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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

What Is England Coming To?

TIME was when England was an officially Christian land. Time was when the Church of England was entitled—with considerable accuracy—as “The Tory Party at prayer.” Time was when the English aristocracy, “our old nobility,” despite a marked taste for the Turf and a high rate of illegitimacy, was, at least officially, Christian. In those “good old times” Christianity was proclaimed from the Bench by learned judges as “parcel of the laws of England.” But now that golden age is past for ever. A pagan generation and a pagan England have arisen which have turned their backs upon the law of Christ. In short, we are now living in a post-Christian age, and England is now a pagan land.

Such, in brief, are the melancholy reflections which appeared in our contemporary, *The Church Times*, the well-known High Anglican Anglo-Catholic weekly, which represents the semi-official organ of the High Church party in the Church of England and which enjoys a considerable circulation amongst Anglican clerics and devout lay people in the more ritualistic circles of the Established Church. Our contemporary represents that section of the much-divided English Church which has no use for modernism—including, very particularly, such heretics as Bishop Barnes and Dr. Inge—and not very much for the Reformation nor for the hallowed names of Luther, Calvin and their English anti-type, John Wesley. It does not accept papal Infallibility, which it regards—*pace* Fr. Mizzi, quite correctly from the point of view of the evolution of theological orthodoxy—as a Protestant heresy; but, otherwise, *The Church Times* stands foursquare for the Catholic Faith in its integrity, “which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.” Indeed, it appears at times that *The Church Times* is “more royalist than the King,” more papal than the Pope! In contradistinction from the typically latitudinarian Church to which it nominally adheres, the High Church periodical professes an intransigent orthodoxy.

The article alluded to above appeared in the middle of August, 1952. It was occasioned by a sensational public event which received wide publicity in the national Press: the recent marriage between Mr. Churchill's niece and his Foreign Secretary and chief lieutenant, Mr. Anthony Eden. In itself, there would have been nothing notably surprising in such an alliance. Students of English social history who have penetrated beneath the democratic fictions with which it is now the fashion to overlay its actual evolution are well aware that the English aristocracy has always displayed many of the characteristics of a caste, whilst, down to times within living memory, the effective political direction of this country was kept pretty tightly in the hands of a narrow political and social oligarchy. This state of things was and, indeed, still largely is so in the Tory Party, the leaders of which have been usually of aristocratic origin, and where, we believe, it is still true that no one of plebeian or proletarian origin

has ever attained to the leadership of the traditional party of English “gentlemen.”

Thus it is not at all surprising that the present Prime Minister's political heir should marry into his political dynasty. Mr. Eden, the glamour boy of the Tory Party, has, so far, not had the best of political luck. For some fifteen years, ever since the retirement of his political sponsor, Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Eden has been kept waiting on the steps of 10, Downing Street. His eventual succession to the Premiership now seems assured. From the point of view of Mr. Eden's political prospects, the marriage was eminently suitable.

But not from the point of view of *The Church Times*! For Mr. Eden is a divorced man; and though it is true that he is what is technically known as the “innocent” partner, Anglo-, like Roman, Catholicism does not accept this as constituting any palliative or excuse for “divorce.” Our Anglo-Catholic contemporary does not, indeed, recognise that there is, actually, such a thing as a genuine divorce. For human law cannot affect the Divine Law of Christ. No Christian, once validly baptised, can validly contract out of his or her marriage whilst the other partner still lives. If such a person goes through the form of marriage in a registry office, it is no marriage at all in reality and, in the sight of God and in the view of the Church, they are “living in sin.”

Such is the rigid Catholic view of marriage as an indissoluble sacrament. Such has always been the view of Rome, but it certainly seems a peculiar view for the Church of England to take, in view of the historically indisputable fact that the English Reformation, which created the Church of England, owes its origin to Henry the Eighth's “divorce” from Catherine of Aragon and to the refusal of the Church of Rome to recognise it. From the present point of view of *The Church Times* it looks as if Rome was right from the start: perhaps we shall soon see the Editor and staff of our Anglican contemporary lining up for reception into the One True Church which has *never* permitted divorce, unlike so many Anglican bishops?

However, be that as it may in the future, in the present *The Church Times* is deeply shocked. What is the world coming to? And England, in particular? Only fifteen years ago, our (anonymous) leader-writer recalls, the former King chose to descend from his throne rather than seat a divorced lady on it: why does not Mr. Eden imitate the august example of the present Duke of Windsor? At one time, indeed, the Tory statesman would have had no choice in the matter. “A generation ago,” our scribe sorrowfully recalls, “a Foreign Secretary (who is more than likely one day to be Prime Minister) would have felt compelled to choose between his public career and such a re-marriage.” The above phrasing sounds rather like a conscious reminder of the late Victorian *cause célèbre* of Sir Charles Dilke, who, a far abler man, we should say, than is Mr. Eden, would certainly have been Foreign Secretary and, perhaps, Prime

Minister, had his name not figured in the Divorce Court lists. But now "the good old days" are a thing of the vanished past. Why, even Fundamentalist America has just selected as the Democratic candidate for the coming Presidential election another divorced politician, Governor Adlai Stevenson—incidentally, a rather rash move on the part of the Democratic politicians, for most American Catholics belong to the Democratic Party. (Will His Grace of Canterbury now line up with Mr. Butler against an Eden premiership, and will Mr. Eden share the fate of the Duke of Windsor? Both Anglicanism and respectability are still strong in Tory circles.)

Meanwhile, *The Church Times* laments: "It is now apparently to be accepted as a matter of course that those who occupy the highest positions in public life may break the Church's law without embarrassment or reproach. . . . The world has now openly rejected the law of Christ."

Certainly the unfortunate Mr. Eden has caused trouble all round! To his uncle-in-law, who will find his relations with his colleague of Canterbury embarrassing? And to his party, once almost a "Siamese Twin" of the Anglican Church. However, the whole thing is something of a landmark in the contemporary decline of Christianity in Britain. Even the Tory *Evening Standard*—organ of that pious son of the manse, Lord Beaverbrook, deploras "the failure of the Church to keep abreast of the times." What is the world and, in particular, England coming to? The answer seems clear: a world from which Christianity has faded away.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE CHIEF CHRISTIAN VICES

THAT unforgivable sin, the mysterious "sin against the Holy Ghost" (whatever it may be, and on this theologians differ) never aroused Jesus to such furious bitterness as Pharisaism.

It is arguable, perhaps, whether the hypocrisy of religious and legal minds is really so very great a crime as Jesus evidently felt it to be. This, however, is not the point. The point is that it was so to Jesus. Also he said so in the rudest and most insulting language such as to-day would only be used by what modern folk call "extremists," that is to say the rare type of formidable people who believe fully and not half-heartedly in what they profess, such as the Puritans of former days and the Communists of to-day.

How seldom, if indeed ever, do Roman priests, Anglican clergy or Dissenting ministers, denounce the hypocrisy of the religious? Rather do they profess it themselves and encourage it in their congregations. Church-going (the publicity in worship which Jesus attacked) is praised. Secret prayer (which Jesus extolled) is little encouraged. Parades of religion, by warriors, by municipal folk, by sectional "interests" of all kind, is actively forwarded by every possible means. Pressure is so strong that the Royal Family, the Premier and Opposition Leaders, Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors, and indeed all public men and women, must go ostentatiously to "special" services—that "they may be beheld of men" in Jesus Christ's bitter phrase.

It is all rather disgusting, this homage which, as La Rochefoucauld said, vice pays to virtue. But it does not nauseate the Church as it nauseated Jesus Christ.

On the opposite hand, one of the official sins of his day to which Jesus was most lenient was adultery. Evidently he considered it venial. Not so his Western ecclesiastics

of to-day. They regard it, judging by their frequent allusions to it, with the utmost horror and repugnance as though it were the chief of sins—which demonstrably it rarely is.

Nor did the influence of Jesus's acts and words upon Sabbath-breaking make the Churches tender to such action. It was not until the modern practice of the hosts of the indifferent majority, determined to enjoy themselves on Sunday, forced the Church's hand that most of the Churches took a more liberal view of the "Day of Rest."

From Westernised Christian hypocrisy stems the silly habit of pretending that Christianity means everything that is fashionably thought right. Thus one of our Archbishops preached a sermon to the lower classes lately on what he called "The Christian duty of work." Jesus never taught any such "duty": it is probable from his talk about lilies, and from the Martha and Mary episode, that he disliked work and put contemplation, meditation and reverie far higher than work, as I do myself.

An M.P. writes to *The Times* lately of "the Christian duty of preventing the slaughter of worn-out horses." But you will search in vain the recorded utterances of Jesus for a single word on kindness to animals. Nor do the Commandments or the Creeds inculcate any such attitude.

Animals have always been outside the Christian religion. They have no souls to be saved. Jesus did not die for them. Heaven is not their promised land: hell they get on earth.

Similarly the equality of women with men is now put forward as a Christian concept. But Jesus harboured no such idea as his language to, and treatment of, his mother plainly shows. Nor was any woman worthy "to be numbered amongst the Twelve" Apostles. Women-followers Jesus had, but they were not of the inner band. No woman was admitted to the Last Supper. Sentimentalised Western Christianity has had to improve on that. But no woman, even to-day, can be ordained a Priest or a Bishop. Hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Church they may be. The pretence of their equality before God and in the Church is a sickening piece of hypocrisy—lady-Popes and lady-Archbishops are impossible even to-day.

If hypocrisy is the Westernised-Christianity vice *par excellence* what is to be said of another Christian vice—the tolerance, nay the determined encouragement, of militarism and war? Before the God of War, the Church grovels. Its cathedrals and churches show a hundred thousand memorials to slaughter against one—if there be even one—to the saving of human life. The exploits of peace go unglorified. The events of war are exalted. Yet Jesus cared nothing for war or Jewish nationalism and set an example of non-resistance.

Next of Westernised-Christian vices is the subservience and sycophancy to the ruler of the day. The Church upheld the divine right of kings and when the mob began to take power we heard much of "Christian Socialism" and the Christian nature of the Trade Union movement. Be sure that if an English Stalin gained ascendancy, the Church would re-discover that the Early Church of the Apostles "held everything in common" and that the Church was most truly Communistic, and always had been at heart in spite of outward seeming. Are we not all "equal before God?"—though if we are, God must be blind indeed.

Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, whom two wars have tended to discredit, held that Christianity even in its purest form, was a slave-religion, harmful and vicious in itself. It is more probable than in its Protean Westernised, sentimentalised, and degraded Church forms that it

is most vicious. As taught by Jesus, it is only a little inferior to Buddha's teaching, and really much the same, in point of elevation, with the dozen or so major religions of the world. True, its doctrine of inept heavenly reward and vile hellish punishment may degrade its believers in character and behaviour—but few of its adherents really believe such horrors. Again, the doctrine of the Atonement and Remission of Sins by Bloodshed is a ghastly blasphemy against the premiss of a Loving Father—God. But religious men, in general, are so blasphemous about their God that an extra insult cannot matter very much.

Moreover, it is impossible to say that these theological doctrines are not interpolations, excrescences and glosses upon the few ideas of Jesus himself. Knowing mankind with their irresistible propensity to falsify truth and to turn good into evil, I, for my part, am ready to doubt the responsibility of Jesus Christ (either as a real or fictional person) for the worst vices of modern Westernised Christianity. It is more probable that he would regard Rome and Canterbury as worse than Caiaphas and Annas, and the Roman, Anglican and Dissenting clerics as the "vipers" and "whited-sepulchres" which the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees seemed to him of old. Let us be fair to Jesus. For his so-called followers seldom are.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

FOREVER SHAKESPEARE

(Concluded from page 272)

That was a great stunt with the old performers, playing the parts of *Othello* and *Iago* on alternative nights. Ostensibly to show versatility, actually to exhibit vanity. Mr. Wolfit and Mr. O'Connor got away with it successfully, but after seeing both performances I thought of the old story of the Irish jarvey in the little town where there were only two hotels. When asked which was the better one to go to he would reply that it didn't matter, for whichever you patronised you would wish you had gone to the other! Mr. Wolfit was a wretched *Iago*, and neither of the players was convincing as *Othello*. The Moor is a superman in every way, he should be big and black. Certainly one cannot by make-up add a cubit to one's stature, but another number of grease paint can be chosen? Why on earth do these moderns make *Othello* so pale? You may tell me that *Othello* was not a negro, but decidedly the play hinges on his blackness. When Mr. O'Connor, looking like a white man who had been to the seaside for a fortnight, spoke bitterly of his black face, when really he was attractively sunburnt, there was no illusion. Of course the right *Othello* would be a coloured man. We would laugh if Paul Robeson whitened his face to play *Hamlet*, but what would he think of our conception of a negro? In no possible way did Mr. Wolfit or Mr. O'Connor convey the impression that either of them was a tough guy. They were lamentably lacking in the final scene. *Othello* for all his swank about his physical prowess was a moral coward and like all other weak, vacillating creatures he searched for a moral reason to justify his impending immoral act. "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul" marks the decision in his mental conflict. These words with their fearful import call for a tone that is outside Mr. Wolfit's range. In my mind's ear I can again hear the organ notes of Forbes Robertson's glorious voice, the deep sepulchral religiosity of Irving, the sudden change of vocal chords in Benson's technique. These men gave us the full significance of the culmination of *Othello's* soul torment. I have heard of "the great Salvini" in this part, and he surely was something memorable. In Edinburgh, where I lived as a child, I

remember father walking about the house when we were bedded up. "Put out the gas, and come to your bed" mother would say, and the reply would be:—

"Putt out the loight, and then putt out the loight.

'Tis the caughtse, me sowl, here is me journey's end."

I have a shrewd suspicion that Barry was something of a ham. When he took a curtain call in Aberdeen the gallery used to greet him with calls of "good old Chowce." Apparently he always mispronounced the word "chaos."

It is frequently said there are no great actors now, but there never were any. There are types, and that's about the end of it. Men claim to play many different parts but they fail. The film people know this. They don't put whiskers on a boy; if they want a venerable professor, they look round for an old man, the result is an assured success. The greatest actor England ever produced, a man who, without paint or wig, or costume could change feature, voice, and deportment and mystify everyone—this supreme histrionic genius was hanged! I refer, of course, to Charley Peace.

I know that the old lads played all the leading parts whether comedy or tragedy, that was the weakness of the star actor-manager regime. Mr. Wolfit acted sensibly in relinquishing the lead in *Hamlet*. The production was what critics describe as "competent." Its place in my 14 runners would not have to be determined by a photo-finish. In his book, *The Man Shakespeare*, Frank Harris tells us that the playwright revealed himself in his great characters. There was progression from *Hamlet* to *Macbeth*, from *Macbeth* to *Lear*. Be that as it may, it seems to me that a young actor is required for *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* may be played by one no longer young, and *Lear* ought not to be attempted by a youthful personality. During his recent visit, someone alluded to Mr. Wolfit as a "second Irving." It is no compliment to be a second anybody. There will never be a second Irving any more than there will be a second Charlie Chaplin. I rate Mr. Wolfit higher than that. In the past fifty-odd years I have seen all the great stage performers, and memorable creations are still fresh in my memory. To narrow down a selection, I would take John Barrymore's *Hamlet*, Henry Irving's *Shylock*, Frank Benson's *Coriolanus* as outstanding characterisations. I would now place Donald Wolfit's *Lear* in that company. It was a superb performance, he was the old King to the life. Donald Wolfit was every word an actor.

Was Hamlet mad? Scores of books have been written on this question. My mind has long since been made up. I think everyone in the play was mad, and that the king made the most sensible observation when he said (in other words): "What are you moping about, Hamlet? Get wise to yourself. Your da lost his da, and so on. Still, there's wine, women and song. . ."

Wise words, sound philosophy, but from the man who had just bumped off Hamlet's father. . .!

The words of that platitudinous old fishmonger, Polonius are frequently quoted as a guide to life. "To thine own self be true, and it doth follow as the night the day, thou cans't not then be false to any man." Was there ever such an obvious untruth? Hitler was true to himself, but history records his falsity. There is, however, one remark of Polonius that is never quoted, and which I think an impatient sub-editor will approve, that will round off this article. It is great advice to writers and speakers. When the players are declaiming about Hecuba and all the rest of it, the old philosopher says testily:—

"This is too long."

J. EFFEL.

ACID DROPS

That stout, if primitive, champion of lost Christian causes, *The Church Times*, has, as one would expect, fallen foul over Mr. Eden's marriage. An anonymous writer (and therefore a Christian nobody), in its columns solemnly rebuked him for re-marrying, because, as Mr. Eden must have known, a celibate Jew in Palestine, nearly 2,000 years ago, laid down the law that there must be no re-marriage of people whose ex-partners are still living. *The Church Times*, it is true, represents a small minority of "Churchmen," but it is adamant on anything the aforesaid Jew is supposed to have said.

Moreover, Mr. Eden actually got married in a Register Office, loyally following the State. It cannot too often be repeated, a marriage in this country is legal only as a civil contract. Any religious blarney can, of course, be added, whether by witch-doctors or their near kin; but it is the civil, and not the religious, ceremony which is the legal one.

With this civil marriage disappears the whole Christian conception of it as a "sacrament." The Christian Church wanted to come into the life of people from birth to death, and invented these "sacraments," invented "confession," invented the burial service, invented baptism and christening, as if these more or less pagan rituals came from God Almighty. This bluff is now increasingly being called, and the Church is feeling the pinch. It is good to see a Minister of the Crown defying "religion" in this way.

All the same, we wonder where Mr. Churchill stands on the matter? He has often been seen on the cinema screen lustily singing hymns—hymns which his sense of the sublime and the ridiculous must have caused him at least some disquiet. He certainly supported Mr. Eden this time in defying the Church.

The "Wee Frees" of Scotland are intensely annoyed with the Duke of Edinburgh. He was asked to postpone the "flag-unfurling" ceremony and the floodlit military tattoo of the opening of the Edinburgh Festival, as being "unseemly" in the eyes of the Lord on a Sabbath Day. He took no notice, the ceremony duly took place, and both God Almighty (presumably) and the Wee Frees are almost bursting with anger. They are in all probability now petitioning "our Lord" to make the Festival a failure. Or, perhaps, if it is a failure without God's help, they will cite this as a proof that God, like an elephant, never forgets.

How strong these primitive Sunday laws are, can be seen in two items given publicity even in our Christian-dominated Press. A comedian in Blackpool "impersonated" a vicar at a Sunday concert. Impersonating anybody, particularly with a false nose or a dicky, on the Sabbath Day is evil in the sight of the Lord and our Sunday licensing magistrates; and the promoters of the concert were promptly fined £5. Had it been a case of a Christian father half murdering a child of two, the tender-hearted magistrates would either have given the poor, dear child-torturer "another chance" or let him off with a fine of 2s. 6d.

The second item concerns a gentleman who actually had the impudence of letting people see a cinema film free, but charging them for their seats—on a Sunday! This gave

our magistrates a splendid chance of upholding the sanctity of the Lord's Day, for the poor chap had no licence. He had to pay £120. Splendid. But you can see at Cowdray Park a polo match on a Sunday for nix—only you have to pay 10s. to park your car. That is, it is absolutely right to pay 10s. in hard cash to park your car, but absolutely wrong to pay 6d. to park yourself—on a Sunday! This is "religion" in 1952.

THEATRE

"As You Like It." By William Shakespeare. Open Air Theatre. (Regent's Park.)

THESE warm evenings it is good to know that theatrical pleasures may be taken out of doors in the centre of the metropolis, where London's leading open-air theatre flourishes—or it deserves to.

This year it has opened with "As You Like It," which is typical of Shakespeare in that he taxes the credulity of the audience by making it so easy for a woman to appear a man (recognised by none, and not even her lover) by donning a man's attire. But if we accept this peculiarity of plot for the sake of the play, we are well rewarded.

The standard of production and performance is better than many I have seen at this theatre. David Powel—as Jaques—quotes *All The World's a Stage*, and his was a very pleasant performance. Other equally good performances came from Basil Hoskins as Orlando, Mary Kerridge as Rosalind, Judith Stott as Celia, and Robert Lewis as Oliver. Nora Gaussen made a great deal of the part of Phebe. Russel Thorndike, though reasonably good as Touchstone, did not give the impression that he was born to be a clown.

If the Bankside Players, who have presented this play, can keep up this standard with *Cymbeline*, which is to follow, they should deserve a fine summer. But there is always a good, covered enclosure should it rain.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

WOMAN TO MAN

I am of earth: yours are the starry heavens;
I am foundation: yours the soaring dream;
I am the well-content: you the long-troubled;
I am the lamp, and yours the changing gleam.

When it was dark, who held the light before you?
And when you stumbled, whose the hand that came
Out of the dark with gesture reassuring?
Courage I gave at the murmur of my name.

Go, shut me out with books, the solemn temple
Of all your mind deny me any part.
When you are tired and hungry, there's my answer:
For ever you come back unto the start.

My apron-strings are stronger than your theories,
My wisdom is more final. When all's said,
The wisest man who puts the world in order
Comes home to foolish woman and to bed.

JOHN O'HARE.

DEATH

"The popular belief that however careless a man may be while in health, at least on the 'low, dark verge of life,' he is appalled at the prospect of leaving these warm precincts to go he knows not where—this popular belief is erroneous. As a rule, man dies as he has lived, uninfluenced practically by the thought of a future life."—SIR W. OSLER.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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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.

SUGAR PLUMS

The article of *The Church Times* on the remarriage of Mr. Eden, discussed elsewhere in this issue, has attracted wide and, we are pleased to say, unfavourable comment in the national Press. Not only the more liberal type of paper, such as the *Manchester Guardian*, but even the Beaverbrook Press referred in unmistakably hostile terms to the clerical medievalism of *The Church Times*. The *Evening Standard* pointedly observed that, whilst Anglo-Catholics like everyone else, are entitled to their opinions, yet they have no right to ram them down the throats of other people, particularly as they represent only a small minority in this country. Hear, hear! The writer must have been reading *The Freethinker*! We shall be interested to see what *The Church Times* has to say about all this. From what we know of clerical mentality we would not be at all surprised if our Anglo-Catholic contemporary considers the recent terrible floods in Devon as a Divine judgement for Mr. Eden's breach of the "law of Christ." Incidentally, even the pious *Sunday Pictorial* was rather startled by this devastating answer to the recent prayers for rain!

Our friend, Mr. Albert Hassell, of the Leicester Secular Society, writes us that the R.P.A. have held a very successful conference in Leicester. The subject was the very relevant one of the current position and influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Amongst the speakers were, we understand, such well-known authorities on the subject as Mr. Joseph McCabe, Mr. Avro Manhattan, and Mr. A. D. Howell Smith. Mr. Hassell, however, writes us that "the local press would not print any of the titles of the lectures." Our correspondent comments very relevantly, "that shows what a hold Catholicism has on the Press, and then they say we are flogging a dead horse," an apposite reminder, indeed.

Readers both of the correspondence columns of *The Freethinker* and of the "Poetry Corner" in co-operative magazines will know the outspoken work of Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe. Mr. Ratcliffe was very active in the old Metropolitan Secular Society a generation ago, and is now living in retirement at Clevedon, Somerset, where, incidentally, we hope that the recent floods have not disturbed him. Mr. Ratcliffe, who describes himself as a "Humanist," has just published a stimulating little volume of verse entitled *What Think Ye?* Under which comprehensive heading Mr. Ratcliffe asks his readers to

"think" about quite a number of things. His little volume can be obtained for 1s. 6d. per copy from the author, at "Ormside," 13, Madeira Road, Clevedon, Somerset.

A new magazine entitled *New Vision* (20, Rutland Gate, London, S.W.7, price 1s. 6d.) has just appeared and it may well appeal to thoughtful readers desirous of learning what a "new vision" had to say on topical subjects as well as on God, religion and sex, and they may find the articles therein on these subjects just what they were searching for. All the same, we wonder whether any "modern" approach to religion, for example, is really better than the old one, or whether a more modern approach to God makes that elusive "spirit" any more credible. The writer on God actually tells us that God "moves on"—by which he obviously means God is learning something from our modern world!

For our part we oppose the God idea altogether—all Gods, ancient and modern, are just delusions. When we are told that "God surely much be a dynamic process, not a static product," we realise again how hard it is to eradicate God from some minds, especially if we are further told that "God is spirit" but the word "is beyond definition." It surely is; and if there is a God, he has done nothing in the past and is doing nothing now. Cannot we once for all dispense with such a God?

Then there is an article on the "Adam and Eve Hiatus"—a "new vision" of sex. We all have sex constantly with us, to say nothing of its implications and complications, but whether the article has told us anything new or made the subject even a little clearer is an open question. Whether "sex education" will do anything to help on difficult sex problems is also a problem no one has yet solved. Still, the writer has put some interesting points to be pondered over. *New Vision* may be well worth supporting.

"JESUS, THE UNKNOWN"

I.

IT is surely rather strange that, although there must have been thousands of lives of Jesus written, all or most of them with huge circulations, and billions of sermons about him delivered from every pulpit in the world during nigh on 2,000 years, to say nothing of the enormous missionary efforts and evangelising with the sole purpose of bringing the world to Jesus, there are still people who talk and write about "Jesus, the Unknown." This is the title of a book by Dmitri Merezhkovsky, a famous Russian novelist, who appears to have got religion pretty badly.

He is not the first who found out that Jesus was "unknown." There was an American business man called Bruce Barton who also discovered that "Jesus was the Man who nobody knows"—he wrote a book with this title many years ago which had a huge circulation, but he appears to have dissatisfied Mr. Merezhkovsky with his failure to enlighten us. Mr. Barton, being a big business man himself, discovered that Jesus also was a business man; in fact, the greatest Business Man who ever lived. Did not Jesus found, with no capital whatever—except his own unknown personality—the greatest Business Organisation the world has even seen, the Christian Church? It has, perhaps, 600 million shareholders, hundreds of thousands of "real estates" furnished with all the wealth its shareholders can get together, and able to pay huge salaries to

its highly efficient managing directors and its millions of other "executives." Mr. Barton's book had a tremendous success, especially in America, the land of Big Business.

Unfortunately, some of the shareholders expressed great dissatisfaction with Mr. Barton for stressing the business side too much. They had been taught to look upon Jesus as a Socialist and Communist—were not his early followers all Communists?—and, anyway, they were not in favour of Big Business. After all, if Jesus was a Socialist, the greatest Socialist that ever lived, as maintained by Denis Hird, a "reverent" Rationalist, as well as by Protestant and Catholic Socialists, it was quite a mistake to stress his Big Business activities. Much better to show that Jesus was "unknown," and who could do this better than a "mystical" Russian with centuries of religious mysticism behind him? His book was published in 1933 by Jonathen Cape, and it has a Preface by the Very Rev. W. R. Inge, then the Dean of St. Paul's. Dr. Inge had made it a rule never to write a Preface, but when it came to a book about Jesus, he simply could not resist.

Exactly what Dr. Inge believes it is hard to gather. At a time when the poverty of the Christian Church with regard to great men was never so apparent, Dr. Inge stands out almost alone as one of its greatest scholars—far too great to be deluded by the childish legends and myths which crowd the New Testament. He quotes in this Preface, Harnack saying that "no biography of Jesus Christ can ever be written," and he adds: "The Synoptic Gospels do not conform to our notions of a biography." Why does Dr. Inge maintain this? Because "they are the creations of the faith and love of the primitive Church." But Dr. Inge cannot remain there. Readers may remember Dr. Barnes, another of the Church's genuine scholars, writing a book on the origins of Christianity making mincemeat of the usual Christian "apologetics," going, in fact, much further than Thomas Paine did in his *Age of Reason*, and then abjectedly claiming that he believed Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God. So Dr. Inge claims that the Gospels do give us "a true picture of the character and teaching of the Founder," a claim which completely knocks out the express declaration of Merezhkovsky that Jesus is "unknown."

But Dr. Inge hastily adds that the "nature-miracles of Jesus and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies meant more to the first generation of Christians than they do to us." And like the scholar he is, he asserts that "the Fourth Gospel, the 'spiritual Gospel' as it was called by its first readers is further still from being a biography in our sense."

Of course, he recognises also that the Gospels depict two Christs—one is the "historical" Jesus whom our modernists describe usually as if he were a first-class superintendent of Sunday schools, and the other the Christ Jesus of Paul, "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever" (whatever that means) who is generally described as up in Heaven (also whatever that means).

But whether one says "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Christ Jesus," Dr. Inge recognises that, as Jesus was expecting the world to end soon—hence such teaching as "Take no thought for tomorrow"—"his moral teaching must have been adapted only to a brief period of expectation, until the 'Kingdom of Heaven' should arrive." And so he realises that "this theory deprives the Gospels of most of their permanent value." And what did this lead to? Why, "a few extremists argued that Jesus was not a historical character at all."

Now, Dr. Inge is prepared to go very far with our Modernists, but he cannot proclaim his belief in Christ Jesus (like Dr. Barnes) after throwing overboard nearly

everything which gives us the story if he believed that the "extremists" had a case. So, like so many other eminent Christians as well as eminent Rationalists (like Joseph McCabe) he finds it necessary to say "emphatically that no scholar of the first rank has even thought this extreme theory even tenable." Perhaps Dr. Inge sincerely believes this, perhaps he wrote it to placate Mr. Merezhkovsky. But what does he mean by a scholar of the first rank?

Would he be prepared to say that John M. Robertson was not a scholar of the first rank? The late Harold Lasky, who was a distinguished scholar himself, put Robertson in the first half-dozen scholars then living in the world, and I should be greatly surprised if Dr. Inge disagreed with him. But in any case, the question is not the opinion of scholars but the production of evidence that the Jesus of the four Gospels and of Paul really lived. It is not, and I want to stress this, a question as to whether there was one or several "martyrs" living about the time assigned to Jesus from whom the Gospel writers composed their ideal. Nor is it a question of picking and choosing what one may or may not believe in the Gospels. Either Jesus did what the Gospels proclaim, or he did not. Arbitrarily to throw overboard the edifying story of Jesus and the Devil and then to accept the Virgin Birth, or Jesus stopping a storm by word of command, simply will not do. Either the New Testament is a "Revelation" or it is not. Dr. Inge's sweeping away of an uncomfortable theory, one to which he himself has no answer, may be scholarship, but it looks more like a desperate attempt to hide his own lack of knowledge on this most important question.

He almost admits this by asserting again that "we cannot construct a biography of Jesus Christ." Admitting the thousands of "biographies" constantly appearing, he is forced to conclude that "most of them are unsatisfactory." They are "steeped in the national character of the countries where they were written." Renan's *Life of Jesus* (Dr. Inge, with impeccable scholarship, calls it the "Life of Christ") is "a French novel." He finds it very "offensive to Christians." Seeley's *Ecce Homo* depicts Jesus as a good English Victorian, and so on. In sober fact, no life of Jesus is satisfactory for Dr. Inge, but he wants people to read Merezhkovsky's, though he cannot recommend it "without reserve as a contribution to critical scholarship."

It may, therefore, be worth while to look into it, and see whether the Russian author has succeeded where so many other biographers of Jesus have so utterly failed.

H. CUTNER.

THE DRAGON AND ST. GEORGE

"WHAT, another Dragon!" cried St. George. "No sooner do I dispose of one than another appears."

"Never mind, it keeps you employed," said the Princess. "If there were no more Dragons left, you would be out of work. Besides, you are doing God's work in destroying the nasty, atheistical beasts."

"Is this one atheistical, too?"

"Of course. All Dragons are Atheists and all Atheists are Dragons. That goes without saying."

"I am growing old," said St. George, shaking his head. "One day the Dragon will win."

"We are none of us so young as we were," agreed the Princess. "But with your new suit of American armour and your American sword you are still a match for any."

"When I was young I would have scorned borrowed weapons, but now. . . ."

"But now it is different," interrupted the Princess, "therefore we must be more careful. We must make sure the people are with us before we start anything. That is

why it is important to remember that the Dragon is an atheistical animal. An appeal to religious sentiment never fails, both with our own people and the Yanks—I mean the Americans." The Princess disliked slang. "So you are the champion of Christendom, you must never forget that."

He assured her fervently that he never would.

"But are you sure there are no Christians on the other side."

"Of course not—don't be ridiculous." The Princess was quite scornful.

"But how about the Dean of—"

"Sssh—never mention his name if you can help it—there are perhaps one or two on the other side. . . . Needless to say they are only poor, misguided fools, but I wish they were not so dense."

In his slow-witted way St. George pondered the matter. At last he observed: "Don't you think there might be a third way? I mean we can't go on like this for ever. We really ought to start thinking of some way out. . . ."

The Princess would have none of it. "What! Compromise with the enemies of God? Never! What has become of your religion? You will be turning Pacifist next."

St. George protested that he had no such crackpot notions. "Only I do think it would be better if we could settle the matter peacefully for once."

"Stupid. The Dragon is not to be trusted, even supposing it would agree to peace, which it won't."

"We could ask it."

"If the Dragon wants peace it has only to go away, or better still, disappear altogether," said the Princess scornfully. "Come, let us have no more of this nonsense. Your only hope of peace is to make a brave show, rattle your sword and frighten the Dragon off. So get busy and polish up your armour."

"I don't think the Dragon is so easily frightened," replied St. George, but he got an old rag and set to work on his fine new American armour, and as he worked he remarked wistfully: "Just think what we could have done with the money all this cost."

L. HANGER.

CORRESPONDENCE

CORRECTION

SIR,—I would like to correct the following weird passage in your report (p. 190): "As Mr. Taylor could now get the required number of votes from his Branch. . . ."

I am not in a branch, and in any case branch votes have nothing to do with it. Election is by Conference votes on an area basis, and the areas from which my nomination came in '49 were Scotland, Yorks, and North-West. I have never been at variance with any branch.—Yours, etc.,

G. H. TAYLOR.

FREETHOUGHT AND SOCIAL ETHICS

SIR,—Should we be so critical of Russian methods? The most backward people trying desperately to become modern. Certainly Communism is not to be judged by such spectacle, but we can ask "Was not Marx correct that capitalists will stick at nothing to hold their grip?" Election lies, "praying," etc. Socialism is piffle unless it forces teaching of social ethics in schools. Children look vacant at the mention of "Democracy." Could not *The Freethinker* fill the crying need for a forum discussing questions like these?—Yours, etc.,

H. FIDDIAN.

THE TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA

SIR,—So at last we have, according to Alfred Corrick, the truth about Russia.

His authority is none other than Don Dallas, a Reuter correspondent, a Christian, a religious conscientious objector, who was confined to Moscow, and who does not speak or read Russian.

That Don Dallas was "let loose" on the B.B.C. is a guarantee of his impartiality is sufficient for Mr. Corrick. Well, well!—Yours, etc.,

J. M. BARKER.

THE FRATERNITY OF SPORT

SIR,—I should like to record my pleasure in reading your leading article, "The Shape of Things to Come," in your August 10 issue.

It is now more than ten years ago that the literature of that fine organisation, the Rationalist Press Association, freed me from my bondage to supernatural belief while I was still in my teens. But if I dislike religious dogma I dislike political and racialist dogma not less. Yet I am a passionate believer in the Parliament of Man and would dearly like to see established a United States of the World. And though not a sportsman myself, like you I found the 1952 Olympic Games the one glorious, unsordid thing in a very dismal, sordid international world. Here, as you say, political, religious, racialist animosities were all forgotten—for a short time; human fraternity was demonstrated.

Translating this comradeship in the world of sport into comradeship in the world of every day may seem remotely idealistic, yet it must be the aim of all sensible men if there is to be a future worth anticipating.—Yours, etc.,

G. I. BENNETT.

THE VICAR OF BRAY

SIR,—I always read with interest and appreciation your leading articles in *The Freethinker* week by week and "Cant or Cunning from Canterbury" is very interesting, and regarding it I would like to know what reply we can make if, in reply to the accusation against the Church of being a "Vicar of Bray," they turn round and make the same accusation against Rationalists and Freethinkers? They know that we are divided as regards party politics—admitted that they are likewise—and they know that we are also, to a certain extent, divided about human morals—admitted that they are likewise, although I can see that they are beginning to see the "red light"—but I also think that we are vastly less divided on this than on party politics.

We do not want to give the religious people a loop-hole to say that we are "vicars of Bray" and I would consider that the answer is that we show that we are united as to what superstition really is and as to what is a reasonable, human, considerate, sympathetic and practical social system. I think that the Church is a "Vicar of Bray—I consider them traitors to their own Founder about human love and morals, etc., but that has little or nothing to do with Rationalism—but as things are with us and our non-united condition about party politics and perhaps as to what really is superstition, I am wondering if it is wise to make any such suggestion as "Vicar of Bray."

Also, I think that it is unwise to even suggest that the religious or the believers go in for drink, gambling, sex-without-love, etc., more than Rationalists.

I should value your opinions on these matters if you can find time to let me have them. I think that it is plainly clear that any "hitting below the belt" does more harm to those who do it than to the one so hit.—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT HUMPHRIS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

MR. J. CLAYTON'S Lectures. — Friday, August 29, 7-30 p.m.: Rawtenstall. Sunday, August 31, 3 p.m.: Haslingden. Monday, September 1, 7-30 p.m.: Scoutbottom (Ressendale). Thursday, September 4, 7-30 p.m.: Read.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place). — Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.: R. BILLING (Manchester). "The Crimes of Christianity."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park). — Every Sunday evening, 7-30 p.m.: H. DAY.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: MESSRS. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath). — Sunday, 12 noon: J. M. ALEXANDER. (Highbury Corner), Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 30, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: MESSRS. WOOD and O'NEILL.

REVIEW

THERE are librarians *and* librarians. One kind of librarian may be a good bookkeeper, a bibliophil, keeping his books in good order and well-indexed, like, shall we say, a money-lender, who keeps his coins clean and his accounts up-to-date, but in the passing of years develops into a miser. In like manner the kind of librarian we have in mind, though a good administrator, may all too easily develop into a pedant, a dry-as-dust mummy of a man. Such men ruled in the Alexandrian Library in the long period of its decline.

On the other hand, there are the growing number of librarians who, in addition to being bookkeepers and good administrators, are *bookmakers*, meaning by that term writers themselves of books. Such men, and we have known a few, make their library a real academy of learning, a centre of civic life in the arts and sciences. The creative spirit that manifests itself in the books written by them is a specific against all tendency to pedantry, or that state called in the British Civil Service, "Potterer's Rot." Prominent among such creative-minded author-librarians is Mr. George Seibel, the present Director of the Allegheny Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pa., U.S.A. This library is the "original Carnegie Library," which Mr. Seibel has for many years laboured to make a far-reaching force in adult education and community progress. The public library Mr. Seibel, as Director, so ably administers has a quarter of a million volumes, while Mr. Seibel's private library exceeds 10,000 books, including over 1,000 by or about Shakespeare. The list of works from his pen is extensive, including the "Religion of Shakespeare," described as an "Analysis of the Bard's Real Belief."

When, therefore, Mr. Seibel's book of verses, "Book and Heart," drops into *The Freethinker* office for review, one who has browsed through the titles of this author's books is not unprepared for his verses showing a human and enlightened appeal. ("Book and Heart" is published by the Lessing Circle, Pittsburgh, Pa., in the United States, at one dollar.) In a brief "Prelude to Poems" the author, half jokingly, half defiantly, tells us that of the forty poems in his little book, some "were written sixty years ago, some six weeks ago; all have been rejected by the best magazines." That word "best" is an operative one and most revealing, coming from an author with such a background. He says, "I had joy in writing them; and hope you may have some joy in reading them." We do, Mr. Seibel, we do; but you need not have told us of your joy. Never yet has true artistic creation been unaccompanied by joy.

What are our librarian's poems about? Many naturally about books. Next about poets; naturally again, not a few about the immortal Will. Besides Shakespeare the "field" here includes Homer, Dante, Goethe, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Tennyson, Longfellow, Poe, Sappho, Swinburne, Omar, Suckling; all are mentioned in these despatches. And one little poem, a quatrain, is in German, showing the poet's versatility. The quatrain, reassuringly, is about Wahrheit (Truth), which the gods grant men through the mouth of Poetry. A study of this book is rewarding in other ways. By means of a sonnet, our cicerone shows us how to write one, and by a rhymed couplet, that the Poe that follows Edgar Allan rhymes with Cicero.

Altogether a pleasant, unpretentious, almost bedside book. Personally I was most moved by the poem,

"Bring oats to Pegasus!" I enjoyed, too, these two lines from another poem:

"Television—latest fad! the listener's torpid brain must drug:
As they hear the crooner bleating, must they see his made-up mug?"

There speaks the librarian who is also a prominent sound broadcaster.

Here are two poems from "Book and Heart" which should show percipient Freethinkers why "the best magazines" are allergic to the work of this spirited and clear-thinking librarian.

IN A COPY OF KEATS

Keats loved his Fanny well—perhaps too well.
We do not know what killed him—but he's dead.
Since men and women make their heaven and hell,
Let us keep out of both—and live instead.

BUT FOR HIM

High far upon a rampart cloud of glory
Stood God, to watch the silly tribes of man
Down in the valley of His cosmic plan,
Acting the cruel chapters of their story,
Victims and hangmen both, pallid and gory.
He frowned and rumbled as the centuries ran
Through the great hourglass in which time began,
Then shook a thunderbolt comminatory.
God spake: There is a paradox! I know
Those cannibal fleas have well deserved to die;
I ought to dip that globe in burning lye
To make an end of their infernal show.
But can I do it? Never—for I note
That is the planet where Will Shakespeare wrote!

STEPHEN YORKE.

DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Mr. Gorer's Sociological Survey

"IT is a picture familiar to the readers of Gibbon, Cumont and Burckhardt, where these great historians paint with a master's brush the decline of the pagan culture of the Roman Empire into a welter of Competing Superstitions. Christianity eventually succeeded that world. What will succeed OURS?"—F. A. RIDLEY, "Freethinker," October 7, 1951.

Hushed forever are the thunders of Sinai; lost are the voices of the prophets, and the land once flowing with milk and honey is but a desert waste. One by one the myths have faded from the clouds; one by one the phantom host has disappeared, and, one by one, facts, truths and realities have taken their place. The Supernatural has almost gone, but man the natural remains. Nations, like individuals, have their periods of youth, manhood and decay. Religions are the same. The same inexorable destiny awaits them all. The gods created with the nations must perish with their creators. The deities of one age are the bywords of the next. The religion of our day is no more exempt from the sneer of the future than others have been. When India was supreme, Brahms sat upon the world's throne. When the sceptre passed to Egypt, Isis and Osiris, received the homage of mankind. Greece, with her fierce valour, swept to empire, and Zeus put on the purple of authority. The earth trembled with the tread of Rome's intrepid sons and Jove grasped with mailed hand the thunderbolts of heaven. Rome fell, and Christians from her territory, with the red sword of war, carved out the ruling nations of the world, and now Jehovah sits upon the old throne.

W.H.O.