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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

An English Modernist Takes the Air

PRESUMABLY to prevent our thoughts from becoming too occupied with worldly affairs during this present holiday season, the B.B.C. is now putting on a weekly broadcast which is supposed to represent a new angle upon traditional Christian "apologetics." This new series, featured in the "Home" programme at 10 p.m. to 10-30 p.m. on Tuesdays, is delivered by Canon Charles Raven. Canon Raven is one of the leading theologians of the Church of England, the author of many books upon theological questions, and is an ex Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University. He has, in addition, achieved some distinction in what our readers will probably regard as the more authentic science of ornithology, for he has also written books on bird life, a congruous occupation for one of his name! Canon Raven is a modernist and his series of lectures, which is delivered under the general title of "Modern Science and the Christian Man," attempts to "restate" the traditional apologetics of Christianity in line with contemporary scientific knowledge.

It is, as we have often had occasion to remark in the columns of this journal, one of the major anachronisms of our age that the B.B.C., which is supposed to be a democratically controlled institution, yet appears to regard itself as the habitual servant of the Christian Churches rather than of the general public which pays for its upkeep, and appears to be solely concerned with the spiritual welfare of the orthodox minority. When, as does happen occasionally, "truth will out"—even upon the B.B.C.—and a critical sceptic like Bertrand Russell, or Fred Hoyle, "spills the beans," immediately a theologian is rushed in to hold the breach. After the ludicrous reply to Mr. Hoyle by Miss Dorothy Sayers, whose acknowledged success as a writer of fiction surely qualified her to defend theology, we assume that the authorities at Broadcasting House thought that someone of more weighty intellectual antecedents was required to "restate" Christian theology in face of the devastating criticisms implicit in the more recent talks of Prof. Young, Bertrand Russell, and other sceptics. Hence Canon Raven's series on "Modern Science and Christian Man."

At the time these lines are written, Canon Raven has already dealt with two out of the three most important dogmas of orthodox Christianity: the personality of Jesus, and the Christian doctrine of God the Trinity. He has not yet expounded what "modern science" has to tell "the Christian man" about the third, human immortality. It must, however, be conceded that so far he has not succeeded in "apologising" for either Jesus or the Trinity. Indeed, from the point of view of an orthodox believer in the traditional theology of the Church, he has merely succeeded in "making confusion worse confounded." Indeed, we must confess that if we have got to have Christianity, we much prefer the traditional version which, however factually improbable, is at least logically consistent, and one knows where one is with it.

According to Dr. Raven, Jesus is not—or so we understood his rather vague phraseology—actually God but is, rather, what God looks like to us. Or, to quote an eminent Roman Catholic modernist: "Jesus revealed to us all of God that can be comprised within the life of man." Here, our Cambridge theologian adopts a common distinction of modernist theologians between "Deity," which only God possesses, and "Divinity," which is possessed by all men in some measure and by Jesus in greater measure than by anyone else: "Jesus," declares Canon Raven, "is our conception of God," is, in fact, God as human beings are able to comprehend Him.

All of which, no doubt, sounds very impressive. However, Canon Raven's conception just won't bear a critical investigation, whether from the standpoint of logic or of history. From the standpoint of the former, how is it possible that there should be, so to speak, an universal norm which the whole human race without exception would recognise as "God" as presumably the *summum bonum*, the Ultimate Ideal of Perfection? Jesus may fulfil such a rôle for Canon Raven, a Christian clergyman, brought up in circles that regard Jesus as God. Jesus, the "Jesus of the Gospels" assumed as an historical figure, may be Canon Raven's idea of God, but how can he be that of someone reared in an entirely different religious tradition: a Muslim, a Hindu, a Confucian? Or, since the whole human race is here invoked, of, say, a Marxist or a member of the National Secular Society? Jesus is not *their* "idea of God," or even of an ideal human figure; and in any case, even if we admit that there ever was a "Jesus of History,"—a very large assumption!—how much do we actually know about Him? In the opinion of nearly all modern critical scholars of Christian origins, including Bishop Barnes and other Cambridge modernists and colleagues of Dr. Raven, very little indeed. Certainly not enough to justify anyone regarding him as a model of perfection.

Canon Raven's logic seems deplorable, but his history is, perhaps, still worse. For if one thing is absolutely certain, it is that the earliest Christians, the actual founders of (what later became) the Christian Church, knew little and cared less about any historic Jesus "who went about doing good." What they *were* interested in, apparently alone, was the Risen Messiah, "the Man from Heaven," who was shortly due to return on "the clouds of Heaven" to put an end to this present dispensation. This is indubitably so, whether they believed in an historical Messiah or not. Neither of the oldest Christian traditions in the New Testament, either that of "Paul," or that of the author of the Apocalypse, has anything whatever to tell us about any Jesus "who went about doing good," nor does either record any of his moral teachings, which, according to our modernist broadcaster, form the essence of the Christian message and reveal what "God" is really like. This Jesus, probably entirely fictitious, only originated in the middle of the second century A.D., when our gospels received their present form and when the early Messianic Christianity was disintegrating as a result

of the indefinite postponement of the return of the Messiah in glory: "the Jesus of the Gospels," who preached the Golden Rule, was a second century stroke of literary genius who, as portrayed in the Gospels, saved Christianity from an otherwise certain destruction after the unaccountable failure of "the Man from Heaven" to put in an appearance on this earth.

We very much fear that Canon Raven is no more convincing than are his more orthodox colleagues. In future issues of *The Freethinker* we shall hope to comment upon other aspects of his broadcasts. As far as his treatment of Jesus is concerned, we rather fear that this latest interpretation of Christianity ends up where Christianity itself began—in the clouds!

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

ALTHOUGH science has quite a deal to say in the matter of discovery and invention it seems to have little, if anything, to say regarding the manner in which such discoveries and inventions shall be applied. It is in this connection that science most clearly displays its limitations. Science discloses to us the processes operating from one end of the cosmic scale to the other—from the minute atom to the giant galaxies in distant space. It reads to us the record of the rocks, and unfolds the history of life on this planet before the advent of man. From a few apparently insignificant finds it is able to reconstruct the history of our ancestors in far off, prehistoric times. Science has prolonged the average duration of life, reduced disease, ameliorated pain, and to-day provides us with luxuries undreamt of by our near ancestors of less than one hundred years ago.

Wide, however, as is its scope, there is a growing recognition among thinkers of all shades of opinion that science alone is but a part of that much wider world of thought and feeling which makes up the sum of human existence. From this it follows that the usual comparison between science and religion is not a true antithesis. It is an antithesis only when applied to the respective cosmologies. The modern religionist would be well content if he were left in undisputed possession of that vast residue which science, even when pushed to its utmost limits, fails to absorb. The extent and importance of this residue will be appreciated by the reading of a recently published work entitled *The Individual and his Religion** by Gordon W. Allport, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University.

In the work under review Professor Allport directs his efforts to a portrayal of the place of subjective religion in the structure of personality whenever and wherever religion has such a place. He tells us that his approach is psychological or, as some would call it, naturalistic. He further tells us that he makes no assumptions and no denials regarding the claims of revealed religion. As, throughout his work, he has faithfully kept within his self-imposed limits, I see no reason to quarrel with his use of the word "religion" in this place. We shall see more clearly what he really means by religion as we proceed.

Professor Allport makes a distinction between what he describes as viscerogenic desires and psychogenic desires. The former, which have chiefly to do with nourishment, rest, sex, and physical safety are clearly organic in character and, for the most part, have a one-to-one correspondence with the tissue needs of the body. Psychogenic desires, by contrast, are objectified. "We long for information, let us say, and we locate the desired knowledge

somewhere outside ourselves, calling it Truth. Or perhaps we may long for fair and just social relations, and call them Good, again objectifying the value we seek. A symphony or a stained-glass window furnishes satisfaction to our aesthetic hungers. Beauty too we locate outside ourselves." Anything that yields a satisfaction or provides a means for such satisfaction is designated a "value," and so we get two kinds of value, the viscerogenic or "bodily" and the psychogenic or "spiritual" (pp. 14-15).

The fact that there are two such kinds of "values" admits of no dispute. But to class one as "bodily" and the other as "spiritual" is misleading. It suggests two separate entities, a material and an immaterial, to which the respective attributes belong. That this is the meaning that Professor Allport intends to convey is borne out later where he says: "The mature mind . . . demands a comprehensive philosophy of life. . . . And the facts calling for order are not only material; they include emotions, values, and man's strange propensity to seek his own perfection" (pp. 75-76); clearly implying not merely that these are immaterial but that they inhere in an immaterial substance. There would be no point in classing anything as "material" and "immaterial" if the only distinction was that one was a concrete and the other merely an abstraction.

There is yet further evidence that Professor Allport is still haunted by the old, animistic idea of "The Ghost in the Machine." Referring to psychiatric treatment he says: "The modern mind might easily decide, 'Here is a new branch of science. God, if there be a God, has shown that He chooses to work by natural laws alone. Just as natural history has forsaken the confines of sacred literature and passed wholly into the hands of natural science so should problems of mental history and functioning pass into the hands of the newer psychological science.' The single fact that weighs against this wholly secular solution is the ever insistent truth that what a man believes to a large extent determines his mental and physical health" (p. 88). But there is a secular solution to the truth that what a man believes to a large extent determines his mental and physical health, and in this matter we are still well within the scientific realm. To say, as Professor Allport does, that "few medical men realise fully the truth that what the patient believes profoundly affects his health" (p. 86) is absurd. Professor Allport also seems to have strayed a little on the subject of determinism. Scientific determinism is not invalidated by "freedom of choice." In fact, "freedom of choice" is all that differentiates the doctrine of determinism from fatalism.

The above criticisms have taken up far more space than I intended and have left little room for the appreciations I should have liked to have made. Perhaps the best excuse I can now make is to say quite frankly that the above criticisms are, in my opinion, probably the only ones that can justifiably be made. As an example of sentiments which Professor Allport would call "religious" he cites from Robert G. Ingersoll as follows:—

"I belong to the Great Church which holds the world within its starlit aisles; that claims the great and good of every race and clime; that finds with joy the grain of gold in every creed, and floods with light and love the germs of good in every soul."

However antipathetic to religion we may be we cannot call this science. Yet it is expressive of sentiments and feelings which I venture to assert no Freethinker would disown. Professor Allport is well within his province in calling it "religious" as he has already excluded any connection with the claims of revealed religion. But what is

* *The Individual and His Religion*. Constable, xiii, 163 pp., including 4 pp. Index. 12s. 6d.

a professed Freethinker to call it? The reading of *The Individual and his Religion* may go a long way towards providing him with the answer.

FRANK KENYON.

SCIENCE AND CATHOLICISM

PART II

IN the first part of this article I said that modern science claims to have knocked the bottom out of the first chapter of the book of Genesis. It has, however, demolished much more of that book than that, but I have only space to deal with the former assertion. Before doing so I cannot help remarking that a God of truth could not have been the author of both of the first two chapters of that book, because each of them contains a contradictory account of the creation.

The sciences which have produced such devastating results are the sciences of geology, paleontology and the general evolution of all living things. I am dealing with this subject with a certain amount of elaboration in a portion of a work which I hope to get published in the near future under the somewhat provocative title *The Elements of Unbelief*, and in which I shall attempt to show in as popular language as I can, but with the necessary amount of detail, including some explanation of the elements of these sciences, how these results have been produced. For the purpose of this article, however, I can only deal very briefly with this subject and I, therefore, propose to deal only with one of the many ways in which these sciences have been successful. That one way is, however, quite sufficient to prove my assertion. Moreover, for the sake of brevity I shall have to ask readers to assume certain scientific discoveries to be true.

That one way consists in showing that, whatever be the definition of the word "day" in Chapter I of Genesis, whether it be merely a period of an ordinary day of 24 hours, as it obviously is, because of these words "and the evening and the morning" to which I have already alluded, or whether it be an indefinite period capable of extending even to hundreds of millions of years, the description in Chapter I of the making to appear plant life, including fruit trees, on the land on the third "day" of the creation, and the making of the sun and other celestial bodies not until the fourth "day" causes that part of that chapter to be scientifically absurd.

If only 24 hours had elapsed from the time of the first appearance of plant life on the land until the making of the sun, then, naturally, the fact that the plants which first appeared on the land would have been in complete darkness, for not more than 24 hours would not have prevented them from retaining their youthful vigour until they received the light of the sun after such a short period of time. The sciences of geology and paleontology, however, have definitely proved that an immense period of time, extending to more than a hundred million years, elapsed from the time of the appearance of the first plants on the land to the time of the appearance of the angiosperms, or covered seed and proper flowering plants, to which class of plants all the fruit trees known to the authors of Genesis must have belonged.

Consequently, according to Genesis the sun could not have been made until more than a hundred million years after the first plants appeared on the land, with the result that they and also certain later plants, as I shall show, must have, during the whole of their successive lives, been in complete darkness for immense periods of time.

Before ever plant life appeared on the land palaeontology shows that there existed in the seas the algæ, or

seaweeds. There is a considerable amount of evidence that these algæ existed in the seas of the Cambrian geological period, i.e., about 450 million years ago, but there is abundant evidence that they existed in the next period, namely, the Ordovician period, i.e., about 375 million years ago. Prof. A. C. Seward, F.R.S., in his work, *Plant Life Through the Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1935), at p. 109, says: ". . . we know that calcareous formed reefs of limestone in the Ordovician seas." Apart from some fossil evidence that there was land plant life in the next geological period, namely, the Silurian period, i.e., about 335 million years ago, there is abundant fossil evidence that considerable plant life appeared on the land during the next geological period, namely, the Devonian period, i.e., about 300 million years ago. Such plant life consisted of the primitive bryophytes comprising mosses and liverworts, and the less primitive pteridophytes comprising ferns, horsetails and club-mosses. All the plants which I have so far mentioned and all the plants of the later geological periods which I shall mention contained chlorophyll, the important physiological function of which I shall explain.

During the next geological period, namely, the Carboniferous period, i.e., about 250 million years ago, plants, some of them of very great size, covered most of the earth in great profusion, and it was in the latter part of this period that coal seams were laid down. The plants of this period included gigantic horsetails, club-mosses, tree-ferns and pineo-like seed-bearing trees, called cordaitales, which last named plants appeared in the latter part of the period. They were gymnosperms, or naked seed plants. There was, however, so far, no indication of fruit trees having any resemblance to the fruit trees known to the authors of Genesis. After the end of the next geological period, namely, the Permian period, i.e., about 190 million years ago, many of the primitive land plants which I have mentioned had become extinct (see Seward, *ibid.*, at p. 518), and they were replaced by other and less primitive plants, namely, gymnosperms, mostly consisting of cycads (palm-fern trees) and conifers, including pines, firs and larches.

J. H. G. BULLER, L.L.B.

(To be concluded)

LINES

(Imposed by the great Schoolmaster)

I Must Not Talk—while preacher has his say—
I Must Not Play—upon the Sabbath Day.
I Must Not Move—for everything's been fixed,
I Must Not Think—whilst Master Minds are mixed.
I Must Not Sleep—the Word is Watch and Pray,
I Must Not Wake, to glimpse of Reason's day;
I Must Not Learn—all earthly arts are lies,
I Must Not Teach, to open bandaged eyes.
I Must Not Criticise, for All is Good,
I Must Not Smile—the Lord's in serious mood;
I Must Not Live, except to worship Thee,
I Must Not Die—the Devil waits his fee!

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

HENRY HETHERINGTON. By A. G. Barker. A Pioneer in the Freethought and Working-class Struggle of a Hundred Years Ago. Price 6d.; postage 1½d.

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST. An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

ACID DROPS

Here is a chance for our spiritualist friends to get some useful information from "Summerland." Two little girls have been murdered under atrocious circumstances and the police are, at present, without a clue. Won't the spirits lend a hand and reveal something useful for a change? Or, perhaps, Our Lady, who seems to take a special interest in revealing herself to young girls, might work a useful miracle by bringing their murderers to justice?

In a recent boxing contest between two negroes for the world's heavy-weight championship, the winner, Joe Walcott, read the Bible between the rounds. As he won the fight and the world's heavy-weight title by "feinting with his right and then hooking with the left," we assume that his favourite text in Holy Writ is that which enjoins us not to "let your right hand know what your left hand is doing?"

The Rev. Austin Lee has had enough of it—"it" being the "Church of England by Law Established." He informs the no doubt startled readers of *The Sunday Pictorial* that "the Church of England is becoming just a fraud," that "the Christian challenge of the average church congregation is that of a milk-pudding," and that "to get on in the Church of England, in almost all cases, you must either be born in the ecclesiastical purple or cultivate boot-licking." *The Freethinker* hopes soon to welcome Mr. Lee amongst its contributors!

"Exorcism," declares the Rev. Father Alfred Cole, "is a serious matter. We would have to have the bishop's permission." In view of the number of devils exorcised by Jesus, we assume that the bishop could hardly refuse his permission, whilst that of the patient could presumably be taken for granted. So everyone will be happy except the exorcised devil who will have to seek "alternative accommodation." A hard job nowadays!

Writing in the Unitarian "Inquirer," Mr. John Rowland claims that "it cannot be disputed" that the Atheism of Haeckel and the Agnosticism of Huxley are "now less easily maintained than was the case fifty years or more ago." We are quite sure that most Unitarians will not dispute this ridiculous statement for, like Christians, they appear to swallow most statements in their own journals without a quiver. But if any of them read these lines, they can rest assured that more and more professors of science agree with Haeckel and Huxley these days, and fewer and fewer believe in either Christianity or Unitarianism. Fifty years ago there were quite a number of "religious" scientists who were prepared to go almost the length of the New Testament; we wonder how many scientists will vouch for its miracles, its devils, its angels, its heaven, or its hell now? Names please?

Dear, dear—the Lord's Day Observance Society, in spite of their sumptuous offices in Fleet Street and their numerous legacies of large sums of money, got an awful smack in the eye the other week. With horror they heard that the Bloody Tower of London and all the other towers and gates in the building usually opened on weekdays only were going to be opened on Sundays! This was too much. Such a desecration of God's precious Day could not be tolerated, and with the aid of some of the pious warders

a strong letter of protest was sent to the Minister of Works with special reference to the large numbers of prayerful Christians opening the Tower on Sundays would upset.

And how did the Minister respond? Did he bother his head over the outraged religious feelings of the L.D.O.S., or over the wealthy Christians who support it or even over the other prayerful Christians? The answer is brief and to the point. The Tower will be opened for the public in future every Sunday. This must be a staggering blow for the L.D.O.S. in particular and for Christians in general—and no doubt a terrible K.O. for God Almighty as well.

One of the leading "educationalists" who has achieved a world-wide reputation is Dr. Montessori, and the Ninth International Montessori Congress recently held its meetings in London. The real point of interest for us is what Dr. Montessori had to say about religious education—and it will not come altogether as a shock that, as a good Catholic, she was all in favour of it. Every child, she contended, must take part in all the religious ceremonies its parents go in for, for "religion must be within the child's reach from the moment of birth." Freethinkers should fight shy of all the bally-hoo which somehow seems always to accompany the Montessori Method.

An outraged Tory M.P., Mr. T. Galbraith, is shocked to the very core that in Scotland the Bible is not taught as it should be. He insisted in Parliament that it should be made an examination subject—no doubt, he would completely penalise any poor child who didn't know the difference between Christ and Habakkuk or who was unable to repeat the gibberish of Revelation. Mr. Galbraith wants the Bible to be taught in "an original form" and not as "a children's story book." We shudder to think what might have happened to teachers and pupils in an earlier age if people like Mr. Galbraith had been about. Mutilation, torture, imprisonment, the *auto da fe*, were all employed in the Golden Age of Christianity to keep everybody up to scratch where the Bible is concerned. And it was Freethought that civilised Christianity!

We sometimes wonder how Christians like to be castigated by Christians? Here we have the Bishop of Croydon telling us that his fellow believers "are rather vague, woolly, charming but ineffective, rather dumb, shy and reserved." And he adds, "We are sometimes somewhat timid in things religious with little or no signs of strategy." But, God bless our heart, what can he expect with a religion like Christianity? How can anyone really champion it? Can the Bishop of Croydon? He complains that Christians "have no sense of attack"—but what blows has he ever struck in defence of his faith? When he can stand up to a representative Freethinker in debate himself, what he says about other Christians might well be taken more seriously.

Be sure that wherever possible for the Festival of Britain, the clergy will barge in. Here we have the Bishop of Peterborough speaking recently in the Southampton Guildhall telling the children what influences their life—especially "the church to which they went to learn about God?" But do they learn about God? What does the Bishop know, let alone the children? What they do learn is antiquated twaddle long since given up by intelligent people.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- C. McCALL.—We are writing to you.
A. E. MACDONALD.—Thanks for good wishes and suggestions.
E. B. L.—We shall certainly use your articles as soon as space permits.

Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, 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, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

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.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Annual Report of the Executive of the National Secular Society is now ready for distribution and every member of the Society should receive a copy; branch members through their branch secretary, and members of the Parent Society by post through the Head Office. The report outlines the work of the N.S.S. during the past year and non-members can obtain a copy from the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, for 3½d. post free.

With the spell of fine weather and the open-air season in full swing, reports of improving audiences and interest in our ideas continue to come in. That may easily be one of the results of the publicity campaign for a revival in religion. The citizen who realises the nonsense of a 2,000 years old religion as a remedy for the troubles of the world to-day is not likely to be reclaimed by larger and more frequent doses of the nonsense; he is far more likely to be attracted by the opposition.

We are grateful to those readers who send newspaper cuttings to the office. Naturally, they cannot all be used in the limited space in *The Freethinker*, but they have a use in the office as well. Those who send cuttings have the satisfaction of feeling they are helping in our work and we now invite others to join in by sending us newspaper cuttings likely to be of use at this end.

AN AMATEUR ON CHRISTIANITY

ATTENTION was called in the "Acid Drops" column the other day to an article written by Mr. Arthur Bryant on Christianity in the *Illustrated London News*—of all journals! He followed it up with another recently, and it is hard to realise that these two articles were actually written by a man who has made not a little reputation for himself by some interesting and entertaining historical studies on Charles II, Pepys, the Regency, and other subjects. Mr. Bryant has a perfect right to believe what he likes and to boost up his own unadulterated Funda-

The Freethinker Fund

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To find space for the numerous articles awaiting publication we shall acknowledge all contributions by post instead of printing lists.

is now open

mentalism to the utmost. And indeed, it will no doubt surprise him to learn that this journal would always help him to uphold that right. But we have, at the same time, every right to criticise him and his Fundamentalism. He believes everything—I won't say in the Bible as a whole for it is difficult to assess this from his articles—but in the New Testament. Jesus "of Nazareth" said everything he is reported there to have said, acted in every way as the Gospels say he acted, and of course he was "put to torture and suffered a criminal's death upon the Cross, forgiving his persecutors and dying in agony. . . ." Before this, though he was "gentle, wise, loving and heroic," he was "bound and scourged" by the Roman magistrates and "reviled by a fickle populace." Reading all this brought to my mind the many Protestant tracts I read as a boy, a bound volume of which I still preserve as a ghastly monument of human stupidity.

Though an accomplished historian, when it comes to Christianity, Mr. Bryant disdains evidence. If I were to ask him for evidence that there really had been a "Crucifixion"—he calls it "the one supreme historical fact"—he would no doubt blandly refer me to the Gospels; for outside them there has never been one scrap of evidence that the Crucifixion ever took place. So unreliable are the Gospel writers themselves, that they cannot even agree as to the day on which it took place. Mr. Bryant would, of course, insist that the Gospels are a "revelation" from God, and could contain no error—but the plain fact is that they abound in contradictions; they not only disagree among themselves, but one can be almost sure that if the Synoptics do agree with each other, then John says something precisely the opposite.

And still more curiously, no one can give us the date on which the Crucifixion took place; as I have said, no one can even give us the *day*. Was it a Thursday or a Friday? Or was it, as a few Christian writers maintain in complete opposition to the Gospels, on a Wednesday? The Crucifixion is one of the biggest delusions that has ever been planted on the human race.

As I do not believe that there ever was such a person as Jesus Christ, and as I insist that his story is nothing but a "write-up" of a God in Heaven who had come down "to save" us (though no one, not even Mr. Bryant, can tell us what "saving" means) it is not surprising that I consider the Crucifixion a Myth. But even the very reverent and stout-hearted Rationalists who believe in Jesus of Nazareth as a Man are very hard put to accept the Crucifixion. In Mr. A. D. Howell Smith's *Jesus Not a Myth*, he tries hard to reconcile "hanging on a tree" with "crucified on a cross," and comes to the conclusion that there is no "discrepancy" (he had to, as he believes Jesus did exist) if one only understood the "original" Greek. For example, the word translated "tree," he says, should be rendered "wood" or "timber," while "Hanging is quite compatible with crucifixion." Could anything be more thoroughly convincing? Acts says that

Jesus was hanged on a tree; the Gospels say he was crucified on a Cross. And in weighs Mr. Howell Smith with the kind of juggling with words I indicated slightly above, telling us they are quite identical!

The real truth is, of course, that the accounts of the "Crucifixion" do not tally and could not tally because the event never happened. Almost every detail of the "Passion" and the "Betrayal" and the "Last Supper," as related, is in hopeless variance with every other. Here are a few: According to Luke, Satan entered into Judas *before* the Last Supper; according to John, *after* the Last Supper. According to the Apocryphal Gospels, Satan entered Judas when he was quite young—if I remember aright; and it should prove very interesting to learn why one of these stories about the Devil is rejected by Mr. Bryant and why the other is accepted? What difference is there between the stupid stories of Jesus related in the "canonical" Gospels and the "apocryphal" ones?

Who arrested Jesus? According to Matthew and Mark, "A great multitude . . . from the chief priests and elders of the people." Needless to say, John, who appears to have loved putting Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the wrong, says it was a "band of soldiers and officers." When was Jesus bound? According to John, when he was arrested. According to Luke, he was not bound; while according to Matthew and Mark not until after his trial by the Sanhedrin. This is one of the cases where you pays your money and you takes your choice—though, as far as Mr. Bryant is concerned, he would naturally be quite ready to throw overboard on this the Great Physician Luke. Of what earthly use is it tearfully to tell us how Jesus was "bound and scourged," and at the same time admit that Luke, at all events never mentions that he was bound?

But there are dozens of similar contradictions, and unfortunately there is no space here to detail them all. But it is rather intriguing to find that Jesus was charged with "blasphemy" and, as far as the Jewish law was concerned, he said nothing whatever that was blasphemous. It also requires a belief in the miraculous to imagine that a Roman governor would order a man charged before him with blasphemy to be put to such an agonising death as crucifixion after declaring him to be innocent. The whole story is just hopeless myth.

But there is one point to which people like Mr. Bryant should have their attention called. It is that one of the most respected Fathers of the Church, Irenaeus, who had been the companion of Polycarp and others who had seen John, and who spoke from personal knowledge of the "elders," and who certainly believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of the Living God (as does Mr. Bryant), utterly denied the whole story of the Crucifixion as early as about the year A.D. 200. He insists that Jesus lived until he was "an old man" because he "passed through every age"—an infant, a child, a youth and "an old man for old men." And all he has to say is that when Jesus was an old man "he came on to death itself." He says nothing whatever about Pilate or the Cross or the Crucifixion.

Mr. Bryant however can take comfort in the fact that, like all Christians, Modernists and Fundamentalists, our own reverent Rationalists also hate this passage in Irenaeus. They wish Irenaeus had never been born (which, by the way, is also probable).

For the rest, Mr. Bryant, following all good theologians and particularly amateur ones, is a dab hand at the stock Christian phrases. More's the pity.

H. CUTNER.

TALKING ABOUT ASSUMPTIONS

THE title of the article "The Dreadful Catholic" suggests only one, but millions of them are more than a handful; the problem is not so simple. But, concerning assumptions, bodily or otherwise, immaculate virgins, heavens and hells, "I de L" puts a queer proposition in the interests of philosophic progress. C. E. M. Joad said these things must exist or we could not think about them, but he says that to talk about anything, even perhaps to think, is to give it existence. He says a strategy of ignoring them is better than debate. But do they not continue to exist with millions of Catholics still talking about them?

This rather reminds one of the yarn in Holy Writ about the God who gave the world existence by talking about it. By the same logic, talking about the peculiar success of the Church makes it peculiarly successful. But is the Church successful or is it that "I de L" thinks so? The Church is now uttering many of the heresies it persecuted. And, this strategy of ignoring is coupled with that of fighting Rome to the limits of our ability, which is reminiscent of the totalitarian Hitler who said that he solved the problem of the class war by stopping people from talking about it. But can one stop a people from thinking?

If such things can be talked into existence, can they not be talked out of existence? He says these things are hypotheses that have no noticeable utility, so, his reasoning is equally quaint. Though he says knowledge is largely theoretical, we are not concerned with abstract philosophy but with ideals. Are these hypotheses also talked into existence? He introduces the pleasure and pain principle of utilitarian philosophy in the interests of happiness, but in his strategic ignorance he is not only ignoring the use of the theory in question while vehemently objecting to its application in practice, but is blissfully unaware of his own use of this theory.

This idea that knowledge is theoretical is typically Catholic. It asserts that our reasoning is based upon assumptions. An example may be seen in Rudolf Allers's *Successful Error*. He is writing as a Catholic but not as giving Catholic teaching. He uses the first half of the book analysing Freudian doctrine to find its basic assumptions, and having shown them to be materialistic, he then settles down to a condemnation of materialism. Now, whether an assumption is considered as such or whether it is talked into existence makes no difference so far as the application of a theory is concerned. As "I de L" suggests, the value of a theory is shown in its utility.

A theory without a purpose is unthinkable and these things would not be theory if they had no utility. The assumption of virginity is a basic element in the Catholic attitude towards sex, and whether or not one agrees with it, it is an ideal of sexual purity in contrast to the idea of corruption, just as heavenly bliss is contrasted with the torment of the damned. But although "I de L" gives us no corresponding ideal of sexual behaviour, he makes use of typical Catholic theological terms in talking of the brutalising and disgusting sex taboos, so expressing his personal feelings in the same oddly venomous way.

Choice of hypothesis, he says, is a matter of individual preference, but it is clear that there is no substitute for this Christian theory for the expression of personal passion and prejudice. It is sometimes carried to extremes, as in *Witchcraft*, by Montague Summers who, not denying witchcraft, seemed to be trying to exhaust the dictionary and to completely nauseate his readers with such words as dirty, filthy, disgusting, detestable, revolting, abominable,

and vile. All of which is typical of Catholic rhetoric, with a stinking, decaying corpse giving an analogy for corruption. Not only is this use of what "I de L" calls scarifying words a matter of talking, but it is also an application of the theory in question.

Clearly, neither the utility nor the choice of this hypothesis is a matter of individual preference; for, if this Catholic theory uses the most expressive words in condemnation of what is considered as evil, it is avowedly, with incentives and deterrents, as a discipline; justified by the doctrine of rewards and punishments. It is the feelings of happiness or sorrow, pleasure or pain, that are personal. These are involved in the matter of discipline, and neither this nor sex can be considered as simply as of individual concern. The trouble arises in that this is emphasised by personal appeal in theological rhetoric to personal feeling without consideration of consequences.

Very many many people, like "I de L," make use of this way of talking; it is passionately expressive. To say someone or something is a force for evil may express sincere feeling; but according to him, talking about it gives existence to evil. If he rejects the assumption of the virgin he accepts that of corruption. Very few people are willing to consider the problem of evil and equally few are ready to relinquish the doctrine of rewards and punishment, and if Shakespeare could say sweet are the uses of adversity, the Church can openly claim, and not simply admit, the necessity of catching 'em young and treating 'em rough. But then, the Church has, according to "I de L," by talking, given existence to the forces of evil.

If as he says, knowledge is theoretical, to ignore the theory of these strange fears, half comprehended phobias and morbid doctrines is the worst possible strategy. That it is better not to say, even perhaps to think, that it is a farrago of nonsense, for fear that talking about these fears gives them existence, is to be afraid of one's own shadow. It is worse than the old idea that it is better to believe, for fear that it might turn out to be true; for it refers, not to a remote possible hereafter, but to the most intimate here and now.

H. H. PREECE.

"In 1810 seven dignitaries of the Church, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, sided with Lord Eldon and Lord Ellenborough and voted against Sir Samuel Romilly's bill to abolish capital punishment for theft in shops to the value of five shillings." (Cp. Mr. Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law*, Vol. 1, p. 353.) Romilly's bill was thrown out by 20 votes to 6.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE CHURCH OF MOSCOW

SIR,—Mr. E. A. Ridley's excellent article in the issue of July 29, in which he set forth in a masterly summary the age-long struggle between the Eastern and Western branches of Christendom is, in my judgment, marred by one flaw. In his penultimate paragraph he writes: "Right down to the Revolution of 1917 Roman Catholicism was illegal in Russia." If by the word "illegal" it is meant to convey that the Tsardom prohibited in Holy Russia freedom of worship by the Roman rite, or cult, this was not the case—at least in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. No doubt the Holy Orthodox Church had every conceivable priority, being in this respect like the Church of England "by law established," but anyone who walked down the long Nevsky Prospekt (the Oxford Street of old Petersburg) could see with his own eyes the fine stone buildings of many alien cults.

Prominent among these edifices is the Roman Catholic church of St. Catherine, built in 1763 by a French architect. In close proximity are the Dutch church, finished in 1834, the French Reformed Church, the Finnish and Swedish churches (presumably Lutheran). Further along is the chief Lutheran Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, whose two square turrets were described as "dull as a sermon." But I have written enough here, I think, to suggest that Mr. Joad is right—"it all depends upon what you mean by . . ."

May I express the hope, in concluding this letter, that Mr. Ridley will revert again and again to this conflict between the two greatest churches of Christendom. This conflict is the key to much of present-day political manœuvring, and has its part in the Cold War. It explains, I think, in part why the *rapprochement* of the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Church (under Archbishop Temple) has been dropped by the Anglican Church (under his present Grace of Canterbury), and why the present directors of our faith are trying (not entirely unsuccessfully) "to sell" us "union with Rome."—Yours, etc.,

BAYARD SIMMONS.

N.B.—An old nickname of the Nevsky was "The Street of Tolerance."

[Mr. Bayard Simmons is technically correct. I should not have actually used the term "illegal" of Roman Catholicism under the Tsarist regime. However, it is substantially true to state that Romanism in the Tsarist empire was a suspected, ostracised, and periodically discriminated-against minority of actual schismatics and potential rebels against the "Holy" and "Orthodox" Tsar. The Vatican's view of the imperial regime was expressed by the then papal secretary of state, Cardinal Gasparri, when he told a visiting English Catholic, Colonel Repington, that "the Russian Revolution was a judgment from Heaven upon the heretical and persecuting Tsars."—F. A. R.]

ACID DROPS

SIR,—I should like to record my agreement with the views expressed in P. C. King's letter published in this week's *The Freethinker*.—Yours, etc.,

R. W. J. DESBY.

SIR,—Most busy men, I imagine, turn to columns such as "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums," which proves at any rate that in a serious paper like *The Freethinker*, a short, light feature is fitting. I do not think Mr. P. C. King's criticism is quite justified. He is beating the big drum unnecessarily. Let us have a few more "acid drops" or "pithy pars." Incidentally, as a printer may I congratulate you on the clearer type faces and better printing introduced recently.—Yours, etc.,

J. S. REYNOLDS.

SIR,—I would like to express my general agreement with Mr. P. C. King's criticism of "Acid Drops."

I think it is high time the whole layout of *The Freethinker* was overhauled and brought up to date.—Yours, etc.,

L. HANGER.

SIR,—I would like to support the protest of P. C. King at the retention of the headings "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums."

About forty years ago I wrote to the founder and editor of the *Freethinker* stating that these headings were childish and unworthy. G. W. Foote, however, liked them, and Chapman Cohen left them standing. I think the headings should now be retired, with many thanks for their past old-fashioned services.

I would respectfully suggest for consideration, "Religion in Practice" instead of "Acid Drops," and "Secular Notes" instead of "Sugar Plums."—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

J. CLAYTON'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS: Haslingden, Friday, August 10, 7-45 p.m.; Great Harwood, Saturday, August 11, 6 p.m.; Preston (Town Hall Square), Sunday, August 12, 7 p.m.; Rishton, Tuesday, August 14, 7-30 p.m.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK.

Also Lectures at Platt Fields, Sunday, 3 p.m.; Alexandra Park Gates, Wednesday, 8 p.m.; St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site, Sunday, 8 p.m.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY, J. CALVERLEY and W. G. FRASER. Sunday Evening, 7-30 p.m. (Highbury Corner): L. EBURY, W. G. FRASER and J. CALVERLEY. Friday Evening, August 17, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park): J. M. ALEXANDER and F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 11, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

South London and Lewisham Branch (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD.

THEATRE

LONDON'S many small theatres are often neglected by the playgoer, and yet there have recently been two excellent shows which are fully up to West End standard and deserve to go to larger theatres.

The first of these is:—

“THE BIGGEST THIEF IN TOWN” at the New Boltons Theatre.

The play is staged in an undertaker's parlour in a small Colorado town. An old man, one of the leading figures who has been something of a rogue, is dying in his palatial residence on top of a hill, and the undertaker, his doctor friend and a journalist-editor wait for the light to go out that will signal the old man's death.

As the undertaker is hard up, he wishes to obtain the corpse for burial but fears that a more important rival firm will receive the engagement. So by a ruse he obtains the corpse and it is brought back to his parlour. They then set to celebrating by drinking rather more than is good for them. But the old man is actually not dead, and something near panic is created when he is found to be alive. The doctor's one object is to help him recover, while the otherwise honest undertaker and the journalist would rather knock him on the head.

The play is full of satire, and the macabre theme has been most capably handled by the author, Dalton Trumbo. In other respects the play is a little untidy, but the various parts are well written, it is highly amusing and entertaining.

Hartley Power gave an excellent performance as the Undertaker with a conscience, who could not be dishonest. There were other good performances by Brian Haines, Launce Maraschal, Jean McDonald and Maurice Kaufmann.

Peter Cotes has added another highly creditable production to his list of good work at Boltons.

“FIRES OF MIDSUMMER EVE” is next, and is to be seen at The New Lindsey.

It is taken from Sudermann's “Johannisfeuer” and translated by William Stirling and Anthony Spring Rice. The setting is in a landowner's house on the Prussian-Lithuanian border in 1888, when the patriarch ruled the family. The story is fairly simple and involves a love quadrangle, but what distinguishes it is atmosphere and fine acting, notably one of the best performances in London by young Yvonne Mitchell. Laurence Payne, Adrienne Corri and Reginald Dyson also give fine performances.

Basil Ashmore's good production would be greatly improved by a little speeding up in the second and third acts, where the play tends to lag.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

The Philosophy of Secularism

(Concluded from page 283)

(2) THE “INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION”

The “Indian Rationalist Association” was founded upon December the 18th, 1949, at a meeting at the Rajaji Hall, Madras, and is affiliated to the “World Union of Freethinkers.”

The “aims and objects of the “Indian Rationalist Association” are defined as:—

1. “To combat superstition wherever, whenever, and in whatever guise it may be found to exist.
2. “To stimulate freedom of thought and inquiry particularly in reference to religious beliefs and practices

and to encourage popular interest in science and the various branches of criticism and philosophy as connected factors in the progressive human culture which is independent of all theological creeds and dogmas.

3. “To promote a secular and ethical system of education, the main object of which should be to cultivate in the young moral and intellectual fitness for social and civic life.

4. “To bring together scattered rationalists for mutual aid and protection against all that hinders the free exercise of thought, for the overthrow of such obstructive forces, and for the advancement of civilisation along purely humanistic as opposed to theological lines.”

(3) THE “SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE”

The “Society for Ethical Culture” was founded in 1876 by Felix Adler in New York. It defined its aims as, “to assert the supreme importance of the ethical factor in all the relations of life—personal, social, national, and international, apart from any theological or metaphysical considerations.”

F.A.R.

CHRISTIAN LOVE

“THE vilification which was poured on Luther and his doings, says Draper, was so bitter as to be ludicrous. It was declared that his father was not his mother's husband, but an impish incubus who had deluded her; that, after ten years' struggling with his conscience, he had become an atheist; that he denied the immortality of the soul; that he had composed hymns in honour of drunkenness—a vice to which he was unceasingly addicted; that he blasphemed the Holy Scriptures, and particularly Moses; that he did not believe a word of what he preached; that he had called the Epistle of James a ‘thing of straw.’ Luther himself, however, was, as is well-known, one of the foulest-mouthed controversialists that ever polluted literature; and he possessed in full measure the Christian gift of calumny may be proved by his vilification of Aristotle and the Schoolmen. Aristotle he vilified without measure, calling him ‘truly a devil, a horrid calumniator (!), a wicked sycophant, a prince of darkness, a real Apollyon, a beast, a most horrid imposter on mankind, one in whom there is scarcely any philosophy, a public and professed liar, a goat, a complete epicure, this twice-execrable Aristotle’; while the schoolmen he denounced as ‘locusts, caterpillars, frogs, lice.’ Calvin was a worthy fellow to Luther, in the base art of calumny and vilification; and in one short work he called Castellio ‘a blasphemer, a calumniator (!), malignant, a barking dog, full of ignorance and bestiality, an impure corrupter of the Holy Scriptures, a derider of God, a despiser of all religion, impudent, an impure hound, a pitiful fellow, and a scoundrel.’ This Castellio or Chatillon was a great apostle of toleration, which was, perhaps, one reason why Calvin pursued him with untiring hatred.”—*On the Influence of Religion upon Truthfulness.*

F. H. PENYCOSTE.

INFIDEL DEATHBEDS. By G. W. Foote. Revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth 6s., paper 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED. Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 5s. 3d.; postage 3d.