, and I desire, oh, so much, to contribute my grain of comfort. Dear one, can you not believe that your beloved is still with you, at your side, a constant though silent companion? Do take this comfort to your heart. You who knew the breadth of soul, the largeness of heart, the noble nature of your husband so much more intimately than anyone else could, can you not believe that these graces of heart and life were but the manifestation of the loving Father within him? Can you not believe, with me, that this same loving Father welcomed his son, running to meet him, falling upon his neck, kissing him, and crying: "This is my son, Robert, who has not recognised me these many years, but whom I have been loving all the time. This my son, who was dead but is alive again, has come back to his Father's house." And there

was joy in heaven! Take heart, dear bereaved one. Take to yourself this assurance, this hope, this comfort offered you from the fullness of a loving, sympathetic heart. He may not return to you, but you shall go to him.

The amount of illiteracy in the letters is astonishing. One reads:—

Mrs MAUD INGERSOLL,—Dear Mad: i inclose you a tract, what is the Soal, and hope reading same may Convert you from the evil of your Ways. hope you will write me your Opinion of it.

The avalanche which has poured in upon the family has taxed their utmost resources to sort out what little wheat there was from the chaff, and to send replies to all who deserved it. So far as has been possible, they have sent courteous replies to all really sympathetic and sensible letters. Three large drawers have now been set aside for the reception of future correspondence, and they are respectively labelled, "Well-meaning," "Spiritualistic," and "Idiotic."

Most of the writers seem to doubt Mrs. Ingersoll's Agnosticism. She could scarcely hold other beliefs. Sarah Buckman Parker, her grandmother, was the wife of a wealthy shipowner of Boston, and after his death she, with two sons, George and Benjamin, crossed the country, and in 1836 settled in Central Illinois. Here her home was situated in the centre of a triangle, having at its angles Springfield, Bloomington, and Peoria. Here the family flourished, and exercised a decided influence on all educational, political, and business interests of the community. This influence was exerted chiefly by Mrs. Parker, who was a woman of unusual intellectual qualities and fond of study. In her library were more books than usually fell to the lot of any save a minister or a lawyer in those days. Her taste ran to a study of the religions and creeds of the world, and amongst her favourite books were the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas, and the works of Swedenborg, Hume, Humboldt, Volney, Voltaire, Gibbon, Kant, and Paine. She arrived at that stage where she believed only in the revelations of science. To her sons she taught her beliefs, and they followed in her footsteps, for to them she was ever an oracle; whilst the bond of affection between them was of that close and deep-seated nature which is characteristic of the Ingersoll and Parker families on both sides for many generations back.

The Parker home naturally became a central point of meeting for well-known men of the time. Three of the best known and most welcome were Abraham Lincoln, of Springfield; David Davis, afterwards Senator, of Bloomington; and Leonard Swett, of Chicago. The three men were all intimate friends, and very fond of one another; but the fact that they lived at widely-different places, and that travel was not then so easy as now, led them frequently to agree on some place of common advantage.

"We'll meet at Mrs. Parker's," was always satisfactory to all, and so they did, and more than one Western minister had the fortune to do his best measuring arguments with the four; for Mrs. Parker's roof sheltered many a one, to whom she extended every courtesy that the most orthodox could have done; nor was any minister ever seated at her table without being asked to say grace.

Into this brilliant circle Robert G. Ingersoll entered about 1858, and met Eva Parker, daughter of Benjamin Parker, with whom he at once fell in love, and from the hour they met until the day of his death the harmony in every respect between them was perfect. Miss Parker was already an Agnostic.

This group continued unbroken up to the time of Mrs. Parker's death. She departed this life at an advanced age, ripe with the honours of a well-spent existence and

undisturbed in her Atheistic belief. From her had radiated an influence which may be clearly traced at the present day. There are now living of her direct descendants, who have reached mature age, 14, all of whom are Atheists or Agnostics. There is not one believer in the Christian religion amongst them.

George Reno, great-grandson of Mrs. Parker, who tells this story of his ancestor, says: "One thing is certain; and that is, the death-beds of Agnostics, so far as my family is concerned, are far from being the fearful things usually pictured. Both my grandfather and his brother, Mrs. Ingersoll's father, lived to be old men, full of vigour, and possessing all their faculties in a remarkable degree to an advanced age. They died the most peaceful and happy deaths, so easily, that no one knew the exact moment when they passed away, and both of them remained firm in their Agnosticism to the last moment. They were fairly adored by the people of Illinois in the neighbourhood where they had lived and where they did so much to benefit the country, and they were mourned as but few men are in a community."

RELIGIOUS TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

IT is common knowledge that the religious provisions of the 1944 Education Act were based upon a compromise reached by Mr. R. A. Butler after full consultation with both the Anglican and Free Churches and accepted by them. Part of the plan was that religious education in County Schools should be based on Agreed Syllabuses. Such provisions as had been given under previous Acts for denominational teaching were retained. In the case of secondary schools a new provision was made under Section 26, which stated that where a school was so situated that arrangements could not be conveniently made for withdrawing pupils for denominational teaching, provision should be made, upon certain conditions, for such teaching to be given in the schools.

The report of the Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) for Friday, March 10, 1944, shows that this proposed provision was given particular mention. The Anglican spokesman tried to get the provision applied to all schools by an amendment (which was rejected) to leave out the word "Secondary." He said:—

"We were building these new senior schools—or secondary schools as we are to call them in future—in which senior children from a number of what used to be called elementary schools were drawn. Some of these elementary schools were Church schools, and the difficulty was clearly going to arise if these children were removed from a village Church school to a splendid new County senior school, which stood by itself in the fields, so that there was no place to which the parents could exercise the right of withdrawal. Therefore it is provided in the clause that where a school is so situated that the arrangements . . . (i.e. for withdrawal) . . . would be nullified through there being no other convenient premises to which the children can be withdrawn, that in that limited class of case denominational instruction may given on the School premises."

In his reply Mr. R. A. Butler said:—

"My hon. friend is concerned lest in building a new kind of school, . . . the school may be placed in a locality so remote from buildings that when the children withdraw under what used to be known as the section 13 procedure, there is nowhere for them to go to receive religious instruction. If the issue is confined to that, the Committee will see there is no need for us to get unduly worried about the scope of

my hon. friend's intentions—and I trust his intentions will be regarded as strictly honourable. The position is not that which involves the abrogation of the Cowper-Temple principle."

Clearly then, the provision to give denominational instruction in the new County Secondary Schools was intended to apply to those secondary schools which were so geographically situated that withdrawal could not be effected.

It is quite clear that in recent months a deliberate attempt has been and is being made by the Anglicans to go beyond this provision and to try to get an entry into county secondary schools for denominational instruction irrespective of the situation of the school. The policy seems to be "inspired." A recent report of an Anglican Commission on the Church's work among children under the title of "Children Adrift" suggests, in connection with "Withdrawal Classes," that a new line of attack might be made to get entry into the schools. At Reading efforts have been made to secure entry into the schools for priests to give denominational teaching in five instances. Permission was refused in four out of the five, presumably because there were premises to which the children could be withdrawn. In the fifth case permission was granted because the nearest building to which the children would be withdrawn was more than a mile away.

In Oxford, however, an application for entry to the City of Oxford High School for Boys was granted, despite Free Church protests, and despite the fact that the school stands in the centre of the city surrounded by churches, colleges, college chapels, rectory rooms and other buildings to which it would seem the children could be withdrawn. The request came from the Deanery Committee for Education, which had sent out a questionnaire to parents asking them to return it signed if they wished their boys to receive Prayer Book and Catechism teaching. The whole thing was organised by the Deanery Committee.

Curious interpretation was put on the word "conveniently" in section 26. This was interpreted as meaning conveniently to the school time-table or the headmaster's planning of classes! It was denied that "conveniently" referred to the remote locality of the school. In spite of opposition the matter was passed through the Governors' meeting (where it did not even appear on the agenda!), the Secondary Sub-Committee and full Education Committee, in each case the members being informed that everything was in order, and that there was nothing to be done except agree under Section 26. At no stage was any evidence given to show that all the possibilities for withdrawing the pupils had been exhausted. Indeed it was a plain, outright demand for entry without attempt to arrange for withdrawal.

Fortunately the matter has been taken up vigorously by Mr. Wilfred Rowland, Secretary of the National Education Association, and by the Free Church Federal Council. The Minister of Education has been approached and protests have been sent to him. On Friday, March 11, Professor Gruffyd asked a question on the subject in the House of Commons to which the Minister replied that he was investigating the Oxford case.

Reports from other parts of the country suggest that the Oxford case is not the only one. Correspondence in the "Baptist Times" shows that forms inviting parents to sign asking for Anglican teaching for their children have been handed out indiscriminately to Anglican and Free Church children! In other places the forms do not make it clear that what is being asked for is permission to have denominational teaching as distinct from religious teaching under the agreed syllabus. Parents are thereby

confused, thinking that they are signing a request for their children to have religious instruction in general.

What action the Free Churches will decide to take if the Oxford Education Committee does not reverse its decision is too early to say. It is to be hoped that such action will not be necessary. It is clear that the Anglicans, whatever the honourable intentions of their spokesman in the House of Commons in 1944, have attempted to overthrow the balanced compromise on which the religious sections of the 1944 Act were based. This kind of thing makes it difficult for us to believe in the sincerity of certain sections of the Anglican Church. It brings discredit on religion and fosters the spirit of sectarianism, with which, ironically enough, the Anglicans sometimes charge us. As Free Churchmen we do at least know now that we shall have to watch carefully and look to our own rights in the fields of religious education.

WALTER W. BOTTOMS.

(With Acknowledgments to *Liberation Society News and Notes*. A letter from Mr. W. Rowland, Secretary of National Education Association appeared in a recent number of *The Christian World* in which he states, apropos of this article, that the Minister of Education has promised that the present arrangements will be brought to an end and other arrangements will be made.—Editor.)

THE YARN OF THE CROSS

ALL through the Christian ages the Cross, or the sign and symbol that goes under that name, has been a magical instrument or sign, and the most astounding miracles have been ascribed to it. For at least a thousand years it was looked upon in the most materialistic light, and credited with power enough to change and reverse the course of nature in every respect, and to the fullest extent. What the older and later Pagans have ascribed to their incantations and charms, that the Christians have ascribed to their Cross. True, in modern times the Protestants have somewhat idealised it, and stripped off some of its purely physical elements; but they have not diminished its all-mightiness. If ever the Christians, Papal or Protestant, really had an Almighty God, it is the Cross. This Cross can conquer nature, or reverse its courses; can conquer even men and even wild animals; can conquer devils high and low; and it is not less true that it can, and does, conquer God Almighty—that is, it is God Almighty, and the other Almighty has to yield to it.

The real history of the Cross I have given in my *Phallic Worship* pamphlet; but the Legend or Yarn of the Cross, invented and circulated by the Christians, is very different from that, and is a sheer romance from end to end. I may also mention that the Christ and his Cross are by no means historical; they, too, are pious yarns told by priests and monks to stir the devotion and confuse the brains of their dupes. The priestly fables called Gospels have had a long run and a widely-extended influence for evil; but their nature is now understood by intelligent people, and Christ and Cross must go the way of all gods and superstitions. There is no future for them, for the Age of Man has commenced; and Man and God can never occupy the same planet—the supernatural must all disappear in the Day of Science.

There can be no doubt that the Yarn of the Cross was as devoutly and universally believed in the Dark Ages as any item of the Christian faith. It was immensely popular; it was painted up in the churches, and shone in stained windows. There seems to be no room for doubt

that the Cross Yarn is the Christian form of similar stories told in connection with Tree-worship, which in ancient times was universal. The Spirit of Vegetation was everywhere regarded with religious awe and worshipped as the all-bountiful giver of good. And the Cross-worship is but one branch of Tree-worship—Christ, like John Barleycorn, being the spirit or soul or life of vegetation, which is constantly sacrificed for human life. The principal products of the vegetable kingdom are man's food, of which bread and wine were, and still are, the staple, however much they may have been superseded by other products of the animal and vegetable world.

With the hint given that the Cross Yarn is a survival of Tree-worship (mixed, of course, with Sun-worship), we may proceed to relate the story in its substance, though the details are too numerous for repetition here.

According to various monkish writers, the Cross of Christ was made of four kinds of wood; of three kinds only; of only one kind. Bede says the inscription was box, the upright beam cypress, the transverse cedar, the lower part pine. Another says the upright was cedar, the transverse pine, the head cypress. A third party contends that the upright was cypress, the transverse palm, the head olive. One legend says the whole Cross was made of the aspen tree, whose leaves have never ceased to tremble at the use its wood was put to. Lipsius said the wood was oak, and a later writer says it was pine. At any rate, the microscope shows that the wood preserved at Rome, Pisa, Florence, and Paris, all vouched for by those who could not know to be parts of the Cross, is pine.

Of course, the old Tree-worship was hardly likely to permit one tree alone to have all the credit, and so the saints who took over the old Pagan superstition, and called it Christian, manufactured their imaginary Cross of various woods, as if they had been making some choice and showy piece of furniture.

Everyone knows the Bible yarn of Adam and Eve, their creation and fall, their expulsion from the Garden, and the death of Adam (Eve does not seem to have died at all) at the early age of nine hundred and thirty years. The two trees, be it observed, of knowledge and of life grew in the Garden, and from these Adam, and all his posterity, were excluded, until the Christ should come to restore all things.

J. SYMES.

(To be concluded)

IF GHOSTS AND SPIRITS WEEP

In "Welsh Country Upbringing" which deals with Cardiganshire, D. Parry-Jones treats most sympathetically Welsh life and character. Towards the end of the book he writes of one, "John," who went "native" and left the village to live on the mountainside. Following his death the following remarks show how well the author (who was deeply religious) understood the effect of environment.

If ghosts and spirits weep, many tears of bitter anguish were shed round the cairns, cromlechs . . . the night their last child was taken away from them. That night I should have walked out into the gloom and . . . on to the moor to listen . . . if any spirits were abroad. First of all I should have to divest myself of all that I ever learnt, forget my profession and family, blot out of my memory all knowledge of roads, farms, fields, hedges and gates and think in old paths and groves . . . I would recall old ghost stories; sink into real primitive fears; peep the land with spirits and hobbits; corpse-candles, hell-hounds and phantom funerals such as Neolithic man believed in . . . obliterate all lore that was later than the 'Beaker' folk and thus, a ghost-frightened, remote shrunken, child-minded creature conscious of only my fears and instincts, strength and speed, I would slink away to the old cromlech . . . Before coming away I should like to hear the last sad notes of some ghostly sentinel sounding . . . the Last Post."

A PROVOCATIVE PLAY

IF one views the Theatre as a form of escapism with romanticism, colour and happy endings as a *raison d'être*, then the "Rising Wind," produced by Peter Cotes, with Joan Miller in the leading part, is not for them. If, however, one expects the Theatre to be a mirror of contemporary life, pin-pointing, so to speak, in a few hours the problems of the day, or even a channel of propaganda. I can recommend a visit to this brilliant play. The scene is laid in an American university with its "witch-hunt" atmosphere, and the difficult position of a university professor (Winsley Pithey) fervently believing in the right of freedom of speech. His bewilderment at being persecuted as an Atheist and a Communist because he dared to demand that the freedom to criticise is not only a right but a duty, is excellently portrayed. I came away with mixed feelings, and pondered over the position of the Freethinker—indeed of all progressives—who, in expressing his opinions, is immediately saddled with a label, and, as in the "Rising Wind," a Communist. I thought how much simpler life would be if all problems had but two sides. To the Freethinker, the old adage "he who is not with us is against us" is not always a *sine qua non* and, obviously, an anti-Fascist does not necessarily mean that one must be a Communist. This is definitely a play for Freethinkers, and Peter Cotes and his company are to be congratulated on presenting such a fine thought-provoking play.

J.S.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. Ebury. (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 Passing of Empire," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loco. Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E.15).—Tuesday, June 28, 8 p.m.: A meeting.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, BROADY and BILLING.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street (bombed site), Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Market Square).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Sati's Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Marriage Law Reform," Mr. R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P. (London). Joint meeting—N.S.S. and M.L.R.

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