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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Our Pagan Christmas

EVERY year, while from pulpit, Press, and radio we get frenzied exhortations to remember the Holy Child at Christmas, to sing with the Heavenly Host, and to remember that the Babe in the Crib was God Himself incarnated so that he could, by a cruel death, save us from our terrible sins, people at large mark the festival as one instituted entirely for our pleasure. Let us eat, drink, and be merry—whether we die tomorrow or not. Christmas parties for the little ones are full of joyous gaiety, everybody wants to be happy and have a good time. It is the occasion for greetings, for hearty invitations, and above all, for good food whenever possible. The contrast between the pious misery-mongers and the care-free pagans at Christmas is at once both a proof that unless roused to a sense of Christian sin, the average people refuse to share in it, and that the old Pagan festival of the sun, kept by nearly all ancient civilisations, still survives. The days, during the long autumn, became shorter and shorter, but about December 25, the tide turns, and thenceforth they will gradually get longer and longer finally ushering in the lovely season of spring, with its awakening from the winter torpor of terrestrial life, its budding of flower and fruit.

Christians, of course, all—or nearly all—believe that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary on December 25, though in actual fact, there is not the slightest evidence of any kind that any God was born at all. The Sun God Mithra was born on December 25 as were quite a number of others—all pointing to the fact that these Gods were simply personifications of the Sun.

In any case the two accounts in Matthew and Luke of the birth of Jesus are hopelessly at variance. In the former, we learn that His birth was actually prophesied in Isaiah—though even the Catholic Encyclopedia has given that nonsensical story up by pointing out that this was a mistake on the part of the divinely inspired Matthew.

But, of course, it was not altogether a mistake. A God *had* to be born of a Virgin like all or nearly all other Gods and the writer of Matthew must have given a whoop of joy when he read the "prophecy" in Isaiah where a "virgin" was going to have a child. He did not even look it up in the Hebrew (which says nothing about a virgin) but took it straight from the Greek translation, the Septuagint, where the translator had made a mistake. In the Hebrew, the word is "young woman."

It is interesting also to note how fond Christians are of saying that Jesus was born in a stable and how the artists employed by the Church almost always showed the Mother and Babe surrounded by cows, horses and other animals.

Actually, Matthew says he was born in a house (2, 11), while Luke says he was born or put in a manger. There is the "sacred" record, and Christians have to make a choice; and they choose the manger or stable. Jesus,

the Babe, surrounded by animals, makes a much more striking picture than a mere room in a house.

But not all Christians made this choice. The great ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, plumped, not for a manger or a house, but for a *cave*. And why not? After all, quite a number of other gods were born in a cave.

Eusebius probably got his facts from the Apocryphal Gospel, the Protevangelion, which in his day quite possibly was looked upon as of equal authority to the canonical Gospels. And he was followed in this also by both Tertullian and Jerome who also preferred a cave as the birthplace of Jesus. Even Archdeacon Farrar, in his *Life of Jesus*, prefers a cave.

Now, why was, in fact, a cave chosen? Well, the Sun God Adonis was born in a cave. So were Crishna, the Hindu Saviour, Abraham, the Jewish Patriarch, Bacchus, Apollo Mithra and Attis. No doubt, quite a number of other Gods were born in caves or had shepherds and their flocks attending their miraculous births.

Then what about the Heavenly Host singing and praising God at the wonderful event? In the Vishnu Purana there is a similar story of "the spirits and nymphs of heaven" dancing and singing at the birth of Crishna, while the same facts are recorded at the birth of Buddha. Even of Confucius, it is recorded that his birth was heralded with celestial music; and needless to say something of the sort came with the birth of Apollonius of Tyana. A flock of swans surrounded his mother and sang in unison—and if Apollonius had been regarded by our clerics as the Heavenly Babe, his life by Philostratus would have been their Holy Bible, backed up by exactly the same evidence they bring forth about Jesus.

Christian writers, while now ready to give up the famous prophecy about a virgin having a child, are still fighting for the "fact". Jesus *was* born of a Virgin, and that's that. They just hate to think that after all the Jews were right on the matter, and that they were wrong. But just look at the list of Virgin born Gods we have. There is, of course, Horus; Rameses, Crishna, Buddha, and quite a number of Chinese Gods like Fo-Hi, Lao-Tsze, Yu, and Hau-Ki, were all virgin born.

Even "mortals" like Julius and Augustus Cæsar were given Gods for their fathers. And it is well known that the famous philosopher Plato was believed to have been born of a pure Virgin called Perictione. The curious reader can consult Draper's *Religion and Science* where he will find how Apollo declared to Aris (to whom she was betrothed) that he was the father of the Babe—almost in similar terms to the story in Matthew.

One could go on in this way showing how the Christian and Pagan stories of a Virgin born God were nearly identical, proving beyond a shadow of doubt the completely mythical origin of the Christian story. But at the back of it we see, as Dupuis and Robert Taylor so clearly saw, the Sun Myth of the ancients. To the Christian story was added, no doubt, phallic accretions, inseparable from the later Sun myths, but the story of Jesus and his twelve disciples is based, like so many Pagan allegories,

on the adventures of the Sun through the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The "Light of the World" was the Sun and Jesus is represented as saying this very clearly—"As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world". He even adds—"Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while ye have light, lest darkness comes upon you". Here you have the Sun in all his glory.

In its summing up, the Encyclopedia Biblica is constrained to admit, after a long disquisition on the Nativity, that for "the whole birth and childhood story of Matthew in its every detail it is possible to trace a pagan substratum". That, it appears to me, is letting the Gospel Myths down very lightly. It is not a mere question of "pagan substratum" but of a complete Paganism in all its naked myths.

That is why Freethinkers can go ahead and enjoy Christmas with their pious friends. They are not celebrating a Christian holiday, but a Pagan one of very ancient lineage. Thank God, the tide has turned and from now onwards the day of the glorious Sun will become longer and longer.

H. CUTNER.

THE ROME CONGRESS, 1949

The President's Address

AFTER expressing his pleasure in accepting the invitation of the Giordano Bruno Association, his sympathy with Italian Freethinkers who were suppressed in 1925, and his congratulations on their reorganisation, the President said:—

In 1880, the year of the establishment of this international organisation, the movement was still in its essence the outcome of the French Revolutionary impulse with an emphasis on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; we were to be free with no legal impediments; equal in the eyes of the law and submissive to one ethical code, the natural bond of the family, or Fraternity. Freethinkers asked for Liberty of the Mind—free expression, free communication, free discussion—believing that out of the unhindered operation of the reasoning mind would come wisdom.

In many countries this doctrine of freedom was termed Liberalism, and political liberalism was its application to the political scene.

In 1904, the year of that brilliant gathering which has made Rome a high-water mark in the history of our movement, of an assembly brightened by the presence of Garibaldian veterans in the red shirts of Liberation of forty years before, the desire was still one for Liberation. The shaken, but still ponderous and immensely powerful obstacles to philosophic freedom were the great, ancient, organised religions.

A quarter of a century later we found ourselves very differently situated. An appallingly destructive war had precipitated and modified changes which had been operating gradually. In a century the application of science to industry had produced a social revolution. Mass-production evolved mass-organisation and mass-war.

Our fathers saw in the school a hope for freedom through knowledge, but the kings and emperors perceived clearly that the school could be the most powerful tool for the formation of obedient soldiers and servants; just as the Jesuits saw that if the little children were only confided to their care, their domination on earth would be assured. For a century now men and women have passed through the discipline of State schools before entering upon the labour of gaining their daily bread;

and the men have gone from the schools to the discipline of the armies, ever a unit in a class.

In the last quarter of a century this process of organisation by the mass has been accelerated. Men have become parts of a machine and look not to themselves but to organisations to save them; and lo, there appear organisations which offer them salvation at the price of utter and complete submission of self—to what? To some Mystery as interpreted by the initiate few.

After thirty years of war, revolution, destruction and strife, most men dream only of orderly tranquillity in which they rise from untroubled sleep to work without interruption, to eat their food to satisfaction without disturbance and to look forward to a serene and peaceful old age. Few wish to think.

Freethinkers, then, are no longer in the atmosphere of fifty years ago, which was a breath of spring, whereas now to-day we breathe an autumn breeze eddying among dead leaves.

Let us look into the past!

In this great and famous city there is a square with a name that smells of the spring—the Campo dei Fiori. But for many years the flowers that bloomed there were those of pain and death; death was the sweeter, bringing relief from pain unbearable. Nearly 350 years ago, Giordano Bruno was burned there alive.

He was born, the son of a soldier, at Nola, near Naples, just over 400 years ago. At this time the authority of the Church was outwardly supreme; the revived Inquisition was everywhere in Italy and the prisons of the Holy Office were crowded with victims of all grades.

At Paris, Etienne Dolet had been burned alive after torture on a charge of atheism; and at Geneva, Calvin sent his former fellow student Servet to the stake. It was a time of the greatest cruelty and callousness. Hangings, beheadings, impalings were easier forms of death.

When scarcely 27 years of age, Bruno had to flee from Italy for uttering doubts as to the nature of the Trinity; he had been denounced to the Inquisition as an Arian heretic. From that moment till his arrest in Venice, he was allowed little peace, being harried for his outspoken opinions from one city to another through Western Europe. Calvin's Geneva he found little to his taste—not a Reformed Religion, but Deformed, declared Bruno. A year in Toulouse made him a Master of Arts of its university; in Paris he gained the protection of Castelnau de Mauvissiere, who, Ambassador to England, took Bruno with him to London. There he lived for three years, winning the friendship of men such as Sir Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville and writing book after book. To Sir Philip he dedicated his most notable work, *Lo Spaccia della Bestia Trionfante*. In this he expounded a natural theistic religion, denied revelation and derided the notion of a divine nature. When Castelnau had returned to France, Bruno set out once more on his wanderings. The Calvinists drove him from Wittenberg, the university of Faust and of Hamlet. Wherever he went his lectures were sought after, and his influence on contemporary intellectual thought became increasingly great. While in Zurich, he received an invitation from a former pupil, Mocenigo, a man of some standing in the Venetian republic, to visit him in Venice, and there he was denounced by his host to the Inquisition.

Bruno was then submitted to a series of examinations, each more severe and searching than the preceding one, until July 30, 1592. In May, Bruno, whose courage was never in doubt, had declared that he had no fear

of the Inquisition, for he had spoken no evil. On July 30, his spirit broken, he humbly besought pardon and acknowledged that he had given no small occasion for suspicion of heresy. Knowing what we do of the methods of the Holy Office, we can imagine what he must have been through, far from his friends, betrayed by one he trusted. In 1593, the Venetian Inquisition by one Bruno over to the Roman Curia, and for six years he vanished into the prisons of Rome, till, on February 9, 1600, he was led into the hall of the Inquisition at Rome and condemned.

Bruno replied to the sentence, "Perhaps, you, my judges, pronounce this sentence with greater fear than I receive it." On February 17 he was led to the Campo dei Fiori to die at the stake. . . . "I did no fear to die," he said, "yielded to none of my fellows in constancy, and preferred a spirited death to a cowardly life."

In the century which followed, the liberating wind from France swept through the world like the river Alpheus through the stables of Augeas; but the cleansing was far from complete.

Over 100 years ago, one of the young men inspired by Mazzini was a sailor's son of Nice, Giuseppe Garibaldi, two years younger than Mazzini, but different from the Genovese. Whereas the elder Joseph was a man of the pen, the younger was a man of the sword. Mazzini's expedition to liberate Savoy in February, 1834, was a failure. Garibaldi's part in it was to have seized the Arsenal at Genoa, and for that part he was condemned to death. Making good his escape, he eventually went to Brazil and for ten years took an active and remarkable part in the revolutions which shook the South American continent.

On his return in 1848, Garibaldi, accompanied by the shattered remnants of his volunteers, left from the Porta San Giovanni and, pursued by French, Spaniards, Neapolitans and Papalini, made as though for the Alban Hills, twisting and doubling through Tivoli, Terni, Todi, Orvieto, leaving the enemies in the lurch, fooling them, outmarching them, climbing the lofty mountains, over the Bocca Trabaria, down towards the sea, towards Venice, besieged by the Austrians. These heroes, in the uttermost plight themselves, turned to help their brothers under Daniele Manin. The glorious effort was in vain. Trapped, they had to seek refuge in the rocky republic of San Marino, and there all but a handful were obliged to surrender, surrounded as they were by the Tedeschi. Yet the handful made their path through the very ranks of the Austrian armies to Cesenatico on the shore of the Adriatic Sea.

There, on a little fleet of fishing vessels, they sailed out in a storm towards Venice—and were captured by the warships of the Habsburgs. Not all: three boats got away. Garibaldi and his inseparable comrade, his wife Anita, gained Comacchio and the marshes. There in a poor hut, Anita, gravely ill even at San Marino, drew her last breath. Dying on the breast of Garibaldi, she needed no priest.

On September 2, a hundred years ago, the last words of Garibaldi as he pushed the boat from the beach were, "We shall meet again." Ten years later, he returned and Italy was made free.

Giordano Bruno died terribly alone and unafraid; Giuseppe Garibaldi saw all lost, but returned victorious.

In the century that has passed since the Liberator rowed away from Casa Guelfi, men have learned in most countries to know and prize that Libertas Philologica which Bruno taught and the Freedom for which

Garibaldi fought. Freedom, to live and speak freely, is the test of civilisation.

Let us now in our Congress take stock of where we stand to-day.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH BONNER.

(Abridged.)

INTERVIEW WITH GOD

THE reporter sat gratefully on the proffered cloud-bank, took his notebook upon his knee and began: "What do you think of the earth, my Lord?" God was a little embarrassed. "I have to admit." He said, "that for the last few thousand years I have not troubled over-much with that little planet. My adjutant, Lucifer, administered that department once, but, nevertheless, I will take a glance in order to answer your questions."

The archangel Gabriel, brought a big telescope, opened a cloud rift at the feet of God the Father, steadied the instrument, and stepped respectfully back.

Presently, God leaned back from the telescope, rubbed his eye and remarked quietly, "Everything has gone mad on earth."

The reporter ceased writing and glanced at God. "Do I understand you rightly, my Lord?" he asked. "Do you charge us on earth with being insane?" "Quite right, answered God, "that is exactly what I meant, but I will admit that you cannot help it." "But, really . . ." The reporter raised himself. "That will make my report a little too sensational, but I fear that your accusation is a little too sweeping." "All right," said God, "let us both look together."

Gabriel adjusted the telescope for the journalist. One then saw into innumerable halls and meeting places. Everywhere could be seen, on platforms and behind desks, wildly gesticulating crowds of men and women, milling around like flocks of sheep.

Slogan upon slogan was shouted, and there was a babel of noise from the crowd who repeated the phrases without in the least understanding them. The orators, with their supporters, shouted one against the other, and when they met there were bloody heads and many killed, for what reason none could really tell, for they all wanted the same things: freedom, equality, security, food and happiness.

"What do you make of it?" asked the all-loving God. "When one sees them all together like that one could really think they are all mad," answered the journalist. "as they all want the same things. Why do they not agree? What idiocy!" added the journalist, as he stared below. "Quite right," agreed God politely, "but wait a little, I do not want to miss introducing you to my representatives down there."

A Cathedral was brought into focus.

The scene was magnificent; gold, silks, costly fabrics, fat church dignitaries were being fêted like great heroes, despite the fact that there was nothing heroic about them; actually there was nothing exceptional about them except that they were just—corpulent princes of the Church.

Hungry, ragged people stood about watching the spectacle with awe. From chancel and altars, priests, parsons, rabbis, prophets and medicine-men preached and exhorted, exciting and insinuating in a thousand tongues. Each one claiming that their own teaching was the one and only truth, as if it were a new tooth paste; yet all were praising the same god, though none would admit it, so great was their hatred for one another. Wars came, and wars went, but none of the fat princes of the Church on their golden thrones built on the Ten

Commandments (of which they took no heed) deigned to lift a finger to stop even a small war. Contrarily, many wars were waged precisely because of religious differences.

"Mad," mumbled the reporter, feeling himself as giddy as Gabriel, swivelled the telescope and brought into view another speaker's rostrum from which an infuriated orator screeched that it was a crime for a German to marry a French woman. Thousands acclaimed the speaker, and as the picture faded from the journalist's eyes, God chuckled and said, "A little joke, but even this madman is taken seriously in your country. . ."

"One could see into huge laboratories in which men were busy searching for the most devilish methods with which to destroy each other, others were working in innumerable factories producing death-dealing appliances. The people hungered and slaved and gave of their wages without understanding that they were buying unnatural death at a high but certain price.

Elsewhere, in the immense space hung the Moon, no one had, as yet, disturbed her, except that dogs were sometimes constrained to howl at her; but that was enough for her. . .

HANS VON OETTINGEN.

(Translated by J. S. from *Geistfreiheit*, Germany).

SHAKESPEARE — OR SOMEONE ELSE ?

DID Shakespeare write the plays attributed to him? The question has been raised many times by those whose foregone conclusion is that he didn't. The main arguments on which they base their contention are (a) that the extent and character of the knowledge shown in the plays are irreconcilable with his education and social position; (b) that what is known of his career after leaving Stratford affords no evidence that he was the author of them. Let us briefly examine these two points; both rest on the strange assumption that what is unknown is of greater evidential value than what is known.

As a critic has well observed—"It is not surprising that the details of his earlier life are somewhat meagre; for in the 17th century there was little of that curiosity in an author's private life which plays so important a part in modern criticism."

It is on this scantiness of information that the impugnors of his authorship insist while studiously ignoring the references to his character and the quotations from his work found in the writings of his contemporaries. Their objections are founded not on facts, but on the absence of facts.

We have the testimony of Jonson that Shakespeare "had little Latin and less Greek," which, though negative in character, is enough to show that, even in the opinion of a scholar, he was not wholly deficient in "the humanities."

But, it may be asked, was such scholarship necessary in his case? Take the classical plays. There is nothing in *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* or *Troilus and Cressida* that indicates or requires a greater knowledge of ancient history than might easily have been acquired from such translations of Latin and Greek authors as were available at the time. In insisting on his supposed defects of education such cavillers defeat their object. Their argument (if it can be called such) proves too much. Would a finished scholar (Bacon for instance) have been guilty of the geographical blunder of giving a sea coast to Bohemia, making a clock strike in ancient Rome or causing Hector to quote Aristotle at

the siege of Troy? These are only a few of the errors to be found in the plays, but they are such as no scholar, jealous of his reputation, would make.

Shakespeare's knowledge was of human life and character which mere academic learning not only cannot give, but often makes its possessor unfit to acquire. Every seat of learning has had its quota of erudite fools; we have Seldon's paradox to the point. "No man is the wiser from his learning; it may administer matter to work in, but wit and wisdom are born with a man."

The plays evince vast and varied knowledge, but it is not the knowledge of the bookworm, absorbed from the books of others, but of an intellect conversant with every phase of life and character. Shakespeare's work was that of an actor-dramatist more intent on arousing the interest of his audience than on mere accuracy of detail. It is known that many of the plays were founded on older ones, the plots and characters of which he transformed by the power of his genius while indifferent to their trifling defects. Viewed in this light, even their errors may be regarded as evidence of his authorship.

It is opportune at this point to refer to some remarks by Mr. W. Kent who is known to readers of *The Freethinker* as a zealous opponent of (to use his own phrase) "the Stratfordian."

In a letter (October 30) he gives us a few quotations from the late Prof. Raleigh's monograph on Shakespeare in which that eminent critic writes in terms of eulogy of the extent and variety of Shakespeare's knowledge of the world of his day. He refers to "his unerringly sure touch with the characters of his high-born ladies." He tells us that he "was minutely acquainted with all the lore of field sports"; that "he had a remarkable knowledge of the processes and technicalities of the law"; that "all we know testifies to Shakespeare's familiarity with the life of the court"; that "certain of his allusions in *Hamlet* and the Italian plays show some detailed local knowledge of Elsinore and of Italy."

At this point Mr. Kent asks, "How do these fit the Stratfordian." His implication being, of course, that they don't fit him. Let us see. I will take them in due order.

(1) Shakespeare was a member of a company of actors who (it is on record) were frequently engaged to play, not only in the mansions and castles of the nobility, but in the presence of the king himself and his court. Would he not thus come in touch with the manners and characters of "high-born ladies"? *Hamlet's* reception of the players affords an instance of the easy and familiar footing on which actors were received by the highest in the land.

(2) Born in a country town like Stratford, is it surprising that he should be well acquainted with field sports and pastimes? If there be any truth in the report thereof, he was, in his youth, prosecuted and punished for his expertness in deer-stealing.

(3) Is it too much to assume that as an actor and part proprietor of a theatre, Shakespeare would be more or less intimate with the lawyers of the Inns of Court and the Temple wits who frequented it, or that he ever attended at a court of law? As has been pointed out, there is much more parade of technical legal knowledge in the plays of Jonson and Chapman, though neither was a lawyer, than is to be found in any of Shakespeare's.

(4) There is no proof that Shakespeare was ever in Denmark or Italy; the probability is that he never was. But how does that disprove that he wrote the plays? The fiction of all ages abounds in descriptions of scenes and places which the writers probably never saw. Yet we do not on that account question their authorship, or indulge in crackpot theories ascribing it to someone else.

Shakespeare's references to particular places are slight and allusive, and reveal nothing more than might be learnt from books, plays or intercourse with those who had some personal knowledge. His scenes are merely the setting or background for the presentation of incidents and events and the interplay and conflict of human character which he knew was everywhere the same. So far, Mr. Kent's method of argument is to put forward one flimsy objection after another, each founded, not on positive evidence, but on mere presumption.

The following is his final quotation from Raleigh's book with his (Mr. Kent's) comment on it:—

"He went to London to seek his fortune, and when he had found it there, returned to Stratford and established himself with his wife and family in peace and prosperity: *it is simple as a fairy tale.*"

To which Mr. Kent adds: "The italics are mine. The sentence seems unconscious irony."

It is obvious that this passage is quoted simply for the purpose of misconstruing it. What does he mean by "unconscious irony"? Is there such a thing? As I take it, the essence of irony is the *consciousness* on the part of the person using it of the difference between what he says and what he means. If he is unconscious of such differences his meaning is literal not ironical.

There is no reason to suppose that Prof. Raleigh intended his remarks to be taken otherwise than literally. His book is consistent throughout in its recognition of Shakespeare of Stratford as the author of the works attributed to him, and discovers no taint of the absurd craze which denies his right to be so regarded.

A. YATES.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF RELIGION

PERHAPS one of the strongest defences of religion against the onslaughts of freethought is the argument that nice people get a lot of comfort out of their beliefs, even if erroneous, and it is therefore cruel to disturb them in any way. Freethinkers, according to my observation, are a tender-hearted lot, and may be tempted to keep their knowledge to themselves, if they think they are likely to hurt anyone's feelings by airing it. Before they make a practice of restraint, on the score that they have no wish to rob a person of "the consolations of religion," it would be as well if they made certain that such consolations do really exist, and are not the creations of wishful thinking on the part of the clergy and their friends.

To read one's daily newspaper alertly is to have it thrust quite plainly on the attention that the consolations of religion are frequently missing in the very cases where they ought particularly to be present. Three recent items from the press can serve as examples.

A young woman university student of good family commits suicide, and at the inquest it is stated that she was "deeply religious" and that the effect of this was to make her despair of ever attaining the ideal standards in which she believed. Instead of giving consolation, as it is so often credited with doing, religion drove this poor girl to self-destruction.

One would imagine that an Archbishop of Canterbury would never lack the consolations of religion. There has just been published a volume dealing with the late Archbishop Lang. I have not read it, but all the reviews are unanimous in referring to his sense of shortcomings and failure, particularly when he interfered in the private life of King Edward VIII. His retirement, far from being filled with the consolations of religion due to a man who had reached the highest position in the

Church of England, appears to have been marred by heartsearchings and disquiet.

If anyone has earned the consolations of religion, surely it is Lord Reith, the architect of his country's radio broadcasting services. As the first Director-General of the B.B.C. he gave religion a predominant place in the programmes, and none of his successors has departed from the policy he laid down. And now he has written a book of memoirs, which, according to the reviewers reveals him to-day as a frustrated and disgruntled man, who feels that his talents have been wasted while Britain has been passing through some of the worst crises in her history.

Now I submit that if there was as much in these vaunted consolations of religion as is often claimed, Lord Reith would not have published a book tinged with bitterness. At almost any time he ought to be able to switch on his radio set, and, if he did not get a dose of comforting religion right away, it would not be long before he would be soothed by "Lift Up Your Hearts," "Morning Service," "Children's Hour Prayers," "Community Hymn-singing," "Christian Newsletter" and other such items owing their existence to his influence.

Would anyone be surprised, moreover, if, lulled into drowsiness by their opium-like effect, the ex-chief of the B.B.C. heard a voice from heaven saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" or some other words of similar commendation? I fear, however, that no such consoling message from on high has ever reached the noble lord, great as his deserts may seem to all who wish religion to be thrust willy-nilly on the British public. Hence, no doubt, the note of petulance that appears in his latest published utterances.

I must not overlook the old folk, who are alleged to be the most frequent recipients of religious consolations. This is because you often find them in old people's clubs held at churches and chapels, but it isn't the religion they go there for, but the company; and I am sure that none of these church and chapel clubs has a larger or happier membership than an Old Age Pensioners' Club I had the pleasure of visiting recently in Chiswick. They run it themselves without the aid or domination of any sect. I saw no sign of any need of religious consolation there, but a great appreciation of the comforts of social life. I came away feeling that at the present time the old are intellectually a long way in advance of those of a generation ago—knowing what they want and how to get it, given half a chance.

The moral for Freethinkers is that the consolations of religion scarcely bear examination. The assertion that they are to be found to any considerable extent and that they are precious and merit preservation is generally made to discourage criticisms of religious practices and ideas, and not because they are really what they are cracked up to be. Their alleged existence and value are doubtful in the extreme. Let no Freethinker be deterred from his duty of making known the truth as he or she sees it out of consideration for such a questionable quantity.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS—A MODERN DELUSION. By Frank Kenyon. Price 5s.; postage 3d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM, The Great Alternative. By Chapman Cohen. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 3d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

One does not often hear of that queer sect the Christadelphians these days, but recently a Spiritualist challenged them to a public debate on the Bible. It is their own particular interpretation of the Bible that Christadelphians stress so much, and it must be confessed that many of them know their texts pretty well. However, as the Spiritualist had about a hundred texts teaching immortality and survival, and Christadelphians believe only in a "conditional immortality," the latter refused to debate. What a pity—it would have been glorious fun to hear these protagonists slanging and differing from each other about "immortality," and all from the same God's Word!

Advertising for converts has been seriously discussed in our Protestant Churches, but we notice that a fervid Catholic, writing in the *Universe*, is very worried that the Catholic Church does not advertise. As a matter of fact, he is quite right when it comes to *paying* for space in our newspapers, journals, or hoardings; but when it comes to *free* advertising, the Catholic Church has all the others beaten to a frazzle. There is no day in which it does not manage to get into the papers somehow or other, and the way it manages to make the Pope "hot news" commands our highest admiration. And so long as our ultra-smart newspaper advertising men do not see this, so long will the Catholic Church's free advertising continue in their columns.

It is quite a pleasure to find the *Universe* still attacking Bishop Barnes' "Origins of Christianity." It is criticised as having a "number of discarded theories" lumped together so that they could "shock simple Christians," though so far no Catholic has been able to refute any of the "discarded" theories. To tell the truth, the only people who talk like this are people who cannot answer the Bishop, or who have never read the book—and they know their own credulous sheep very well.

But the real reason for dragging in Dr. Barnes is because there are still fools in the Anglican Communion who talk about "reunion." The *Universe* tells them sweetly but bluntly that so long as they can retain bishops like Bishop Barnes, "it is a waste of time to discuss corporate reunion." And we can well believe it. Reunion can only take place when the Church of England expresses "contrition" and is ready to swallow the ludicrous nonsense the Roman Church calls religion. And somehow or other, that, we think, will never happen.

Bishop Barnes must be an awkward colleague. He will just not toe the (theological) party line. His latest defection was made at the Birmingham Rotary Club, when he came out in favour of sterilisation, birth control, euthanasia, and many progressive ideas that have shocked Christians ever since these subjects were broached. "The ideas are new, they are contrary to our tradition, and seem to be an offence against our human instincts," but, adds the Bishop, "what alternative is there?" Could we diffidently suggest that the "alternative" is to "trust to the Lord," which seems to be the stock Christian answer to our problems.

A branch of the Spanish *Opus Dei* ("Work of God") consisting of professional laymen is being opened in Chicago. It is one of the first of the secular institutes to be recognised by the Holy See, and is a new form of

religious life. A drive is being made to persuade newsmen, lawyers, and students to join, in fact, to "all those that wish to continue employment, but also a saintly life." Members take a vow to lead a spiritual life of meditation, humility, and prayer, but are not expected to live at headquarters.

The only restrictions placed on Protestants in Spain is that they are banned from advertising, or any signs or indications on the outside of their churches, and are not permitted to hold any demonstrations or outdoor meetings. But, adds the Spanish Embassy press attaché, in a letter to the *Christian Science Monitor*, these restrictions are placed upon them more for their protection than for their suppression. After this, let no man say that tolerance and charity are absent in the Catholic scheme of things.

Last week we published an account of the plan of carrying a statue of Our Lady of Fatima which crashed in flames with the loss of several lives, despite its "holy" cargo. This week, Our Lady has let down her devotees once again, when a lorry hurtled backwards down a hill into a religious procession at Forlì (Italy). One person was killed and several were injured. Really, if the Mother of God cannot do better than this, even her most ardent worshippers may start to wonder whether all their adulation is worthwhile. If She cannot look after some of her best friends, how is She going to convert Russia to the "true faith" as She promised at Fatima in 1919?

An appeal to ministers to help with evangelistic work in the Army Cadet Force was made by Major White, welfare officer, at Sidmouth. Although he reported "good progress" he wanted still more ministers to join the panel, for the young cadets have an "open mind on religion," which no doubt worries the welfare officer—for what is more dangerous to religion than an open mind? Obviously, the Major wants to catch them young to close their minds before the cadets start thinking when the damage to religion would be irreparable. It is not only the Roman Catholic that realises that the perpetuation of religion is based on early training—the earlier, the better!

As much as we dislike the Lord's Day Observance Society and its Moaner-in-Chief, Mr. Misery Martin, we must admit that he is, at least, consistent in his bigotry. This is evinced by his proposed attitude for Christmas Day, which falls on a Sunday this year. For Misery and his lieutenants, there will be no celebrations. Not for them the time-honoured Christian tradition of merriment, including mistletoe and the trimmings, nor the still older Pagan welcome to the birth of the Sun. This Christmas will be to them just another Sunday—a day of mourning and gloom. However, all is not serene in the L.D.O.S. camp, for one of the organisers, according to the *Daily Express*, will eat a Christmas dinner, smoke a pipe, and horror upon horror, "even let his two children laugh with joy." This is enough to make even the "Man of Sorrows" laugh!

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Is the delay in proclaiming the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary designed to give Her time to settle in, or has not the Pope yet received the O.K. that She has arrived in Heaven.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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FOR "THE FREETHINKER"—A. Addison, 10s.; E.C.R., 2s.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

It is near enough two weeks now to the N.S.S. Annual Dinner, which is to be held in the Holborn Restaurant on January 7, and those who have not already applied for tickets need to remember the following points: Apply at once, enclosing 15s. with application for ticket; state if vegetarian; and give details of any hotel accommodation required. The party is filling up nicely and those wishing to join in must send in without delay to General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1.

The new German Freethought Association has been formed and is already active in Hamburg, Braunschweig, and Berlin, and a committee has met to discuss further activities and organisation. Many of the old (pre-Hitler) officials have tendered their services, but many are missed, in particular, Max Sievers, the former President of the Freethought Association, who was executed by the Gestapo in 1945. An official organ, *Geistfreiheit* (The Free Mind), is issued monthly by editor, H. Goegginger.

Another book has just managed to find a publisher—the well-worn subject of God and Science. In fact, the title is *God and Science* and the author, Mr. J. W. Doerly, sets out to prove that the Bible "is essentially scientific." Elijah going up to heaven in a fiery chariot, Jesus flying up without a chariot, God creating the universe in six days, the wholesale resurrections of Jewish Saints, and a hundred more similar yarns, are all "essentially scientific." Still, Mr. Doerly has courage even if most scientists will roar with laughter at still one more naive attempt to square an Oriental collection of myths and legends with the modern utterly Atheistic conception of the Universe.

An advertisement in a daily paper offers a crucified Jesus on an oak cross for 12s. 9d. post free as a Christmas

gift. There's certainly money in religion. The advertisement says children find the crucifix comforting when hanging over their beds. Ye gods! A dead man nailed to a bit of wood to comfort little children in bed. To follow up the same idea, the N.S.S. Christmas Greeting card, with a picture of the Devil sitting on a red hot coke fire with a pitchfork in his hand, will lull nervous children into a deep and refreshing sleep. Sevenpence, post free.

Mr D. B. Wyndham Lewis, whose Catholicism has become an obsession, thinks that the present day "odious" Christmas was largely invented by Charles Dickens and his *Christmas Carol*. Mr. Lewis is (we are glad to say) a Dickens lover, and he speculates on what Christmas might have been had Dickens followed Newman into the Roman Church. He might have lost a large public, but he would have made Christmas the feast of the Incarnation instead of the orgie of booze and eating it really is. In other words, Mr. Lewis would have preferred a solemn Christmas of misery, rather than a pagan day of happiness, joy and revelry. Thank God, Dickens had no illusion about Roman Catholicism which he loathed quite as much as he did Spiritualism.

A little book written by "Mass Observation," entitled *Meet Yourself on Sunday*, is causing no little heartache among Christians for it tells the blunt truth about the Lord's Day and the way it is being kept by Christians. The old Victorian conception of a Divine Day of Rest to be kept sacred to God Almighty and sponsored thus by the Lord's Day Observance Society appears to be as dead, for the majority of people, as the proverbial door nail. They simply will not go about looking miserable and thinking it looks holy. With bicycle, motor car, and other transport, whole families get into the country whenever possible, and if the weather is too bad, they prefer the Sunday cinema to the church. As the *Church Times* has ruefully to admit, people nowadays refuse to regard missing a Sunday service a sin.

The *Church Times* cannot offer any real solution. If churches have no plan wherewith to attract reverent believers they might as well shut up shop. To say that services in church must insist not "principally to hear or to see, but 'do this'" is to go bankrupt straight away. Belief in Christianity, even among some bishops, is pretty nebulous—and if the faithful note that nothing happens from God when they "desecrate" the Lord's Day, and it gradually disappears, another big nail will be hammered into the Christian coffin.

Miss Sheila Kay Smith is a Catholic convert and a well-known novelist, but her experience in both fields does not appear to have forced a little common sense into her make-up. She tells us that "Men enjoyed themselves because Christ was born, knowing that but for the Incarnation, there could never have been any real joy upon earth." One wonders why conversion should be responsible for this kind of bilge—or is it a necessary concomitant? The late G. K. Chesterton could nearly always write so well that one was almost compelled to read him—except when he tried to write about the "Faith," and then he became a consummate bore. Miss Kay Smith can rest assured that people enjoyed themselves before the Incarnation, after the Incarnation, and in spite of the Incarnation. And they will go on enjoying themselves long after the Incarnation has been proved to be a hoax.

HIS WHOLE VOCATION

I

EDUCATION of children up to the age of five years proceeds so rapidly and satisfactorily that one wonders why the authorities interfere by making school attendance compulsory so early in life as the fifth year. Physically, growth of the newly-born helpless pink lump into sturdy vigorous active boy or girl is stupendous, but we are so used to seeing it happen that we do not realise the immensity of bodily development during the first quintennium.

Less noticed but more astonishing because greater in extent is the mental growth of those first five years. Biologically and psychologically to set up a body-mind or mind-body dualism is wrong. They are manifestations of the same organism, not to be considered apart any more than height or weight, sight or smell or taste, running or eating or sleeping should be isolated from the general expansion of children.

Only if a limb or organ is diseased, atrophied or irregular do we notice it and take action to cure the defect. This should be our attitude toward mental abnormality or retardation in children. In a few cases the brain as a whole, or an important segment of it, or a gland influencing some of its functions may, be defective, results upon the sufferer considerable, varying up to helplessness.

Fortunately such are few, though too many till there are none at all. The majority of youngsters need only good food and fresh air, cleanliness, exercise and plenty of sleep to grow and learn automatically.

Because that is the outstanding feature of the infant, surprising and pleasant, his capacity for self-education as well as bodily growth. The two occur together, associated and interlinked.

II

The number of mechanical processes acquired by the human machine during its primary five years is notable. Some are of much complexity. We adults take our control of them as a matter of course, not remembering how we first learned them. Unless we lose one, when we find the recovery long and tedious, as experienced by soldiers and workers who attend rehabilitation centres, or when we contest against our fellows in games, work, memory, reasoning or aught else.

Yet the toddler masters a host of complications, apparently with unconscious ease, and starting from zero.

Neither statement can be made dogmatically. Psychology of the infant is difficult to understand and small in ascertained amount. He has the advantage to him, disadvantageous to us, of neither analysing his own sensations nor answering questions either to help or mislead inquirers.

Every textbook on baby care gives the simple accomplishments and the age at which they should be achieved; sitting up, crawling, walking, talking, guiding objects to mouth; recognising individuals, shapes, colours, sounds and so on through a long catalogue of abilities. Till by the age of five years we are contemplating a tiny man or woman whose physical and sensory set-up is efficient though intricate.

He has many graces, numerous interests, personality or character enough to deserve respect, can practise surprising numbers of activities, has learnt a series of personal habits to make him bearable by others and capable of looking after himself. Additionally he is most likely a voluble talker with a startling range of topics, and moods from tears to laughter.

As near as we will permit ourselves any meaning to that discredited word it is a miracle. To detail every-

thing a child learns in its first years would fill pages, all got eagerly and voluntarily, most of it without help from grown people, wise ones among whom find it best to interfere little with the child's dabbling in experiences.

Because that age is experimental. What a marvellous record a man might write if he could make conscious and put in language memories back to his birth.

III

So acquisitive and retentive is the growing mind, so perceptive the senses that one tends to be sceptical, wondering if all the five-year-old knows has been learnt in five years.

It opens possibilities of conjecture and theory as to the likelihood of reincarnation, so that children carry with them from previous states masses of knowledge and experience upon which to build their present lives; or feasibility of acquired characteristics being inherited, giving children chances which their ancestors had not.

All this is speculative and fanciful. As far as we know each baby starts blank and proceeds to grow and learn as fast as it can, faster than in any subsequent five years of existence.

It is an enormous benefit to be born of healthy and intelligent parents both deriving from similar stocks for generations back. Also possession of at least moderate wealth rather than poverty helps nature wonderfully in bringing forward the child.

Debatable it may be but cannot be flatly contradicted that the first five years of life constitute the most formative period. Fortunate is the child who has good parents and home as his background and circumstances during that time. Among hosts of reformers and uplifters who flourish in the community, those who desire to improve housing conditions, pre-natal care, family allowances and everything which summarises under the head of child welfare, have strong arguments on their side.

Another problem is raised. Most children up to the age of five years acquire their vast stock of skill and understanding and knowledge voluntarily and joyfully. It should be possible to continue that process and method, that happy progression, through many more years.

We are too ready later to dictate to children, boys and girls, youths and maidens, what they shall study, penalising them if they do not learn that which adults, especially those in authority, prescribe as suitable and good for them.

Remembering how successful is the free friendly home rearing of children in their first five years of infancy, more of the same style and atmosphere should be applied to the ten years of education which more formally follow.

So glibly is the phrase compulsory education thrown about that users of it ignore the contradiction of adjective against substantive. Education ceases when compulsion is applied.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

MIRRORS

The gods are mirrors of our human minds;
Each man and woman in them merely finds
The pattern of his character; on Thor
The Warrior calls; to Venus prays the Whore;
The Builder deems his god an Architect,
The Lawyer treats God's law with deep respect.

These mirrors throw man's image back again,
And if our souls lack harmony cause pain;
"An honest god's the noblest work of man,"
But few they be that find him; fewer can
See through the Mirror to the Truth behind,
Which poets apprehend and sages find.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

I WAS A LITTLE CATHOLIC

(Concluded from page 512)

THIS attitude was, of course, but a minor symptom of the prevailing self-assurance of British Christianity during the great expansion of wealth and power of the nineteenth century. We were rich and powerful it was argued, our Empire was spreading because we had the true religion and God was on our side. The British were the chosen people, selected by the Almighty to rule the world; Catholic countries were decadent. This notion prevailed even in the last war, when one of our noble lords declared we were the God-elected chosen to conquer the dictator countries. Similarly, the Germans were being told by their propagandists that Hitler was raised up by the Almighty to lead them to world dominion.

But such sectarian squabbles as I have described lessened in importance as we developed and had to attend to the subject of organic evolution. This dominated all other subjects and threatened to make Papist and Protestant uneasy partners in defence of the Holy Bible.

The Origin of Species had dropped on holy ground like an atomic bomb nearly forty years before, and the religious world of the 1890's was still suffering from the devastating radiations from it. Emerging from the dialectical turmoil which it produced was the growing acceptance by prominent Christian divines of the fact of evolution, with attempts to square the belief in it with holy writ, but a considerable rearguard of the old school, driven from one position to another, was still fighting. Those of us, seeking before everything, the truth about man and his universe, studied eagerly Darwin and his excellent expositors whose accumulating evidence made nonsense of much of the sacred books. Earnest young Catholics sought guidance from their priests and the Catholic Press. It is important to note now that the Church, among the educated anyhow, not only admits man's blood relationship to the brutes and the fact of cosmic evolution, but audaciously declares that it has always done so; but those of us who sought the advice of our pastors and the C.T.S. pamphlets found nothing but dogmatic opposition to belief in anything but the Bible story of creation. It is also important to remind modern Catholic evolutionists that it was not merely the Church's opposition to Darwin's special theory of natural selection—or development from apparently fortuitous variations, which still holds the field among most scientists—but it, the Church, held the view expressed by Hilaire Belloc, as recently as 1926, when he set out to instruct H. G. Wells in biology: "Man was specially created."

Mr. J. J. Lawson, M.P., in his excellent autobiography, *A Man's Life*, writes of his efforts at self-education in a Durham colliery village. I would mention his account merely as a contrast to mine, for it is of the same period. Mr. Lawson describes his growing awareness of precious leisure being wasted with the gambling, swearing, bad lads of the village, and his determination to lead a better life; a common phenomenon of adolescence. The only outlet for reform in the circumstances was, apparently, through the local Methodist chapel. No other cultural organisation was available there for a youth of the working class. He, therefore, accepted the doctrines of the Methodists without question; the fundamentalism unchanged from Wesley's time. The ideas that were shaking the foundations of these beliefs in a more sophisticated environment like that of Glasgow seemed to be unknown in his village. He appears to have accepted the scriptures literally. As

one unkind critic of his book declared: "He went from pitch-and-toss to Methodism and became a Cabinet Minister." Which, from the well-known fact that all gamblers are superstitious was not such a violent "conversion" after all. Perhaps, with the Englishman's reputed lack of interest in ideas he didn't concern himself, as a young Scot would, with the validity of the theological assumptions.

Nowadays, I am told, Jail Square is no longer the forum for intelligent discussion. In its decay it is a stand for racing tipsters and ranting evangelists. The arena of religious warfare has moved to the respective football fields of Protestant Rangers and Catholic Celtic. There, despite efforts at segregation of the parties and police surveillance, militant Christianity comes to grips, and with brickbats, bottles and razor blades fights for the faith that is in them. Apart from the activities of these ignorant mobs, Scotland, as elsewhere, displays the modern indifference to religion. A freethinker, however, cannot but regret the passing of those stern old champions of Protestantism who told of the menace of Rome.

J. McILWAIN.

REACTIONARY RELIGION

BEFORE the war of 1939-45 descended on Europe, there seemed to be growing in importance a tendency towards modernism in religion. The Unitarian Church, the Society of Friends, and similar progressive bodies had (while appealing only to a minority) been acknowledged by many people of all shades of opinion as organisations of genuine theological value, while within the Church of England such figures as Dr. Barnes, Dr. Inge, and Dr. Major were generally respected even by those who did not share their ideas.

For some reason not easy to discover the period of the war and its aftermath appears to have reversed much of this. Especially the lay writers who have come to prominence within the last ten years or so—Mr. C. S. Lewis, Miss Dorothy L. Sayers, and the rest—have shown a tendency to take up an attitude towards religious questions which can only be described as reactionary. And the fact that this has coincided with the rise of the High Church party in the Church of England has produced such events as the recent unsuccessful attempt to drive Dr. Barnes out of his bishopric.

The main point in this new tendency in theological circles, as was noted not long ago by an eminent Unitarian minister, the Rev. E. G. Lee, is the adoption of what may be called an "either-or" attitude. Mr. C. S. Lewis, for instance, writing of Jesus, says: "Either he was a raving lunatic of an unusually abominable type, or else he was, and is, precisely what he said." Now this is such an over-simplification that it is difficult to comment on it. The fact that Jesus might be a prophet whose message was distorted by his enthusiastic followers, or that a whole mass of myth might have crystallised around the name of a man originally a startling and impressive orator, is something which Mr. Lewis dismisses airily, with only a cursory mention. Yet to an increasing number of people of varying shades of opinion something like that is what they feel to be true. The Unitarian opinion that there is no undoubted evidence that Jesus claimed to be a Son of God, save in the way in which he would have called all thoughtful people sons of God, while it is in many ways a rational case, is a matter which Mr. Lewis does not even discuss. It does not enter into his mind at all.

And the growth of what I have called reactionary religion has consequences well outside the directly theological sphere. A recent book of literary criticism Mr. George Every's *Poetry and Personal Responsibility*, which its author describes as "an interim report on contemporary literature," deals with many of the leading writers of our period, and often comments adequately on the importance of their work. Naturally, Mr. Every devotes a good deal of his space to Mr. T. S. Eliot, though one cannot avoid a suspicion that this is more because of Mr. Eliot's religious views than because of his undoubted eminence as a poet. This suspicion, indeed, turns into certainty when it is seen that Mr. Every devotes a chapter to the work of the late Charles Williams—a very minor poet and novelist who, for religious reasons, has recently become fashionable. It is thus seen that the theological prejudices of a critic tend to spill over into what should be a purely literary field.

And what have Freethinkers to do with all this? Well, as I view it, the point to be borne in mind is that the old optimism which many of us felt in the now far-off days before the war becomes less tenable. The Churches (with a few notable exceptions) are tending to become more steadily backward-looking in their philosophy. Only by opposing such ideas resolutely is it possible for a rational attitude to religion to be maintained. The revival of an old-fashioned and irrational outlook, such as that which is associated mainly with the name of Karl Barth, is something which must be shown up as something which no sensible person can possibly adopt.

No doubt there are still a number of Freethinkers who feel that those who want to continue to pursue Rationalism in the theological field are flogging a horse which is nearly dead. I do not mind admitting that ten years ago I was one of those who had such an opinion. But the revival of a kind of medievalism is one of the symptoms of our time which shows clearly enough that the price of progress in the religious sphere (as in so many other spheres) is continual vigilance and continual opposition to all reactionary tendencies. There are, after all, few people who are prepared to admit that they have taken up an attitude to life which deliberately closes their eyes to many of the recent advances of science.

For—no mistake must be made upon this point—the modern theological thinkers like Mr. C. S. Lewis and Dr. C. H. Dodd cannot possibly accept the findings of Darwin, Freud, and other pioneers of scientific thought. The work of such scientists cannot be in accord with the beliefs of the medievalists of our time. And as a result the religious propagandists most fashionable to-day must be scientifically reactionary in their outlook. They must be opposed by Freethinkers as well as by all who see that the dignity of man is best supported by advocating a generally humanist approach. No one can possibly accept the beliefs of Mr. C. S. Lewis, unless prepared to throw overboard all ideas of man's mental integrity. And in consequence it is necessary for humanists to take up an attitude of opposition to such backward-looking philosophers.

JOHN ROWLAND.

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From: THE FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATION OF GERMANY.

To: THE FREETHOUGHT CONGRESS, ROME, 1949.

Fraternal greetings and success to the Congress.

The Free Religious Communities in Germany (founded a century ago), and who have been the backbone of the Freethought movement here, are having a difficult struggle for their existence.

Unlike the Churches, support from foreign organisations and friends has been denied them, a circumstance which weighs particularly heavily in that the Freethought organisations were proscribed, disbanded, and all assets confiscated by Hitler and his police during the Third Reich. The Churches, at least during the first years of the Hitler regime, were true helpmeets of the Nazis, and pose, to-day, as the true defenders of democracy and freedom, despite the fact that Agreements were concluded with the tyrant. In their Pastoral Letters they urged and exhorted their flock to be true followers of the "Fuehrer" and from their pulpits called for a blessing from Heaven on him and his hangmen. The Churches to-day, through their hypocrisy, endeavour to awake the sympathy of the world, and obtain the full moral and financial support of the occupation authorities, with the declared aim of suppressing the Freethought movement. Radio and Press are in their service and a reactionary wave is flooding post-war Germany.

On the other hand, the Freethought movement can only rely on the generosity of its supporters, who have themselves a difficult economic struggle.

In this unequal fight we may sink, unless we can look to help from abroad. This cry for help must not remain unheard, and if our friends abroad are concerned in the strengthening of Freethought in Germany, with the renewal of true morality and the rebuilding of democracy, it can only be successfully achieved if the strength of our organisation is reinforced.

The annihilation of this moral strength is, however, the aim of international clericalism; and their assistants in Germany are prepared to replace the Nazi tyranny with a clerical despotism, either Roman or Lutheran.—Yours, etc.,

WILHELM SCHAEFER,
President.

(Trans. by J. S.)

From: THE GERMAN FREETHOUGHT FEDERATION.

To: THE FREETHOUGHT CONGRESS, ROME, 1949.

The German Freethinker Federation sends to those friends assembled in Rome, Freethought and fraternal greetings, and wishes the Congress every success.

We German Freethinkers have realised, through bitter experience, how important is the fight for freedom of thought. Before our organization, which had continually attacked the Christian beliefs of the Nazi dictators was smashed and proscribed, and our assets confiscated, we could count in our ranks more than 600,000 members actively engaged in the building up of a freethought world. Many of our leading lights were murdered, and many officials sacrificed in a criminal war. Members were scattered, and the Federation was poverty-stricken. To-day, under immense difficulties, we are rebuilding our organisation and we can work with greater zest, having the knowledge that abroad, friends of like opinion are doing the same work. These thoughts lend us strength, and we therefore wish you every success in your Congress and tender our fraternal greetings.—Yours, etc.

(Trans. by J. S.)

KURT NEUMAN, Hamburg.

THE PORTUGUESE RACE

The Portuguese race has been slowly and craftily corrupted by monasticism. Our religion—more clerical than divine, has completely penetrated us, giving us an infallible law for our consciences, forbidding us to think, assuring us of a heavenly paradise by the easy road of repentance, making possible to us all crimes by means of the simple confession of them, throwing us into a state of passive inertia with regard to the problems of our higher destinies as human beings. The priests have taught us to explain our faults as temptations of the devil and to consider ourselves innocent once we are absolved by our confessor. With such theories, duty and responsibility have disappeared; conscience was slowly frozen and has vanished. He who hasn't the strength to refuse the domination of his conscience to the priests cannot dispute his liberty with despots. Fanaticism has left us spent and weakened. The clergy bastardized the pure idea of justice by allying it with notions and interest of religion and with religious sentiment.

N.F.

CORRESPONDENCE

FREEDOM—FOR WHOM?

SIR.—According to Mr. Corrick, "if I am a freethinker I should bring my freethought ideals into action" (whatever that may mean); and if I am not, then presumably I can go to the devil.

But Mr. Corrick really should read his own contributions to the correspondence columns of *The Freethinker*: he has not yet given any examples of tyranny, cooked or otherwise; what he has done is to indulge in a series of accusations of a general character such as may be read in the columns of the "yellow" press almost any day.

Mr. Corrick's Russo-phobia may be correctly gauged by the fact that he, a "freethinker," is prepared to accept as evidence "Getting to know the Russians"—by permission of the B.B.C. And the tactics of the Red-baiter are well illustrated by Mr. Corrick's evasion of the issue contained in the quotation from Mr. Paul Hoffman: the point there, quite obviously, was not the difference between standards of living here and in Russia; it was that if Mr. Hoffman is right, then Mr. Corrick is wrong, and vice versa. Persecution, tyranny, oppression and the rest of the horriŕe story cannot co-exist with an intense effort to improve the standard of living of the people.

When Mr. Corrick mentions the "iron curtain" (precise geographical position unspecified) I am tempted to ask whether he considers himself to be behind or in front of it; but no matter: has he been the other side of it? If so, what did he find? If not, from whom does he take his views?

Mr. Corrick says that "freethinkers stand for equal freedom of thought, speech and publication": very well; when did Mr. Corrick protest against the "purging" of public servants with unblemished records because of their political beliefs? Or does he not know that this sort of thing is happening right under his nose? As a freethinker, Mr. Corrick should feel concerned about the recent "trial" and conviction of the eleven Communists in the U.S.A.; or perhaps he believes in freedom for anyone who is not a Communist? Then maybe he will express his indignation against the inhuman treatment of coloured American citizens by that other signatory of the Yalta epic?

I sympathise with Mr. Corrick, but beg of him to take heart; it may yet be possible to show that in reality it was the Russians who dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and that a third world blood-bath against "Russian encroachment" would be a worth-while event.—Yours, etc.,

J. PLIMMER.

IS COMMUNISM, COMMUNISM?

SIR.—Although *The Freethinker* is the only paper that dare present a factual position of any regime, it cannot be expected to take sides with conflicting political opinions.

When, however, Mr. Alfred Corrick attempts to force an issue it does appear somewhat like straining freethought to a position of intolerance. I suggest he is mixed up in his definitions. To assert, as he does, that there is Communistic tyranny in the U.S.S.R., for which he produces no evidence, should he not have said—under the Russian Government? If there is any tyranny in the Soviet Union, it is the Government's responsibility, and has nothing to do with Communism, any more than the Communist Party has anything in common with communism. He then states that a B.B.C. radio discussion on Russia gave a true picture of conditions prevailing. Has Mr. Corrick ever heard of prepared broadcasts, and does he think that the B.B.C. allows anyone on the air without being vetted?

It is amazing that a freethinker can be caught by this propaganda machine, and induced to make statements which cannot be substantiated.

One need not hold any brief for the U.S.S.R. set-up but it is certainly untrue to contend, as he does, that the people of the Soviet Union are responsible for what their Government does. The German people were not responsible for the actions of Hitler, neither are the people of this country to be held responsible for the stupidities of this or past governments.

We must never overlook this fact that the Russian people are deeply religious. It has been pushed down their throats for years. There is a God—Joe is his name, and when he speaks *ex cathedra*, like his counterpart at the Vatican, the flock respond Amen.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. BARKER.

THE SOCIALIST RELIGION

SIR.—To begin with I would like to state that my outlook on Christ's teachings are through Spiritualism, and that I am a left-wing socialist.

In actual fact there are no irreligious socialists, for the simple reason that socialism is a form of social religion, because a socialist has faith in the other person, believing that that person will, if not at once, do his or her share to better the people of this country and the world, for the benefit of the community, so I think the statement that Sir R. Acland made that only socialists can be Christians, and that all Christians should be socialists, should read thus: that all true socialists are Christians, and that all true Christians are socialists.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN J. GLEAVE.

OBITUARY

The death of Thomas Dixon of Pontardawe on December 8 will come as a surprise and shock to his many friends all over the country. He had been suffering for a long time, the root cause being an acute form of rheumatism, and death came suddenly. He was in his 74th year. A member of the Parent Society of the N.S.S. for very many years, he was, also, before going to Wales, a stalwart of the Freethought movement in the Newcastle-on-Tyne area and will be remembered by many who knew and worked with him there. He was also a member of The R.P.A. He retired from business in 1941 after a long association in the coal industry and was held in high esteem by his business associate. His Freethought principles were always to the front, he was a regular reader of *The Freethinker*, and a subscriber to all its appeals. The cremation took place on December 12 in the Pontypridd Crematorium where a large party of relatives and friends assembled from surrounding areas. The short time between his death and the cremation prevented many others being present. A Secular Service was read by the General Secretary of the N.S.S. which included expressions of sympathy with the surviving members of the family from The National Secular Society and The Rationalist Press Association. Mrs. Dixon died some years ago and there is one surviving son, R. H. R.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held December 15, 1949

The Acting President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Seibert, A. C. Rosetti, Morris, Griffiths, Elbury, Woodley, Barker, Johnson and Mrs. Quinton.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to the Glasgow Branch and to The Parent Society. Further communications with the B.B.C. Inquiry Committee were reported and decisions made. Fraternal Greetings sent to The First Convention of Indian Rationalists in Madras were endorsed. A suggestion for a pamphlet on Church revenues was accepted and Mr. Barker undertook to prepare material. Attention was called to an article in *The Freethinker* concerning the cancelling of two dates for the use of their hall by the Sunderland Borough Labour Party. Correspondence was read from Edgware, Newcastle (Staffs), Nottingham, Glasgow, India, and London districts, and decisions given.

Arrangements made for the Annual Dinner of January 7 were reported.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for January 26, 1950, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

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