

Preacher Urges the Establishment of Religious Despotism

That religious fanaticism is a modern menace and not merely a medieval memory, that steady propaganda on behalf of freedom of thought is a most serious necessity, we have proved again for our warning in the sermon of Rev. W. D. Lewis, pastor of the Second Presbyterian church of Wheeling, W. Va. This preacher, who occupies the pulpit of an important city church, declares that religious liberty must be ended in America and that a system of compulsory religion must be established. "I shall never be in full sympathy with our system of compulsory education," he said, "until there is set up side by side with it a system of compulsory religion."

In suggesting a course of despotic religious procedure for modern times, Rev. Lewis goes away back to the days of ancient Israel. He turns to the Bible and its Old Testament code of theocratic laws. Modern Americans, he says, must be compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of a personal, autocratic, all-ruling God even as did the ancient Israelites—and, according to the scheme of this preacher, this God of Bunk must be worshiped by all and no argument permitted.

"The whole scheme of things in Israel," says Rev. Lewis, "revolved around the idea of a personal God. The first leaders of the Jews saw that it would never do to attempt to create a national solidarity without the establishment of a fixed authority. . . . So,

those first leaders of Israel did the wisest thing ever done by any group of men aspiring to bring forth a nation: They invested all authority in God. They took neither responsibility nor credit for themselves. . . . They were simply his mouthpieces and his agents."

That the priests and rulers of Israel "took neither responsibility nor credit for themselves" is of course a ridiculous bit of sophistry. They had a very imposing prestige and very profitable revenues in their role as the "mouthpieces and agents" of their mythical God. Clearly it was a great stroke of clever exploitation (clever enough to deceive primitive tribes and clever enough to fool many moderns who nevertheless do not live intellectually in the modern age) for the priests to put over the fiction that a big, strong, mysterious and fearsome God was behind their words and actions; that piece of fiction made the priests seem far greater than mere men, greater than merely human rulers, and they have fought and schemed jealously through the centuries to retain that advantage.

It is the prestige and power of clericalism that Rev. Lewis is eager to have restored fully in America. This is clear in what he says about the specific command to worship (i. e., to patronize the clerical shops of superstition). "One day in seven, the Sabbath," he says, "was made holy unto God and set

aside solely for his worship [in ancient Israel]. There was no choice about it. . . . Those first days there was no such thing as religious liberty in Israel. A man had to go to worship whether he liked it or not. . . . The fact that he didn't like the priests didn't matter. . . . The excuse that he was intellectually superior to the congregation of Israel didn't work. . . . Religious liberty was given no thought in Israel. I sometimes wonder if it isn't given too much thought in our own America."

We might indeed remind Rev. Lewis that in modern America we have many features of life which were unknown in ancient Israel. We have not only religious liberty but also political liberty, and the two are inseparable. The Old Testament Jews, that primitive and superstitious tribe, had no conception of modern democracy. They had no glimmering of the materials of modern education. For instance, those old Jews whom Rev. Lewis would have us follow in their system of religious despotism had the most ridiculous notions of life—they believed in creation by a God and in all the farrago of legends which are sprawlingly conspicuous in the Old Testament. They believed that the earth was the center of a very small universe (they had really no conception of a universe) and that the sun, moon and stars were merely conveniences to illuminate the earth. They had the most absurd, strangely twisted, cruelly barbaric and super-

stitious ideas of morality—the conception of moral law as social law, while it was necessarily followed by them to some extent, was not fully understood by them. Crude indeed were the ideas prevalent in ancient Israel about religion and about government and about morality and about the earth and man. If we were really compelled to follow the ways of ancient Israel, as this West Virginia preacher insists we should, we should have to scrap our system of education and embrace the system of despotic religion in its stead.

It may be doubted if Rev. Lewis has much concern for education, save as it can be used spuriously as a support for religion. His fixed idea seems to be the importance of compulsory religion. "I shall never be in full sympathy with our system of compulsory religion. Why should we be compelled to attend and support our schools if there is nothing that can be done to compel us to attend and support our churches? . . . If education is absolutely necessary for our community life, so is religion. Or yet, why should we be compelled to support the idea of government if we are at liberty to treat the idea of God with contempt? . . . You will never make a full success of a compulsory government or a compulsory education until you give the same dignity to religion and make it compulsory; at any rate compulsory enough to make it respected throughout the land. The

nation that plays fast and loose with its idea of God will soon or late play fast and loose with its idea of education and its idea of government. . . . If God doesn't matter, then nothing else matters, and all the compulsions of life might just as well be set aside."

What Rev. Lewis does not understand (and presumably does not care about) is the truth, well illustrated in history, that no system of education can survive as educationally free and genuine if it is loaded with the chains of a compulsory religion. A religious despotism is utterly incompatible with the freedom and dignity and progressive achievements of social life. As a matter of fact, religion is an eccentric survival from ignorant earlier periods in the life of mankind. It is not in sympathy with modernism (of course not) and it cannot be reconciled with modernism. The right to believe in religion and practice its forms of worship as an individual affair is one that, on modern principles, we must grant. Religion, however, must be kept in its place as a private matter. It is too dangerous when it goes beyond that and presumes to command, or threaten the state. Rev. Lewis is an exponent, bold yet typical, of a sentiment of religious bigotry which we cannot afford lightly to dismiss nor to ignore. We must expose these bigots and fight them with a sternness that is uncompromising and a sweep of propaganda that is irresistible.

Judge Lindsey Is Mobbed in Church

Disgraceful Melee in Elegant New York City Church After Pulpit Abuse

After Bishop William T. Manning, in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, had heaped unfair and indecent and ignorant abuse upon Judge Ben B. Lindsey, and when Judge Lindsey attempted to reply to the bishop's tirade, members of the fashionable congregation of Christians assaulted Judge Lindsey, kicked and hit him from behind, cried "Lynch him!" "Put him out!" and similar expressions of menace—in short, staged a disgraceful mob scene against one lone man who was seeking only to obtain a fair hearing for his opinions.

Judge Lindsey had sought by letters and telegrams, previous to Bishop Manning's abusive sermon, for an honest and courteous treatment of his views by the bishop; or, lacking that, an opportunity for himself, Judge Lindsey, to state his case briefly. The bishop appealed to the police for protection. Detectives were stationed in the back of the church. However, it was not the Christian congregation nor the Christian bishop that needed protection. The Christians, on the contrary, displayed the mob spirit—threatened and actually visited violence upon this one defenseless man—and the police had to protect Judge Lindsey. Nevertheless Lindsey was taken to a nearby police station on a charge of disorderly conduct. It is suggested that he will later take legal action against Bishop Manning, his attorney being Arthur Garfield Hays and perhaps also Clarence Darrow.

Fanatics in a Rage

Bishop Manning poured out a slanderous tirade against Judge Lindsey, who sat at a press table immediately in front of the high pulpit, looking straight at the bishop and making occasional notes. At the end of the angry and vitriolic sermon, Judge Lindsey arose and began to speak, insisting that justice required a word in his own defense. Then the Christian mob rushed toward him. He received several blows. He had to be rescued by the detective force from the Christian fanatics.

A few days previously Judge Lindsey had addressed a meeting of Episcopal clergymen and Bishop Manning had protested against the invitation for an address by Lindsey to a group of ministers. His assertion was that Lindsey spread immorality, especially by his views on companion-

ate marriage. The sermon which ended in mob violence—violence which came from the Christians and not from the heretic—was full of such terms as "lewdness, promiscuity, immorality, free love, unrestrained sexual gratification" and the like—meaning that Judge Lindsey in his speeches and writings on companionate marriage had advocated these ideas.

Yet Lindsey had particularly called the bishop's attention to the exact nature of his views; and it is scarcely conceivable that Bishop Manning could have been ignorant of the fact that he was grossly and shamelessly misrepresenting the views of Lindsey. But whether deliberately indulging in lying abuse or behaving as a fanatic who was incapable of treating an opponent decently, Bishop Manning's conduct was outrageous; and no less outrageous was the behavior of the godly, pious crew who listened to the fierce tirade, were moved to mob violence by the bishop's language, and afterward applauded his fanatical remarks.

Capitalized Colorado Frameup

Bishop Manning also made much capital in his sermon out of the disbarment of Judge Lindsey in Colorado—although the bishop had the judge's explanation that the disbarment was a treacherous political frameup against him and that he was tried and completely exonerated by the California Bar Association. Lindsey is a lawyer in excellent standing and entitled to practice in every state excepting Colorado. In Colorado a gang of unscrupulous political enemies disbarred him on a technicality, although the act for which he was disbarred had been given the full approval of a competent court in Denver. The supreme court judge in Colorado who wrote the decision disbarring Judge Lindsey was later defeated for reelection on that specific issue.

Judge Lindsey fell into the hands of Christians—that was his trouble. He thought he could get a fair hearing from Christians—that was his mistake. The judge will now realize more keenly that Christian fanaticism is incompatible with fair play and that Christians, when excited by morality and piety, are not capable of common decency toward one who differs. After all, what was Judge Lindsey's offense? He wanted to say a few words. He wanted to explain that he wasn't the bad man pictured by Bishop Manning and that the bishop had outrageously misrepresented his views. And the Christian mob—the elegant Christian mob in New York City, mind you, and not a mob in a Texas tabernacle—turned upon him viciously and violently. It was said that Judge Lindsey

had committed a grave offense by interrupting Bishop Manning's closing prayer. The bishop had concluded his sermon and, turning aside as if to leave the pulpit, mumbled something—but Judge Lindsey said he didn't know that the "mummers" was prayer. If Bishop Manning wanted a real subject for (useless) prayer, he should have prayed that himself and his Christian congregation be raised above their evil passions of fanaticism.

BLIND ALLEYS

Myself when young did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint and heard great argument 'About it and about: but evermore Came out by the same door as I went.

This well-known stanza by Omar, the agnostic Persian poet, expresses the simple truth that he learned nothing from all the arguments about God—nothing, that is to say, except that the arguments were aimless and meaningless. The doctors and the saints were floundering amid unrealistic abstractions. God was merely a name. It had scarcely the solid dignity and comprehensibility of an idea—even a false idea.

This argumentation which taught nothing to Omar—which left him with as little evidence for a God as before he heard a word of the argumentation—was a vain, wordy repetition of fears, fancies, assumptions, dogmas and whimsically elaborated nonsense. And so it has always been. The efforts of theism, intellectually speaking, have been a chasing up blind alleys. They have arrived nowhere—but on the contrary the more argument there has been about the idea of God, the more steadily have men grown in the conviction that the idea is obviously untrue and unrealistic.

Talk of God leads by a direct road to the conclusion of atheism. The only sensible attitude is to dismiss the idea of God—to get it out of the way of more important ideas. The wide dissemination of this intelligent atheistic attitude is one of the leading features of any program of popular education which is completely worthy of the name.

WITH ITS fears and superstitions and prejudices, religion poisons the mind of any one who believes in it—and even the best man, under the influence of religion, cannot reason wholesomely. Atheism, on the contrary, opens the mind to the clean winds of truth and establishes a fresh-air sanity.

Nobody has ever taken notable pains to locate the legendary heaven; but probably that is because nobody ever thought seriously of going to a heaven,

God as a Gamble

One of the most amusing arguments, frequently offered in defense of belief in the idea of a God, is that such a belief is a way of playing safe. It is said that even though a man is not sure of the existence of a God and a future life beyond the grave, it is the part of caution for him to believe, then, in the argument goes, the man believing is safe whether there is or is not a God and a future existence; if there is no God, the believer will be no more dead than the unbeliever; while if there is a God, the believer will have preferential treatment in the judgments of the celestial tribunal.

This queer argument makes the matter of belief in a God an intellectual gamble. It is of course an utter denial of intellectual integrity. Proceeding on this basis, the appeal to belief is not made on the score of truth. One is urged to consider the God idea not from the standpoint of its reasonableness; but rather from the standpoint of blind faith and a chance bet on an idea.

Doesn't the religious person who uses this argument realize that he is appealing to a particularly low form of intellectual cowardice? What men need is courage in their thinking. They need to be trained in facing facts frankly. They need to learn that all ideas should be judged with strict regard for the evidence. Instead religion harps on the emotion of fear and tells men that they should treat ideas merely as gambling chances and that it is safer (not intellectually the better but the more craven part) to believe in a God.

This argument has other fallacious aspects. It assumes, for instance, that the evidence for and against the idea of a God is equal; whereas the vast preponderance of evidence is against the idea, there being in fact no genuine evidence for the idea. It is overlooked, too, that belief is genuine or it is not; and that a belief which is frankly grounded on a gamble—a belief, affirmed for safety's sake—cannot be a real belief. One believes or one does not; and belief, real belief, can only assert the truth of an idea. In short, the man who bases his belief on such a principle is bordering close to hypocrisy and is certainly revealing a striking lack of mental integrity.

Such weak arguments exemplify the decline of religion and show its utter intellectual bankruptcy. It has all the air of a desperate and last plea for a set of ideas which, ordinarily and reasonably, cannot be defended. It is, after

all, a virtual admission of the charge of the atheist that the idea of a God is merely an assumption and has no ground of truth upon which firmly to plant itself.

CREDULITY—A CRIME

Credulity is not a crime for the individual—but it is clearly a crime as regards the race. Just look at the actual consequences of credulity. For years men believed in the four superstitions of witchcraft and many poor people suffered for this foolish belief. There was a general belief in angels and demons, flying familiarly yet skittishly through the air, and that belief caused untold distress and pain and tragedy. The most holy Catholic church (and, after it, the various Protestant sects) enforced the dogma that heresy was terribly sinful and punishable by death. Imagine—but all you need do is to recount—the suffering entailed by that belief.

When one surveys the causes and consequences of credulity, it is apparent that this easy belief in the impossible, this readiness toward false and fanatical notions, has been indeed a most serious and major crime against humanity. The social life in any age, it may be said, is about what its extent of credulity guarantees. In an extremely credulous age, social life will be cruel and dark and treacherous. In a skeptical age, social life will be more humane. We assert that the philosophy of humanity—that the best interests of the human race—demand a strong statement and a repeated, enlightening statement of atheism.

"SPIRITUAL REALITIES"

When preachers talk about "spiritual realities," what do they mean? They do not mean the emotions of men. At least they do not mean these emotions as realistically observed and interpreted human emotions. Love, hate, fear, greed, malice, envy, ambition, dreams and desires—these are human emotions which the rational, scientific mind takes as themes for analysis. They are understood, not in any "spiritual" sense, but in terms of heredity and environment and constitutional (physical and mental) makeup. Their causes and their expressions are, so far as science has been able to trace them, essentially material.

All of mankind's art, mankind's morality, mankind's experiments with and yearning for beauty, can be and are explained in terms of human cause and effect and are placed in the evolutionary pattern worked out by science. They are not, mysterious in the theistic sense; they are not, that is to say, mystic. An emotion in human nature is as realistic a fact as

an object in nature: and science deals with both emotions and objects materialistically, experimentally, analytically.

"Spiritual realities" mean nothing to science. This is the special and unrealistic lingo of the clerical bunk-shooters, who depend upon sweeping (but empty) phrases and pious dogmas and a large spooky and spooky atmosphere of misty mystery for the maintenance of their prestige. That their belief is often sincere does not affect the case.

By "spiritual realities," if you probe the phrase, you will discover that the preachers mean some mystic working of the mind of a God in the minds and motives of men. They intend us to believe that human emotions are something more than human—that back of them is the shadowed and obscure and awesomely immense loom on which is woven a divine pattern.

"Spiritual realities," according to the preachers, are the reflections of the most unreal of all myths, namely, the myth of a God. These so-called "realities," said to be the highest conceivable, are seen to be the most unreal and the most inconceivable.

IS GOD FAIR?

That's a funny question. But still we ask it: Is God fair? The Christians say that God damns forever anyone who is skeptical about the truth of bunkistic religion as revealed unto the holy haranguers. What this means is that a God, if any, punishes a man for using his reason.

If there is a God in existence, reasons should be available for his existence. Assuming that such a precious thing as a man's eternal future depends on his belief in a God, then the materials for that belief should be overwhelming and not at all doubtful.

Yet here is a man whose reason makes it impossible for him to believe in a God. He sees no evidence of such an entity. He finds all the arguments weak and worthless. He doubts and he denies.

Then is a God fair in visiting upon such a skeptic the penalty for his inevitable intellectual attitude? The intelligent man refuses to believe fairy tales. Can a God blame him? If so, then a God is not as fair as an ordinarily decent man. And fairness, we think, is more important than piety.

"FAITH," said St. Paul, "is the evidence of things not seen." We should elaborate this definition by adding that faith is the assertion of things for which there is not a particle of evidence and of things which are incredible.

Is God a Joker?

A few weeks ago a hurricane struck the little religious community of Bethany, Okla. A number of pious citizens of the little town were killed. Houses were destroyed—homes in which prayer and devotion reigned. A church was demolished.

Only a few miles away is the large, wicked city of Oklahoma City—at least we can certainly assume that, from the religious viewpoint, many sinners live in Oklahoma City. Assuming also (which is a great deal riskier assumption) that there is a God, why should he perpetrate this grim and sardonic joke? The sinners in the big city were left untouched. The godly folk in the little nearby village were punished by the evidences of God's wrath. How do the religious people interpret this calamity? Often and often they explain such calamities as flood, fire, and storm by saying that God is angry at the sinful people and is warning them or destroying them for their sins. Was the hurricane in Bethany a sign of the love of God for his faithful worshippers?

And God missed an even better chance, if there were a God who wished to punish rebels against his majesty and inscrutability. Just a few hundred miles north and east of Bethany, Okla., is Girard—the home of The American Freeman and THE DEBUNKER and THE JOSEPH McCABE MAGAZINE and the Little Blue Books—the center of American free thought where an enormous stream of atheistic literature and godless modern knowledge pours forth to enlighten the masses. If there were a God directing hurricanes and he wanted really to "get" an uncompromising foe, whom he has no chance of persuading in the ordinary way, it would have been a devastating stroke for him to send his howling punitive blasts through the town of Girard. It would be a more remarkable suggestion of the avenging act of a God if only the Haldeman-Julius plant were destroyed and the rest of the town were left unharmed—and, as good neighbors, we shouldn't wish the Christian and respectable people of Girard nor those who are respectable and not so Christian nor those who are Christian and not exactly respectable to suffer from our proximity and our propaganda of atheism.

Is God a joker? No—let us whisper it—the joke is that there is no God. Hurricanes come upon the just and the unjust, the pious and the impious.

TO BE TRUE to the mythical conception of a God is to be false to the interests of mankind.

Patterns of Belief

By John W. Gunn

A few centuries ago the principal reason given for belief in a God was that the Bible revealed the existence and the will of God. The Bible was said to be an inspired book. It revealed God authoritatively. It was a terrible sin to question the truthfulness of the Bible. And some millions of Christians today continue to assert this old-fashioned belief in the Bible as divine revelation.

The beginnings of free inquiry naturally shook the idea of revelation and compelled even theologians who still devoutly believed in revelation to hunt for additional arguments in reason. There was a long warfare (still going on, for that matter) between the contrasted modes of reason and revelation in knowing God, as the preachers phrased it—and then it was the job of the theological logic-choppers to devise apparent reasons why God could be made clear to the human intelligence.

It was strongly held at first that the diversity of the animal world could be explained only on the hypothesis of a God who created all things. But the truth of evolution, with its vast range of conclusive evidences, made the creation theory untenable; although quickly the theologians who felt compelled to acknowledge the truth of evolution invented the argument that a God had started the evolutionary processes and then let them work. This is a convincing idea only to one who intensely wishes to believe in a God. It has no explanatory value. It makes nothing clearer. And when one understands just what a long, blundering, grotesque and tragic business evolution has been, the notion of an intelligent God guiding the business is positively absurd.

Other arguments of reason (as opposed to revelation) for the existence of a God were the necessity of a lawgiver, the order and beauty of nature, the moral sense of man, universality of belief and so on. But scientific thinkers pointed out that laws of nature, as they are called, mean only what scientists have discovered about the behavior of nature. It is not meant that some God has drawn up a complete and prearranged set of laws which nature must follow in (as this theory must imply) a spirit of conscious obedience to such laws. It was also pointed out that the order and beauty of nature were simply the reflections of man's growing understanding of the behavior of nature; and that furthermore there is plenty of disorder and ugliness in nature. Again, the scientific study of moral laws revealed that the principle of evolution could and should be applied to this department of human thinking: that man, that is to say, never has had any innate moral sense but that his notions of conduct have been evolved in response to circumstances. Further investigations also brought forth the fact that many primitive tribes have had no conception of a God and that in the first stages of his development man had no belief whatever in a Supreme Being; and it was always ridiculous, in the view of thoughtful men, to argue that because millions believed an idea the truth of that idea was therefore indisputable.

ONE BY ONE the reasons for a God, as flourished proudly by theologians, have been shown up as worthless. Nowadays the most favored reason, among metaphysical spook-lovers, is that the mind just naturally, in some secret and sure way, comes into touch with God. An individual has, that is to say, a secret conviction that there is a God. This individual feels that he has established communication with God. He can't prove it and doesn't attempt to prove it—but he insists that he knows it all the more strongly.

This is really an old argument and it was never a bit convincing. Long before such men as Prof. Eddington used this argument it was commonly used by backwoods preachers who stressed the "spiritual" value of "experience," meaning the direct contact of the believer's mind with God's mind. In other words, the latest and most fashionable statement of the case for theism in certain select quarters is that reason must be given up altogether. God is simply asserted. So the circle of argument returns to the position of the old theologians who died and thought that only dogmatic assertion was needed.

And still God isn't proved. And

we continue to see the merest spectacle of theologians, both lay and clerical (for of course there are amateurs and distinguished ones in theology as in all branches of knowledge or speculation), hunting for a God in the field of the unknown—in the field of ignorance—after they have been forced to abandon all pretense of finding their God in the field of knowledge. God is never observed, God is never explicable nor credible, in the field of known things. God is ever the Unknown. God is ever doomed to dwell amid the shadow of bunk. Every time man learns something new—every man definitely extends his knowledge—the specter of God slips so much farther away.

"GOD'S WILL"

Thoughtful men have always observed that "God's will," as that amusing expression has been employed by theologians and by commentators, has been nothing more nor less than a reflection of human impulses and desires and fears and whimsicalities. Whoever interprets this so-called will of God always presents a picture of his own, the interpreter's, way of looking at things.

A sober, devout man will interpret "God's will" soberly and devoutly. A fanatic, with bloodshot mind, will interpret "God's will" fanatically. Men of extreme, illogical views will interpret "God's will" in eccentric fashion. Kindly charitable, generous men will interpret "God's will" according to their character.

And of course this means that whatever happens in life and in the world of nature, entirely independent of the will of any supposed God, such happenings (of the most immensely variant and complex kind) are ascribed to the will of God—a blanket phrase, and a bombastic one too, which explains absolutely nothing. Back of the phrase "God's will"—and back of the idea, such as it is, which is reflected by this phrase—there is the old, sound, and really (to the thinking man) obvious truth that gods and all that appertain to them are fashioned by man in his own image or, that is to say, by men in the images cast by their fancies and fears. What we have under observation, always, are human impulses and schemes of action: to say that "God's will" is behind them is to say exactly nothing.

INCREDIBLE INSTANCES

As the Bible is regarded as a holy and inspired book by practically all Christians, a book absolutely without errors by many Christians, and the most important proof (through alleged revelation) of the existence of a God by many Christians, it is very important to point out incredible instances recorded in the Bible which no man can sensibly believe.

Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll did a very useful work in exposing the folly of believing that the Bible was inspired. "One can scarcely be blamed," he said, "for hesitating to believe that God met Moses at a hotel and tried to kill him [Exodus iv, 24]; that afterward he made this same Moses a god to Pharaoh, and gave him his brother Aaron for a prophet [Exodus vii, 1]; that he turned all the ponds and pools and streams and all the rivers into blood [Exodus vii, 19] and all the water in vessels of wood and stone; that the rivers thereupon brought forth frogs [Exodus viii, 3]; that the frogs covered the whole land of Egypt; that he changed dust into lice, so that all the men, women, children and animals were covered with them [Exodus viii, 16, 17]; that he sent swarms of flies upon the Egyptians [Exodus viii, 21]; that he destroyed the innocent cattle with painful diseases; that he covered man and beast with blains and boils [Exodus ix, 9]; that he so covered the magicians of Egypt with boils that they could not stand before Moses for the purpose of performing the same feat [Exodus ix, 11]; that he destroyed every beast and every man that was in the fields, and every herb, and broke every tree with storm of hail and fire [Exodus ix, 25]; that he sent locusts that devoured every herb that escaped the hail, and devoured every tree that grew [Exodus x, 15]; that he caused thick darkness over the land and put lights in the houses of the Jews [Exodus x, 22, 23]; that he destroyed all of the firstborn of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh upon the throne to the firstborn of the maidservant that sat behind the mill [Exodus xi, 5], together with the firstborn of all beasts, so that there was not a house in which

Atheism Is the Realistic Answer to the God Idea

New readers may be interested to know that in bringing out this Atheist Special Edition we are emphasizing a very important phase of the educational program for which The American Freeman has consistently and fearlessly stood. We are not fanatics on the subject of religion. If we were merely a matter of abstract argument, we should not be so interested. Ideas, if they could be quite separated from actual influence on living issues, might be regarded with an air of detachment. They might in such case be discussed mildly and dismissively. One might be indifferent to such ideas or only amused by them.

But religion has always asserted and it does assert a very direct and commanding interest in the conduct of men. It is true that, fortunately, there are old terrors and powers that religion no longer can exercise so effectively as it did only a few score years ago. But the atmosphere and the attitude of bigotry remain. If religion cannot ordinarily invoke the armed force of law to punish heretics, it still plays upon the psychology of fear and predominantly its influence is to frighten men and distort their views and poison every process of their reasoning.

The remnant of religion that is cherished by a few educated and urbane men—the philosophical or poetic religion that one observes here and there—does not concern us so acutely. Such a provisional or partial belief in religion is baseless logically and it is confusing; but we may grant that it is relatively harmless; we can point out its fallacy and continue cheerfully on our way about other things. But this philosophical or poetic religion is not, after all, the religion of the masses.

There are many cultured people who do not realize that among the masses—among millions of honest but deluded people—the most extravagant, fanatical and obviously dangerous notions about religion are prevalent. One of the malignant emotional and prejudicial influences that helped to lend menacing strength to the late Ku Klux Klan, for example, was the spirit of religious prejudice. We all know how that vicious organization was strengthened by a Protestant tone of creedal fanaticism. On the other hand, the Catholics have their own extreme tone of fanaticism; and they still assert, moreover, that the Catholic religion should be and rightfully is supreme in belief and power—Catholicism, that is to say, is definitely opposed to the modern principles of political liberty and intellectual freedom.

Protestantism is not, in its definite official statements, so brazenly intolerant. Probably this is because Protestantism includes so many creeds—and these religious people feel that they must be protected against one another. They are not so kindly toward atheists.

In a number of American states atheists cannot testify in a court of law. Blasphemy laws are still on the statute books; and occasionally they are enforced. Our laws regarding marriage and sex are sadly distorted by religious prejudice and obscurantism. Also Bible reading (which means Bible teaching) in the public schools is compulsory in Pennsylvania, Arkansas and other states. In Tennessee and Mississippi a medieval law bans the teaching of evolution—the teaching, in a word, of the most serious principle of truth in modern science—in the public schools. The circulation of a responsible, scholarly, important sex questionnaire at the Univer-

sity of Missouri was followed by a ridiculous campaign of prejudice in which the chief element, plainly enough, was a religious attitude of obscurantism on the sex question.

Our laws and customs are still deplorably handicapped and corrupted by the ideas of religion. These ideas are no longer of valid currency in the intellectual world. They are centuries behind the times. They are not insisted upon with such vicious and perilous persistency as was the case a few centuries ago. But they remain—these terribly wrong and menacing ideas—and it is the part of a civilized program of enlightenment to combat these ideas with all the force possible.

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

If the Bible, which Christians believe is the word of God, is inspired and infallible, why does it have two distinctly opposite versions of many things? God's nature and God's opinions and God's wishes are contradictorily reported in Holy Writ.

It is stated, for example, in Genesis i, 31 as follows: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." But in Genesis vi, 6 it is stated: "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Does the good Christian believe both statements?

In Chronicles vii, 12, 16 we

read: And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him: I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for a house of sacrifice.

For now have I chosen and sanctified this house that my name may be there forever; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually." Then in Acts vii, 48 we read: "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

Whether God preferred the darkness or the light seemed to be uncertain to the Hebrew prophets of the Most High; but if the Bible were thoroughly inspired there should have been perfect agreement. But in 1 Timothy vi, 16 God is referred to in this manner: "Dwelling in the light which no man can approach." On the other hand, in 1 Kings viii, 12 this reference is contradictorily made: "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." And in Psalm xviii we are told about God: "He made darkness his secret place." And in Psalm xcvi, 2 we are told: "Clouds and darkness are round about him."

Such contradictions are common in the Bible. Naturally this happened, as the Bible was a collection of books written at different times by different men—a strange mixture of diverse human docu-

ments—and a tissue of irrecon-

cilable notions. Inspired? The Bible is not even intelligent. It is not even good craftsmanship, but is full of absurdities and contradictions.

HIDDEN GODS

Look at the God idea from any angle, and it is foolish, it doesn't make sense, but extravagantly proposes more mysteries than it assumes to explain. For instance, is it sensible that a real God would leave mankind in such confusion and debate about his character and his laws?

There have been many alleged revelations of God. There have, indeed, been many Gods as there have been many Bibles. And in different ages and different lands an endless game of guessing and disputing has gone on. Men have argued blindly about God. They still argue—just as blindly.

And if there is a God, we must conclude that he has willfully left men in the dark. He has not wanted men to know about him. Assuming his existence, then it would follow that he would have perfect ability to give a complete and universal explanation of himself, so that all men could see and know without further uncertainty. A real God could exhibit himself clearly to all men and have all men following his will to the last letter without a doubt or a slip. But when we examine even cur-

sorily the many contradictory revelations of God, the many theories and arguments, the many and diverse principles of piety, we perceive that all this talk about God has been merely the natural floundering of human ignorance.

There has been no reality in the God idea which men could discover and agree upon. The spectacle has been exactly what we should expect when men deal with theories of something which does not exist.

Hidden Gods—no Gods—all we see is man's poor guesswork.

PRIESTS and preachers have tricked, terrified and exploited mankind. They have lied for "the glory of God." They have held threats over mankind for "the glory of God." They have collected immense financial tribute for "the glory of God." What ever may be said about the character of individuals among the clergy, the character of the profession as a whole has been distinctly and drastically anti-human. And of course the most sincere among the clergy have been the most dangerous, for they have been willing to go to the most extreme lengths of intolerance for "the glory of God."

PERHAPS religion might be dismissed as unimportant if it were merely theoretical. It is difficult, however, if not impossible to separate theory and practice. Religion, to be sure, is full of inconsistencies between theory and practice; but there is and has always been sternly and largely a disposition of religion to enforce its theory in the conduct of life; religion has meant not simply dogmatism in abstract thinking but intolerance in legal and social action. Religion interferes with life and, being false, it necessarily interferes very much to the detriment of the sound human interests of life.

FOR CENTURIES men have sought in the most unusual and devious ways to prove the existence of a God. But evidently a God, if there were a God, has been hiding out. He has never been discovered nor proved. One would think a God, if any, should have revealed himself unmistakably. Isn't this non-appearance of a God (the non-appearance of a God in the shape of a single bit of evidence for his existence) a pretty strong, sufficient proof of non-existence?

A God of love, a God of wrath, a God of jealousy, a God of bigotry, a God of vulgar trading, a God of cheating and lying—yes, the Christian God is given all of these characteristics, and isn't it a wretched mess to be offered to men in this twentieth century? The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of progress is the rejection of this absurd, obscene, extravagantly impossible myth of a God.

RELIGION, throughout the greater part of its history, has been a form of "holy" terrorism. It still aims its terrors at men, but modern realism and the spread of popular enlightenment has progressively robbed those terrors of their old-fashioned effectiveness. Wherever men take religion very seriously—wherever there is devout belief—there is also the inseparable feeling of fear.

CHRISTIAN theology has taught men that they should submit with unintelligent resignation to the worst real evils of life and waste their time in consideration of imaginary evils in "the life to come."

Sacred Books of Spooky Trash

To call the Christian Bible the Sacred Book is evidence of a naive, provincial mind. There is a fantastic string of Sacred Books or collections of supposed divine laws and wisdom, each revered as specially and exclusively holy by the devotees of a particular religion. Mohammedans regard the Koran as sacred. Hindus have their sacred writings. The ancient Greeks and Romans had their sacred mythology (and mythology, mind you, is simply the name we give to the images and beliefs of a religion that is no longer fashionable). The Egyptians had their sacred Book of the Dead. The Babylonians had sacred revelations and legends.

The Christian Bible is not unique. It falls into the well-known classification of Sacred Books, full of legends and myths and fairy tales and a grotesque assortment of yarns, some of them interesting and others stupid and incredible. A bit of human history can be traced here and there in these Sacred Books, for naturally they reflect the thoughts and lives of the peoples who compiled these books. Yet the picture is amazingly distorted. Fact and fancy mingle so closely and so lawlessly that it is difficult for even the most painstaking scholars to determine whether certain passages have or do not have a historical value. As history, all of these Sacred Books, the Christian Bible included, are admittedly poor reliance for the conscientious and exact historian. He finds a little material scattered through these holy writings that may assist him in building up a picture of ancient times; but he cannot depend upon these writings for a true picture and most of the stuff is worthless—worse, it throws difficulties in the way of the historian.

Similarly, it may be said that gleams of literature are found in these Sacred Books; it is of course human literature; it is poetry or it is, in spots, a kind of realism that is not at all devout nor religious; but taken as a whole, these Sacred Books do not have a high literary quality. Honestly viewed, apart from pious preconceptions, how much of the Christian Bible can be read with interest and appreciation as literature? It is a very minor portion. Pages and pages are filled with clumsy and unreadable nonsense. For the most part its fantasies are not good literature. The Book of Revelation, for example, is dreary and windy and ill-conceived foolishness.

Even fantasies have an art of their own—a very special and difficult art—but the fantasies of religion are not as a rule artistic. The reason for this, no doubt, is that profoundly religious men are too seriously foolish—that is to say, fanatical and irrational and deluded—to be good artists. The great artist, in order to create a perfect illusion, must beware of taking his illusion too seriously. He must love it (artistically) because it is an illusion. When he mistakes it for the truth and becomes evangelical about it, then he departs from the style and aim of art.

But to return to our main theme: Sacred Books are many and, after all, they are boringly commonplace. One thing noticeable is that the level of wisdom in these books is very low in comparison with the level of modern thought.

(Please turn to page three)

A Word About This Paper

We wish to explain briefly to new readers that the policy of The American Freeman is one of complete freedom in the discussion of all issues. This is not what is called a "respectable" paper—that is to say, a paper which treats popular prejudices politely and hesitates to express opinions that are bold, unusual and to many startling. In fact, we want to startle our readers into thinking. We consider that a really important paper is one which arouses the most intense discussion. So, if you are prepared to go along with us with good sportsmanship in our free policy, we invite you most cordially to become readers of The American Freeman—the one paper in America which is free and fearless in discussing all questions, whether religious or political or economic or social or moral or what not. The subscription price is \$1 a year (\$1.50 in Canada and other foreign countries). Use the following order blank.

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Prof. Eddington's "Knowledge" of God Is a Freakish Private Delusion

A Debate Between a Mystic Scientist and E. Haldeman-Julius

The following radio address by Sir Arthur Eddington, the noted English astrophysicist, has prompted a large number of our readers to ask for a reply in the columns of *The Freeman*. Prof. Eddington's prominence in the world of science also warrants a serious, albeit a brief and dismissively critical, notice of his utterances. Those who are familiar with the main currents of modern thought and with the attitude of science of the great majority of the world's first-rate scientists will know that Prof. Eddington is one of a small group of eccentric men of science who, aside from their special fields of investigation, lapse into an incurable and moony mysticism. Many, however, will be impressed by Sir Arthur's statements because of his position in the scientific world and will mistakenly conclude that he is speaking scientifically. He is of course no more speaking scientifically than Billy Sunday would be if he were to say the same things. Now we reprint Prof. Eddington's speech and follow it with a short analysis by E. Haldeman-Julius.

Prof. Eddington's Speech

A striking change of scientific views is in regard to determinism, the view that the future is predestined and that time merely turns over the leaves of a story that is already written.

Until recently this was almost universally accepted as the teaching of science, at least in regard to the material universe. It is the distinctive principle of the mechanistic outlook which some years ago superseded the crude materialistic answer. But today physical theory is not mechanistic. Now it is built on a foundation which knows nothing of this supposed determinism. So far as we have yet gone in our probing of the material universe, we cannot find a particle of evidence in favor of determinism.

There is no longer, I think, any need to doubt our intuition of free will. Our minds are not merely registering a predetermined sequence of thoughts and decisions. Our faculties, our purposes are genuine, and ours is the responsibility for what ensues from them.

I have said that physical science is aloof from this transmutation. If I am positive on this side of the question, it is not as a scientist that I claim to speak.

In our own nature, all through the conduct of our consciousness with a nature transcending ours, there are other things which claim the same kind of recognition—a sense of beauty, of morality, and finally at the root of all spiritual religion an experience which we describe as the consciousness of God.

I would say that when from the human heart the cry goes up, "What is it all about?" it is no true answer to look only at that part of experience which comes to us through certain sensory organs and reply "It is about atoms and chaos, it is about a universe of fiery globes moving on to impending doom; it is about non-computed algebra"; but rather is it about a spirit in which truth has its shrine, with potentialities of self-fulfillment in its response to beauty and right.

It means a great deal to me to conceive of God as Him through whom comes power and guidance, but just because it means so much I have no use for it if it is only fiction which will not stand close examination. Can we not give some assurance that there is such a God in reality and that belief in him is not merely a sop to my limited understanding?

The theory is that when we come to analyze that which we call religious experience we shall find that it is merely a personification of certain abstract principles.

The fact that scientific method seems to reduce God to something like an ethical code may throw some light on the nature of the scientific method. I doubt that it throws much light on the nature of God. If the consideration of religious experience in the light of psychology seems to remove from the conception of God every attribute of love, it is pertinent to consider whether something of the same sort has not happened to our human friends after psychology has systematized them.

It does not fall within my scope to give the questioner the assur-

ance he desires. I doubt whether there is any assurance to be obtained except through the religious experience itself, but I bid him hold fast to his own knowledge of the nature of that experience. I think that that will take him nearer to the ultimate truth than codifying and symbolizing.

It is true that in the relatively theory we continue our attempt to reach surely objective truths, with what results? A world so abstract that only a mathematical symbol can inhabit it.

In the other great modern development of physics, the quantum theory, we have, if I am not mistaken, abandoned the aims and become content to analyze the physical universe into ultimate elements which are frankly subjective.

If it is difficult to separate out the subjective element in our knowledge of the external world it must be much more difficult to distinguish it when we come to the problem of a self-knowing consciousness where subject and object, that which knows and that which is known, are one and the same.

I have been laying great stress on experience, speaking of the problem of experience. In this I am following the dictates of modern physics. I do not wish to imply that every experience is to be taken at face value. There is such a thing as emotion, and we must try not to be deceived. In any attempt to go deeply into the meaning of religious experience we are confronted by the difficult problem of how to detect and eliminate delusion and self-deception. I fully recognize that that problem exists, but I must excuse myself from attempting a solution.

The operation of cutting out delusion in the spiritual domain requires a delicate surgical knife, and the only knife that I, as a physicist, can manipulate is a blade which it is true crushes illusion but at the same time crushes everything of non-material significance, and even reduces the material world to a state of uncreativity.

I am convinced that if in physics we pursue to the bitter end our attempt to reach purely objective reality we should simply undo the work of creation and present the world as we might conceive it to have been before the Spirit moved on the face of the waters.

The spiritual element in our experience is the creative element, and if we remove it as we are trying to do in physics, on the ground that it always creates an illusion, we must reach what was in the beginning.

Reasoning is our great ally in the quest for truth, but reasoning can only start from premises. At the beginning of the argument we must always come back to our innate convictions. There are such convictions at the base even of physical science. We are helpless unless we admit also, as perhaps the strongest conviction of all, that we have within us some power of self-criticism to test the truth of our convictions.

This is not infallible, that is to say, it is not infallible when associated with human frailty, but neither is reasoning infallible when practiced by our blundering intelligence. To secure that we are not without this guidance when we embark on the adventure of spiritual life, uncharted though it be, it is sufficient that we carry a compass.

Mr. Haldeman-Julius' Reply

In his rather airy and vague remarks about the latest developments in science (especially in physical theory), Prof. Eddington is taking advantage of an old trick of theologians: namely, he is using mystery as a proof for the existence of a God, although mystery is surely proof of nothing save that there are further problems to be solved. I do not say that this is a trick, consciously, with Prof. Eddington; I would not dispute his sincerity; he has a mystical mind and he can't help it. Determinism seems to work quite as we should expect with regard to the temperaments of, say, Sir Arthur and myself. He can't help being mystical. I can't help being skeptical. I am not willing to accept statements without proof, and without the demonstration of

a sensible plan for them in the scheme of reality.

Whatever links Sir Arthur may be trying to obscure reality, or to suggest that there is no reality or that we don't or can't know what it is, however abstract he may seem to make it—science, to be sure, deals in symbols and abstractions which the lay mind cannot easily follow—it is correct enough to say that reality is the sum of things which can be observed, tested, weighed, measured, analyzed and put to use. Reality is the sum of things which we know through the senses—and Prof. Eddington's hyper-obscure language does not indicate a method of knowledge otherwise than through the senses. As for symbols, they may be used to connote certain realities underlying the symbols and simply more conveniently expressed in symbolic forms; or symbols may represent problems remaining for solution.

If we are told that life is a set of symbols—and, as mystics use it, the phrase is pure obscurantism—we reply that these symbols have valid meaning to us only insofar as they correspond to realities. I would extend that statement by saying that symbols must correspond to realities. The most exuberant and lawless mystical imagination has never created visions out of nothing. Even Sir Arthur's mystical concepts must refer, although in a distorted or (from a logical point of view) nebulous sense, to the world he lives in. If he tries to define a God (which I notice he does not) he must offer a definition that is drawn from the human consciousness, which is to say the human sensations that interpret them mystically as he will, Sir Arthur derives from very material contact with the world.

In his thinking as in his behavior man is subject to and he reflects the operations of determinism. This doesn't mean that a God drew up in advance a complete plan of action for human beings. There is no evidence anywhere in nature, nor can anyone reasonably form a picture of, such a conscious determiner or law-giver. What is demonstrably true, however, is that nothing happens without a cause; that all behavior is caused or conditioned; that the phenomena we observe throughout nature are understandable only with reference to other phenomena. Sir Arthur, for instance, does not live in a free and perfect world of his own, where his thoughts or his actions are independent of other beings or other forces. He lives in a conditioned—i. e., a deterministic—world. He says briefly that determinism is no longer an idea held valid in the scientific world—but that is certainly an exaggeration and, worse, a confusing assertion.

As I understand it, Sir Arthur has found certain kinds of behavior in atoms which he cannot fully understand and which, so far as he can see, are not subject to determinism. This is a very feeble argument against determinism. What it amounts to, after all, is that Sir Arthur and his fellow physicists have other investigations ahead of them; that, let us suggest, they have other laws to discover; that the picture of life is not complete. It is, even so, a long and ludicrous cry from this discovery of apparent confusion in the behavior of atoms to the old theory of free will.

Does Prof. Eddington mean to tell us that atoms or electrons have free will? Or does he mean to say that atoms or electrons respond eccentrically, confusedly, to the eccentric and whimsical free will of a God? Either idea is meaningless. Let us remind ourselves further that all of the knowledge which Prof. Eddington has gained or that his fellow scientists have gained has come as a result of definite, painstaking investigations. It has not come—not one item of this knowledge—by intuition.

The whole case of Prof. Eddington for mysticism is based upon his belief in intuition. Yet he cannot point to a single piece of knowledge which man has obtained through intuition. When Prof. Eddington talks to us about physics—when he reports discoveries made in physics—he is using knowledge obtained through his senses. When Prof. Eddington talks to us about a God, he is relying on intuition and the words he uses are meaningless. His God, we are told, is something queerly experienced within Prof. Eddington's own mind. Nobody else can know that God but Prof.

Eddington. He admits that he can't prove or demonstrate this private, peculiar God of his mind. He admits that "[not] every experience is to be taken at its face value." But what value, more than a face value, has such an "experience" of a God as Prof. Eddington tells us he has felt? If he could put this "experience" in concrete terms, if he could offer some method whereby we might test it, then the case would be different and there would be a bit more ground for argument. As it is, what can a skeptic like myself do but dismiss Prof. Eddington's ecstatic, obscure, undemonstrable God as a queer notion having no value whatever in the common world of evidence?

Quite obviously, the position taken by Sir Arthur is comparable with that taken by the "spiritual" preacher who says that the "saved" can "feel and know" God by some mysterious mental process which doesn't make sense. This "feeling and knowing" God which Sir Arthur asserts along with the evangelistic tribe of faith-mongers is, when one analyzes it, seen to be nothing more nor less than the act of believing without the slightest evidence. Sir Arthur wants to believe in a God. He expresses his belief confidently and yet is very hazy about the conditions of that belief; he says frankly that the belief can't be proved and that one can never know whether another man (Sir Arthur, for example) is suffering from a hallucination or reporting a real "experience" when he claims to have private knowledge of a God.

This so-called private knowledge is, I think, as bad as no knowledge. Knowledge should be able to stand the light of publicity and prove itself. Who knows (just to play this game of mysticism a moment longer) whether Sir Arthur knows God? According to his own argument, he is the only man who can know whether he knows. And he admits that, to the best of our judgment and for all the evidence that we have to the contrary, he may be suffering from a hallucination. Going by the evidence, not merely of Sir Arthur's statements but of the world of common sense and reality, I think we are justified in saying that Sir Arthur is seduced and confused by a hallucination that is on a level with the "spiritual conversion" and jimmies of a Baptist yokel in the hills of Arkansas.

I advance the comparison not insultingly but in a scientific spirit. The Baptist yokel and Sir Arthur use precisely the same tone. They just "know" in their innards that there is a God, and what's the use of evidence or argument? The distinctive thing about the mystic is that what he "knows" is usually wrong—unless he gets to work and proves it. Until Prof. Eddington proves his alleged knowledge of a God, we can only stick to our opinion that the poor, tired man is taking a rest from thinking and getting his "kick" out of his pet hallucination rather than alcohol.

Sacred Books

Continued from page two

ison with literature that is not considered sacred. The great art, the superior wisdom, the brilliant intelligence and fancy, the serious and enduring reflections of life are found in profane as distinguished from sacred literature.

Mankind have really learned nothing from their Sacred Books. The simple laws and truisms found therein, when these happen to be reconcilable with an intelligent view of life, are not remarkable. They are the obvious, simple statements of the experience of men in the early periods of history.

The great store of human culture is found in the non-sacred immortals such as Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Voltaire, Balzac, Heine, Nietzsche, Shelley, and the host of other splendid thinkers and artists whose names are familiar to the race.

Do we wish the soundest, most realistic wisdom? We find it not in the Sacred Books, but in the books of the non-sacred writers. (These terms, sacred and non-sacred, we are using of course in the conventional sense and not

with any serious belief that the terms represent real distinctions.)

Do we wish trustworthy, ample and consistent records of the development of society and the large activities of mankind which are described as history? We do not find them in the Sacred Books—we must turn to the profane historians.

Do we wish scientific information about the world? Obviously we cannot find it in the Sacred Books—we must go to the records of the non-sacred scientists.

Do we wish magnificent poetry, which is human and yet ineffably beautiful? We find it most beautifully in the lines of Shakespeare or Shelley or Heine and other profane poets?

Do we wish wit, fancy, or cultivated pictures? We find them in superior form throughout profane literature. Sacred Books are, from every point of view, wretchedly inferior in value. They have, for the most part, only the fictitious value which is ascribed to them by uncritical believers in supernatural nonsense. Let us conclude with the blunt assertion that nine-tenths of the contents of Sacred Books are the worst trash that men could conceivably have lumped together, the very turbid seethings and tag-ends and dregs of men's stupidity and fear and bigotry.

CAN GOD LIE?

This question is put to Christians who believe that the Bible unerringly describes God and reports the commands and the characteristics of God. If there is a God, it is natural that we should wish to be quite correct in our understanding of that God's nature. So we ask: Can and does God lie?

Looking this point up in the mazes of Holy Writ, we discover confusion. In Numbers xxiii, 19 we are told: "God is not a man, that he should lie." This is put even more strongly in Hebrews vi, 18, where we read: "It was impossible for God to lie."

But do these citations settle the matter? Ah, no, we are upset in our calculations: the moment we turn to 2 Thessalonians ii, 11, where we read: "For this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie." And in 1 Kings xxii, 23, God is thus reported: "Now, therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee."

Can God lie? Can the Bible lie? Anywhere, there is a mistake somewhere. The big mistake is in entertaining the idea of a God.

WHEN we read that some minor scientist (usually a skilled technical worker but not a thinker in science) has "found God" somewhere, we are not excited. We know this is only a form of words, meaning only that the scientific worker, turning away from science, has rediscovered the stale old assumption of theology, "There is a God." We find invariably (as we should expect) that there is no satisfactory definition or description or identification or location or proof of a God. "God" is merely a word, whether it is used by a preacher or by a mystic in a laboratory.

THE FACT that millions of people still believe in a hell of eternal punishment for sinners and unbelievers is a dramatic reminder of the need for persistent, progressive education of the masses. We have as yet only begun to realize the possibilities of progress. But science, rationalism and humanism have pointed the way, they have taken the first great steps, and we must keep right ahead on the highway of modernism.

DON'T take our word for it. Read the Bible itself. Read the statements of preachers. And you will understand that God is the most desperate character, the worst villain, in all fiction.

COMMONLY, those who have professed the strongest motives of love of a God have demonstrated the deepest hatred toward human joy and liberty.

THEISM tells men that they are the slaves of a God. Atheism assures men that they are the investigators and users of nature.

BELIEF in gods and belief in ghosts is identical. God is taken as a more respectable word than ghost, but it means no more.

The Meaning of Atheism

By E. Haldeman-Julius

Atheism is accurately defined as the denial of the assumptions of theism. The theist affirms that there is a God running the universe; he declares that the idea of such a God is necessary to an understanding of life; he offers various arguments or, as he rather presumptuously calls them, evidences for his God idea.

What is the position, logically, of the atheist? He will not say in a mild, uncertain fashion that he doesn't know whether the idea is true or that it is an open question. He has studied carefully the case for and against theism. He finds that case utterly insupportable, lacking any real or positive evidence, defended by arguments which are easily discovered to be casuistic and fallacious, and linking itself with other supplementary ideas which are incredible.

The atheist perceives that in history, in every branch of science, in the plainly observable realities of life and in the processes of common sense there is no place for the picture of a God; the idea doesn't fit in with a calmly reasoned and realistic view of life. The atheist, therefore, denies the assumptions of theism because they are mere assumptions and are not proved; whereas the contrary evidences, against the idea of theism, are overwhelming. He takes a clear-cut position. To proclaim himself an agnostic, while to some it might appear more respectable and cautious, would be to say in effect that he hadn't decided what to believe.

We can understand, of course, why many prefer to call themselves agnostics. They don't wish to appear bigoted. Or they are honestly in doubt and feel that the idea of God may or may not be true; yet with scarcely an exception the attitude of the agnostic is the same as that of the atheist—he denies the assumptions of theism—his disbelief in God, as an agnostic, is quite as strong really as the atheist's disbelief.

But atheism is not in the least bigoted. It is a conclusion reached by the most reasonable methods and one which is not asserted dogmatically but is explained in its every feature by the light of reason. The atheist does not boast of knowing in a vain-glorious, empty sense. He understands by knowledge the most reasonable and clear and sound position one can take on the basis of all the evidence at hand. This evidence convinces him that theism is not true and his logical position, then, is that of atheism.

We repeat that the atheist is one who denies the assumptions of theism. He asserts, in other words, that he doesn't believe in a God because he sees no good reason for believing in a God. That's atheism—and that's good sense.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The problem of evil has always been a mischievous, difficult trap of tormented logic for theologians. They have affirmed dogmatically the existence of an all-powerful and omniscient and benevolent God—but in explaining the evil things in the world they have been not at all deft but rather desperate.

We have been told that God created only the good and not the evil—but that doesn't jibe with the theory of a God who has complete power. If he can't prevent evil, then he is a limited God with a grave element of weakness.

Others have argued that God permitted the evil for purposes of his own, which were really good purposes but beyond man's finite comprehension. But that is a harassed recourse of a man who is in a corner and can think of nothing better to say. It is an argument that admits of no demonstration. It assumes something that can't be proved. It isn't satisfactory.

Again, we are told that there is no evil in the world—that when we regard certain phenomena as evil it is only because we have a distorted view—that all things are good if we could only understand them truly. And that again is wild assertion without even the appearance of logic.

Yes, the problem of evil is too much for theologians. It can't be reconciled with the God idea. It is understandable only in a naturalistic, atheistic view of things.

AFTER ALL, the principal objection which a thinking man has to religion is that religion is not true—and is not even sane. THE FEAR of gods and devils is never anything but a pitiable degradation of the human mind.

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Sit right down and carefully go over the great number of marvelous bargains listed below. After reading the descriptions of these books you are bound to find not one but many that you do not now own, and which you really need. All persons will be entitled to select any or all of this large list of books at the amazingly low price of 19c, and will also be enrolled as a member of the Book Bargain of the Month Club without additional cost, without future obligations or dues. The books listed on this page are bound in stiff covers. They contain an average of 60,000 words; large, clear type; handsomely printed; good paper.

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