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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Two Letters—The Editor</i> - - - - -	65
<i>The Fame of Fitzgerald—Minnermus</i> - - - - -	67
<i>Voltaire and Theism—H. Cutner</i> - - - - -	68
<i>Get Understanding—G. H. Lissenden</i> - - - - -	69
<i>Pious Tactics on the Home Front—G. Bedborough</i> - - - - -	70
<i>"The Clergy and the Bible"—T. Owen</i> - - - - -	74
<i>Our Pious Publications—A. Yates</i> - - - - -	75
<i>Lourdes—F. Whitehouse</i> - - - - -	76
<i>Hindu Orthodoxy and Divine Revelation—E. Maud Simon</i> - - - - -	77

*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

Two Letters

I INTEND taking the material for my "Views" this week from two letters recently received. The first contains a warning, also a threat, likewise a hint that the threat has already been carried to execution. Someone, I do not know whether he is a new or an old reader (I incline to the first category) says that he does not agree with certain articles that have recently appeared in these columns, and will no longer take in the paper—perhaps because he fears lest the paper will take him in. That is a blow; it might be a heavy one and might be—had I been someone else instead of being my obstinate self—a distressing blow. The offending articles are not named, so I will take it that it is myself who is the chief offender, but, of course, as one who is, for the time being responsible for the continuance of the *Freethinker*, with the loyal co-operation of others, of course, I take the full responsibility for the cause of the trouble. That is an editor's duty and privilege.

I will first of all deal with the subject from my correspondent's point of view, at least the only one he states, that of setting up a financial blockade by shutting off supplies—so far as he is concerned. The loss of a single subscriber (allowing for the news-agent's profits) represents ten shillings and tenpence a year. It is a sum on which Samuel Smiles would have dilated at length. He would have pointed out that if one of the noble pirates who came to England in 1066, had invested this sum at five per cent compound interest, it would have represented a colossal sum of money in this year dated 1940. Even if I had put aside for my old age that annual ten shillings and tenpence—without reckoning interest at all—by the time I reached my 150th birthday anniversary I should have amassed between forty and fifty pounds, enough to provide me with a pleasant holiday in Switzerland or, say, a short sea cruise. It is a situation that demands much attention.

A Liberal Policy

But I sacrifice my own feelings in considering the state of my correspondent. Some years ago I gave an address to a Society—not a Freethought one—about a hundred miles from London. I received an invitation from one of the local clergy to have dinner with him. I accepted the invitation and found him a quite pleasant and courteous host, as are so many of the clergy if one can get them away from their religious outlook. I was asked over dinner whether I was not surprised on receiving the invitation. I replied that it was certainly not usual, but as the difference in opinion between himself and myself was not greater than that between myself and himself, and as I saw no objection to eating dinner with him, I could see no reason why he should object to having dinner with me. The dinner hour was a very pleasant one.

I would therefore suggest to the writer of the letter under consideration that however much he differs from certain articles, that difference is not greater than the one between those articles and himself. Opposite opinions have somehow to live together in this world, even in Germany differences must exist, so the sooner we get used to accepting the right of every opinion to exist—so long as it can maintain itself by legitimate means—the better for all of us. Merely to shut oneself up is not enough either to disprove or kill an opposite opinion. In that case one is behaving like a man suffering from extreme constipation, and who declines to take a laxative of any kind—who will not even recognize his need of one. I have an instant feeling that the man who says, "I will not read a paper because I do not agree with its contents," is the very one who most needs to have that paper before him. He gives as a reason for keeping that paper out, one which is the best of all justifications for taking it in. Even the Roman Church has to permit some of its followers to read forbidden literature.

* * *

A Religious Plan

But what is good for the goose should be good for the gander, or to put the matter in another way, if the flat could get the same education as the sharp he might be more on his guard when the two meet. To take in a paper because you agree with it is a very good reason for subscribing, although if one never sees in it other than a reflection of one's own conscious opinions it would soon cloy. Not to take in a paper because you never agree with anything in it—if such a paper exists—would irritate most people beyond patience, and so might form a justification for refusing subscription. But to read a paper with which you sometimes agree and sometimes—even violently—disagree is the best of all justifications for being a regular reader. It should teach one patience, toleration, and even contribute a little to one's education.

Religiously, of course, the rule of never reading anything with which one disagrees is a sound one.

That prevents the serene and holy solemnity of the religious mind, and shuts out the likelihood of doubt. God was never discovered by reading non-religious writings, and the feeling that one is with God is never experienced in an Atheistic lecture hall. Gold and diamonds and pearls, and other precious stones have been seen in visions of heaven, but no books—except the one that is kept by the heavenly Gestapo which records the wrongs of unbelievers. The monk in his cell, the priest in his pulpit, the Bible-banger at the street corner, the religious parent who will forbid his children ever to read a Freethinking essay, the Christian who will on no account attend an “infidel” lecture or read a book that questions the truth of religion, all these guard themselves with an impenetrable armour of ignorance concerning the one subject on which they believe they have the unadulterated truth. They are amongst those who do not believe in reading anything with which they disagree.

I suppose one ought not to be surprised that with the weakening of a formal religious belief, this type of mind often finds satisfaction in the political and social world. There is the old-fashioned conservative who will not look at a liberal paper, he will not subscribe for one, on the avowed ground that he does not agree with it. And on the other side there is the avowed revolutionist, having once made up his mind, who adopts exactly the same policy. He pays the same unquestioning obedience to his leader, as does the Roman Catholic priest to the Pope. The same formula is repeated and “There is no name under heaven by which a man may be saved”—is transferred to the particular political group with the substitution of a different name. Their mentality must have, to use the language of Mr. Jack Lindsay, the proper rubber stamp, or it will be denounced as traitorous.

All the same, and without counting the financial loss if my correspondent carries out his dire threat of withdrawing his support from the *Freethinker*, I have a conviction that he will lose to the exact extent to which he forbears reading papers with which he does not agree. I have actually profited by reading his letter, with which I am in decided disagreement.

* * *

Bias and Prejudice

My second letter asks a question which raises a rather interesting point. We are asked can we recommend an unbiassed history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No, we can't recommend such a history of those centuries or of any other period. And, further, if we could we wouldn't—that is unless we were advising it to be read as an example of “How not to do it.” A history written without bias would be one written without ideas, without an expression of judgment, and I question if that could be done. It would be like the wisdom of God which passes understanding, but which for many thousands of years all the priests of all the religions have been busily explaining. A man who sets out to write an intelligible and useful history must have some ideas as to the kind of history he is about to write. He must have a leaning to this view or that. He may write a history like the respectable, safe, conservative history of Mr. H. A. L. Fisher's *History of Europe*, which will fill the reader's head with the things that matter least, and leave comparatively untouched the things that matter most; or he may write one which emphasizes the deeper and more constant factors that decide human history. But whatever kind of history he writes it will be one that indicates the writer's leanings (bias) in this or that direction. In other words, the historian must have more than a collection of dates and names and a bare chronicle of events, or if he has not, he justifies the remark attributed to Henry Fielding when an historian—of a sort—said to him,

“You are one of those who write fiction.” “Oh no,” replied the author of *Tom Jones*, “it is you gentlemen who write fiction. The only things that are fictitious with us are the names and dates; and these are the only things that are correct with you.” To have a bias when writing is only to say that the writer has formed a judgment on what he is setting down, and his work expresses that bias. The bias (judgment) may be justifiable or not, but it is a bias all the same. To be without a leaning in this or that direction of the significance or causal nature of human events would be to write without intelligence and to be read without profit.

I have stressed this aspect of one of the functions of the historian because I fancy my correspondent is confusing bias with prejudice, and that is quite common, but quite wrong. The two things are, in substance not merely dissimilar, they are antagonistic. It may be said that prejudice also implies a leaning in one direction, that is, a bias. I agree, but the distinction is still important. A bias without prejudice, implies an examination of the pros and cons of a case, and the expression of a judgment in accordance with the facts. It is a bent of mind following a study of the situation—whether it be a jury returning a verdict, a conclusion as to the part played by certain factors in a scientific problem, or any other question. But a prejudice means a bent of mind that is adopted without care and held to out of sheer contempt of available evidence to the contrary. It is there in the case of the correspondent with which I have just been dealing—the man who will not read a paper because he does not agree with it. It is there in the case of those who will not look at the facts that prove their position to be wrong. Whatever a man studies with care and candour will end with the establishment of a bias. But the man with a prejudice rarely studies the facts at all. He begins with a prejudice, and his prejudice grows with nursing until he has established a Chinese wall between himself and the truth about things.

I cannot recommend, therefore, history without bias. If I knew of one it would be one of those volumes that contain a list of names of prominent men and women, and of striking events, and would provide even in that a large number of examples of either bias or prejudice.

There are, of course, plenty of instances where a legitimately formed bias may harden into a prejudice. I have met such cases even in the ranks of the Freethought movement.

Here, however, is a case in point, which I find in *Trials of British Freedom*. The book contains a brief account of trials for treason, sedition and blasphemy since the time of Paine. It is published by Lawrence and Wishart (6s.). Mr. Jackson is a well-known writer on Communism, and is naturally, writing to a pattern. Somehow or the other all reform movements must be made to spring from economic conditions, and man must be depicted as predominately a victim of economic or class domination. That these conditions obtain no one will deny, but that man is, or ever was, completely at the mercy of economic conditions is not and never was true. Reforms are not brought about solely by “class” activities although that factor has its place; in most cases they are brought about by the co-operation of many different social causes. And a great factor in all social stages is the lust for power. Whether that lust is expressed through economic domination here, or other forces elsewhere, matters nothing to this generalization. The lust for power may exist, properly exist in Russia as well as in Britain, and history furnishes many examples of fierce struggles round this issue.

It does, however, say something for Mr. Jackson's

sense of fairness that he is prompted to write the following. People in the early part of the nineteenth century, he says, did not

seem to behave quite so normally as one would expect. The kindly and homely Walter Scott, who genuinely knew and liked the common people, figures as a high Tory; the handsome and dissipated Lord Byron, who knew nothing whatever about the lives of the common people, and the aristocratically born Shelley, who knew their lives little better, both figure as front rank champions of the people, and haters of the established order. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, who begin as enthusiasts for the French Revolution end as high Tories. Cobbett who begins as a truculent ultra-tory ends as an even more truculent Radical.

That list might easily have been made twenty times as long. This is not, of course, theoretically what ought to have happened. And the list might be enlarged until the collection of names would look like a biographical dictionary. What stands out is the truth that by no manipulation of facts can neo-Marxism explain social evolution in terms of a single factor. Of course Mr. Jackson comes back to his old theme, but that will illustrate what I mean by a legitimate bias hardening into prejudice.

I am afraid I have been a little more didactic than usual, but put it down to that self-willed typewriter of mine, which once I get hold of it—or it gets hold of me—insists on turning out what it pleases.

CHAPMAN COHEN

The Fame of Fitzgerald

The art of the pen is to rouse the inward vision, instead of labouring with a drop-scene brush.

George Meredith

That same gentle spirit, from whose pen,
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow.

Spenser

TO-DAY Edward Fitzgerald's version of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, is probably read as much as any verse except that of Shakespeare. It is quoted in newspapers, and many modern novels are incomplete without quotations from its quatrains. Its haunting poetry has been set to music by a well-known composer, and, best of all, it is included in the supplement to Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, and other anthologies.

Yet Fitzgerald died in 1883 almost unknown. My own copy of the Omar Khayyam bore the stamp of an Asylum for Idiots, to whose intellects it was thought appropriate. Only a few people had ever heard his name. The public had little chance of hearing it, for he was so shy that he took more pains to avoid fame than others do to seek it. He wrote about remote subjects, which appealed only to cultured people, and all his books appeared without his name on the title-page, except his version of Calderon's dramas. When his friend, Tennyson, dedicated *Tiresias* to Fitzgerald, the tribute seemed merely one of friendship. The ordinary reader discounted the praise of that

Golden Eastern lay,
Than which I know no version done
In English more divinely well.

A man is known by his friends, and the world has small need of a formal introduction to Edward Fitzgerald. He was a man of many notable friendships. At school he made acquaintance with James Spedding, the Baconian critic, and at Cambridge University with Thackeray. The following years united him to the brothers Alfred and Frederick Tennyson, Carlyle,

Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet, Lawrence the artist, and others.

Fitzgerald's biographer, like the famous knife-grinder, has no story to tell. Born at Bredfield, near Woodbridge in 1809, the same year as Darwin and Tennyson, he was educated at Bury St. Edmunds, and at Cambridge. He followed no profession, after taking his degree. Till 1853, though he often moved, he lived mainly in a thatched cottage at Boulge, near Woodbridge, close to his brother's residence, Boulge Hall. He was in lodgings in Woodbridge from 1860 to 1874, when he settled in a small house of his own outside the town, named at the wish of a friend, "Little Grange." And "Laird of Little Grange," as he playfully signed himself, he remained till he died, aged seventy-four, in June, 1883. He is buried in Boulge Churchyard, and a rose, transplanted from the tomb of the old Persian, Omar Khayyam, has been planted over his grave.

Fitzgerald lived the life of a recluse in Suffolk, on the North Sea coast. His friend, Carlyle, saw in it all "a peaceable, affectionate, ultra-modest man," and "an innocent *far niente* life." Like Shelley, he had a great fondness for the sea, and a real affection for fishermen and sailors. One old Viking, the hero-fisherman of Lowestoft, whom we know as "Posh," he numbered among his personal friends. Fitzgerald, characteristically considered "Posh" a greater man than either Tennyson or Thackeray, because he was not self-conscious. The Viking worshipped at the shrine of Bacchus, but that never troubled Fitzgerald, who was no harsh judge of human frailties. Curiously, the man who gave us Omar's *Rubaiyat*, that rhapsody of wine, woman, and song, was as abstemious himself as Shelley or Bernard Shaw. He was a vegetarian, and he nearly killed Tennyson by persuading him to turn vegetarian for six weeks.

With the exception of his *Omar Khayyam*, Fitzgerald's books made no stir in the world. He wrote a memoir to an edition of the poems of his friend, Bernard Barton. Later he printed his remarkable dialogue *Euphranar, Polonius*, and a rendering of the *Agamemnon*, and four editions of his masterpiece, the *Omar Khayyam*, came out before his death; the first appearing in the year of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, without gaining any immediate recognition. Rosetti's story of buying a copy of *Omar* at Quaritch's bookshop for a penny is one of his jokes. Bernard Quaritch was at that time the foremost bookseller in Europe, and his place of business in Piccadilly had no "penny" box, or, indeed, any outside show of cheap bargains. He employed a large staff, including linguists, scholars, and Orientalists. Quaritch's remainder publications were printed annually in catalogue form, and the sale was preceded by a trade-dinner. "Penny-box" forsooth! Quaritch was a King among booksellers, and he thought little of paying £10,000 for a copy of the *Mazarin Bible*. Yet the literary world has swallowed this legend for two generations.

Owing to his living in the country, Fitzgerald devoted much time to his correspondence, and proved himself a most delightful letter-writer. His friends, be it remembered, were men of genius, and the companion of such giants must have been no ordinary character. When a man is loved by other men of his own intellectual stature, and of a wholly different type we may be certain of his sincerity. Men do not like another man simply because he is a genius, least of all when they are geniuses themselves. It would not have been possible for Fitzgerald to keep on writing uninteresting letters to such men for nearly half a century.

Indeed, Fitzgerald's letters are among the best in the language. There is hardly a dull line in them, and they are most charming and piquant reading on

account of their literary heresies. His taste was all for old books, old friends, familiar jests, and well-known places. His literary favourites were great writers, and he loved Ceryantes and Scott, Montaigne and Mme. de Sevigne, she herself an admirer of old Montaigne, and with a spice of his Freethought. Of course, he revelled in the old Persian infidel, Omar Khayyam, with whom his own fame is so intimately associated; and that other ancient Freethinker, Lucretius. London did not attract him, chiefly because it hid Nature. Like Thoreau, Fitzgerald knew the life that suited him, and had the wisdom to refuse to be turned aside from it.

If any justification were needed, his version of Omar's wonderful "Rose of the hundred-and-one petals" would be enough. The charm of that great poem is that it voices the scepticism at the back of all thoughtful men's minds, and makes music of it. What a translation of Omar was Fitzgerald's! "A planet larger than the sun which cast it," said Tennyson, a fine judge. In truth, the translation is finer than the original, and in this resembles the Authorized Version of the New Testament, which, as Swinburne says, is rendered from "canine Greek" into "divine English." In his version of the Persian poet Fitzgerald proved himself a consummate artist. Although the original quatrains were written in a far-away country in a far-away time, the *Rubaiyat*, as reinterpreted by Fitzgerald, is a criticism of life which men are living here and now.

MIMNERMUS

Voltaire and Theism

I.

A YEAR or so back Mr. Alfred Noyes wrote a book on Voltaire, which caused considerable commotion in the Catholic camp. Mr. Noyes is a distinguished man of letters and a poet; one of those Catholic converts to whom the famous epigram "plus royalist que le roi" might not unfairly be given. Hitherto, the name of Voltaire was more than anathema to Catholics; he represented everything that the Roman Church hated when applied to their religion—irony, wit, contempt, scathing indignation, a hatred of shams and hypocrisy, all combined with a power in writing, which stood almost alone in literature. Such a pen, devoted to irreligion, to the exposure of superstition and credulity, to say nothing of sheer ignorance, was the kind of enemy which the Church could only contemplate in terror and dismay. Its followers endorsed to the full the dictum of Macaulay—"Of all the intellectual weapons which have ever been wielded by man, the most terrible was the mockery of Voltaire." Yet it was left to a Catholic, and a convert at that, to point out that the Church was all wrong in its conception of Voltaire; that he was really no enemy of religion—nay, rightly understood, he was essentially a genuine Christian at heart. No mocker he of *true* religion, only of those wretched forms or conceptions of it against which all faithful Christians have fulminated for ages.

Mr. Noyes' *Voltaire* is a work of over 650 pages, and, it must be admitted, is an extremely valuable exposition of the great Freethinker and his voluminous writings. Not many people have read Voltaire in his entirety—indeed not many people would be able to find room for the 70 volumes containing his work, on their shelves. And it goes without saying that there can be few Catholics who have done what Mr. Noyes has done—really studied Voltaire in all his great versatility with the special object of rehabilitating him to a

generation that sees in him only the personification of mocking blasphemy.

For Freethinkers such a book should be doubly welcomed. All sorts of amazingly wrong conceptions of the man Voltaire and his "morals" are in it scathingly denounced. Indeed, if such a book had been written by a professed Freethinker, it would have been in all probability laughed out of court. It would have been considered a trumped-up and biased defence designed in the interests of Atheism with little truth to support it. There can be no fire without smoke, we have been so often told, and therefore, most of the stories related about Voltaire—his meanness, his utter lack of decent morality, his deliberate falsehoods, and many other base qualities—*must* have had a substratum of truth, and probably more truth than less because he was such a determined opponent of Christianity.

Nearly all the moral charges brought against Voltaire are patiently examined by Mr. Noyes, and he has very little difficulty in proving how baseless they really are. He does not hesitate to condemn not only the accusations of various Catholics, but he also shows how saner critics like Carlyle and Morley had been hopelessly misled, or too ready to accept obvious tittle-tattle. And not only that. Mr. Noyes defends Voltaire over and over again from a purely literary point of view.

It is doubtful whether literature can show another name than Voltaire's so extraordinarily versatile and prolific, and of such a high standard. His facility in all its branches was amazing. He was perhaps one of the first writers to realize that history was not a mere bare recital of so-called facts, but that it had a philosophy all its own, as well as a science. Many of his plays were considered by his contemporaries to be in the highest tradition of the Greek drama, and at least equal to those of Corneille and Racine. And Mr. Noyes has little patience with those modern critics who persist in looking at *Alzire*, or *Zaire*, or *Mérope* with modern eyes or values. In fact he shows how Voltaire's crisp and witty dialogue, different from the long and often stilted speeches found in the plays of the other masters, are far more in our modern tradition, thus proving how Voltaire broke away from recognized conventions.

Voltaire was also a master of that gay and light-hearted verse in which so few poets have excelled. And he could rise to epic grandeur in such a poem as *La Henriade*. He could paint a people as he did in his *English Letters*; he could expound the philosophy of Locke and other philosophers with an enviable clarity, as well as the mathematics of Newton.

There is nothing quite like his wonderful *Dialogues*, in which he expounded his own ideas and thoughts on various subjects, in any other literature. Walter Savage Landor's famous *Imaginary Conversations* are in quite a different genre. Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* is a masterpiece of its kind, combining an immense amount of learning with witty comment. And there are few people with any pretensions to literature who have not read *Candide*, and at least some of the other romances which have kept the name and fame of Voltaire deathless. If one adds to all this an immense number of letters and correspondence in its way unequalled by any other writer one may begin to grasp the place Voltaire can rightly claim in the world of literature.

In his thousands of letters will be found the key to Voltaire's profoundest thoughts and convictions. They are full of all kinds of things and questions of topical interest, but behind nearly everything he wrote was an earnestness and depth which the cultivated reader can see for himself if he searches for it. Behind the mocker was the philosopher, and the

thinker, the man who hated cruelty and intolerance, whose goal was truth and justice. And never were these qualities, added to that of courage, so needed as they were in the France of the eighteenth century.

But the most extraordinary fact in Voltaire's life and his enormous literary output was his constant preoccupation with religion and its problems. He was obsessed with it to a tremendous degree. And—it comes as a surprise to all those people who, for some reason or other, always regard Voltaire as an Atheist—he never for a moment really lost his faith in God, the true God, the Creator of the Universe, the Personality behind all that is, or whatever is meant by the fervent Theist when he talks about God.

Freethinkers have, of course, known that Voltaire was a Theist, and not an Atheist at all. He had always opposed d'Holbach and Diderot. Never was he able to appreciate their point of view, or understand their arguments. His famous epigram, "If there were no God it would be necessary to invent him," is one of his most oft-quoted sayings; it seems incredible that in the face of such a Theistic confession Voltaire could ever have been looked upon as an out-and-out unbeliever.

The truth is, of course, that like so many of the English Deists who so profoundly influenced him in early life, Voltaire had nothing but the greatest contempt for Christianity; and it has always paid the Christian priest to hurl the charge of Atheist or blasphemer or both at anybody who refused to accept the gospel of Jesus in its entirety. Voltaire, whose exceptionally quick brain had seen through the hollow sham of Christian belief very early in life, could never hide this contempt, and his scorching irony and mocking laughter pursued the Church all his life. By this is not meant that his attacks on Christianity are as uncompromising in his early writings as in his later ones. The young Voltaire made few if any frontal attacks on the enemy; not till he saw with clearer eyes in his later days what the Church really stood for did he make up his mind to "crush the Infamous," as he called it. It was not so much the burning of his own works, the ceaseless attempts of Church and State to bring him to book for what are nothing, to the modern mind, but mild heresies, which eventually decided his course of action. It was the fate of Calas and La Barre and many other less known examples of the horrible cruelty, persecution, and intolerance of the Church of Christ which made him devote so many of the last years of his life to demolish the whole superstructure of organized religion.

But through it all he remained a Theist—shaken here and there, it is true—but still a Theist. And stranger still it must be admitted that however bitterly he attacked the outer form of the Christian religion, he still was not altogether averse to joining on occasions in its ceremonies. It is on these facts that Mr. Noyes has based his contention that Voltaire was by no means the enemy of Christianity he has been made out to be. And it is easy to see why his defence of such an avowed and universally admitted heretic should have been received with so much hostility by his own Church. As some of Mr. Noyes' arguments deserve a more closer examination I will try to deal with them in future articles.

H. CUTNER

All truths partake of a common essence and naturally coincide with each other, and like the drops of rain which fall separately into the river, mix themselves at once with the stream and strengthen the general current.—

Conyers Middleton

Get Understanding

"WITH all thy getting, get understanding," we were advised many centuries ago. Excellent advice, but not very easy to follow. Nothing worth having is easy to get, and a good grasp of the fundamental facts of existence which alone makes a *real* understanding possible, perhaps least of all.

Given the character and the will to do it, money and social position can be acquired without a deal of effort; one so very often follows the other. But those things which, in the final analysis, are really worth while—a good knowledge of the world in general and the many ways in which life expresses itself—these are the result of labour and pain and self-sacrifice.

Those of us who wish to understand what is going on around us must, of a necessity, be fairly familiar with the history of the world—not copy-book history, which is largely fiction or distorted fact, but *real* history from the earliest known times down to date, including all the unpleasing as well as the pleasing facts—because unless we have this knowledge our interpretation of what we see and hear will be mostly guess-work or based upon hear-say evidence, and to the sincere and ambitious student that is never satisfactory.

In his pursuit of such knowledge and understanding as he would that should be his, the student must apply himself to the study of not only the childhood of the human race and the recorded history of the world from at least as far back as the Greeco-Roman period, but he must have, too, rather more than a nodding acquaintance with anthropology, biology and geology—yes, and psychology as well, both human and social. The other sciences he will add as his thirst for knowledge develops.

The world is just now in a pretty sorry mess, but unless we know what has gone on before—what have been the moods and motives and movements which have influenced our forefathers—we cannot possibly get the hang of things as they exist to-day and understand what has brought them about. Some there are—many of whom should know better—who would have us believe that civilization is doomed—or at least on the edge of an abyss and likely to topple over and disappear, never to rise again if we are not extremely careful—and unless we know that history is, in a sense, merely repeating itself when it produces such men as Hitler, who (as the Spartans did before him, 2,500 years ago) blathers about racial purity, communal life, the invincibility of the German people, the necessity for a nation to be well-drilled, well-armed and always ready to fight for its very existence, and all the rest of it, unless we know all this and keep it in mind we may be inclined to take some notice of the Jeremiahs who tell us that the end is near.

All down the ages there have been men—demi-Gods they have been called—who have preached democracy but practised autocracy—Pericles, in Athens, over four hundred years B.C. is a fine example—and such men will continue to rise and have their sway until the populace are educated and trained to see through these adventurers and treat them accordingly.

The truth of the matter is, no doubt, that a very large proportion of the human race is, at the moment, in a state of mental and physical unrest for which no one is *personally* responsible or to blame, and no one can tell, with any degree of certainty, precisely what the outcome of it all will be. We can hazard a guess, but that is all. Certain it is that, figuratively speaking, the human mind, in the mass, is groping about for something different, something bigger and better, something nobler and more worth-while than what it has been accustomed to, but whether it will attain its

desired end remains to be seen. The peoples of the earth, severally and collectively, have had these social upheavals before, many a time, and the results have not always been to their liking—or to the liking of the majority at any rate, because of the deceit and trickery of those who have managed to get themselves jockeyed into power—but a new and better era has dawned eventually, and that, it would appear, is what is happening to-day.

A crisis has arisen—a fresh social eruption has taken place—and we must seek to understand the lessons of history, and do whatever little in us lies to direct its course to the betterment of humanity.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN

Pious Tactics on the Home Front

THE B.B.C. has always been noted for the utterly banal nature of many of its "Talks," particularly the Religious ones. As a rule some very pompous person retails rubbish in a sepulchral voice—unless it is the Vicar of St. Martin's, and his type, who made us laugh by their audacious but ineffective attempts to talk like they imagine the "man in the street" talks.

In a land where there is a State Church governed by Parliament, it is natural to expect that any expositions of Theology by a Government Department like the B.B.C. would be in accordance with the State-established Church Dogmas. The gabbling-over of Prayer-Book "services," or the dead-as-mutton (and much more dull) sermons by a Clerk-in-Holy (C. of E.) Orders may be necessarily involved so long as the B.B.C., and C. of E. religion are equally "established." But we are nowadays regularly treated to prayers, sermons, and "theological talks" by Priests who oppose the Creeds and Principles of the only authoritative Church in England. The war has served as an opportunity—and the B.B.C. has facilitated the chance of the Roman Catholics to enter the homes of listeners-in.

Why not? some will say. Freethinkers should be the last to object when varied and opposing views are allowed free utterance! This is so, of course, although Freethinkers do not regard Religious Dogmas as an essential form of entertainment. In the nature of things Questions and Answers cannot be satisfactorily carried on within the circumscribed limits of the Radio. With war at our doors we might at least expect peace—and sleep—from the B.B.C. if they have to have religious pi-jaws after dark.

A not un-called-for protest is being made by those who recognize the obvious intention of the Catholic management of the B.B.C. to drag in their own sectarian theology while men's minds are concentrated on the war.

Freethinkers object to Parliament being opened with Church of England or any other Prayers, but that is the fault of the electors in maintaining a State Church. Except from a narrow calculation of Secularist success in consequence of ALL quarrels of rival creeds, we see no sense in allowing empty formalities to become a playground in which two forms of dogmatic theology fight a proselytizing scrimmage. If we were a logical people we should sweep the board of all these pious talks and talkers.

What are the aims and objects of the B.B.C.? We are led to believe that these in the main include:—

- (a) News and comments thereon.
- (b) Entertainment (including amusement).
- (c) Instruction.

Religion is frequently amusing, rarely entertaining, and instructive only in the sense that *Mein Kampf* is instructive as a revelation of Nazism and Hitler's intentions,

But, as all school-masters know, instruction must be definite. A master may wisely indicate that, while the instruction he gives is the authorized teaching, outsiders have in some cases other views. He does not invite opponents of the school syllabus to air their views during school hours before the students. It would be a sheer waste of time to invite every conceivable form of dissentient to lay his particular dissent before students who cannot remain at the school for ever. It would be worse still, however, if the exponent of ONE differing heresy of dogma were invited to expound HIS view, with the object of deceiving students into the idea that only one or other of the two teachings placed before them was true, or that there were no other theories in existence.

The best service a Master can give his pupils is to encourage them to THINK. He knows perfectly well—and a wise master admits it willingly—that outside the class-room there are parents and many others whose comments, criticisms and even propaganda, will prove an abiding influence, side by side with all one learns at school.

The B.B.C. is probably concerned solely in teaching Roman Catholic theology or else to convince Listeners that Protestants and Catholics between them possess all the truth about religion. We do not suggest that Radio teaching or Secularist Talk on Religion would effect any great improvement on the present illogical chaos implied in the hypocritical "ideal" of "hearing both sides." First of all the B.B.C. is not likely to make any attempt at such "rough justice" as might be approximated to by hearing only extreme opponents. But our objection goes deeper than this.

Nor must it be supposed that we really enjoy hearing the Church of England curate's whining additions to the war misery of the day. On the mere ground of one horror being better than two of similar character, we object to Roman Catholic Purgatory *plus* Hell being added to Radio talks of those who believe in Hell alone.

We think that Theology of any kind (for it, against it; or about it) is fit only for voluntary meetings, purchasable books, and gratuitous tracts. We want to abolish religious propaganda in every part of the public service: from Parliament to Prison, including School and Radio.

The right of Free Speech is quite a different thing. We would increase—not curtail—the opportunities for the free expression of human thought. Why should war-time be considered a fitting season for religious propaganda? We all have to die some day. Can it be that soldiers are more religious than others, or that soldiers in uniform and on duty favour religion more than the same men did as civilians? Few experienced soldiers believe it: they know otherwise.

Apart from all other aspects of the case, it seems clear that both Catholic and Protestant clerics are taking advantage of Barrack and Camp life to address their Radio and other forms of propaganda to the disciplined conditions in which men habitually fight. A war may be wise or wicked, but it is the Pietists' invariable race-track. The Freethought movement is to be congratulated on its scorn of these body (and soul) snatchers. It is right that efforts should be made—and are being made—to undermine by all legal means the abominable pressure of "compulsory religion" of which the present war has already shown many examples. We do not, however, need to imitate the priests. Intelligent men in the field, faced every instant with realities in their most obvious form, are little likely to be persuaded into a belief in the crudest of all impostures. The circumstances of war offer abiding evidence that religion is a fraud.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH

"Gay Sundays" for Soldiers at the Front

The Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society is again making himself objectionable in denouncing the "Gay Sunday" provided for sailors at the front. His inaccuracies, in order to prop up his Society's preconceived and erroneous notions concerning an imaginary "Lord's Day"—a relic of the planetary worship of primitive days—are, as will be seen presently, antagonistic to the scriptures on which he affects to rely. His statement, with the malevolent motive of creating uncalled-for alarm among credulous dupes, implies that the Mosaic command to "keep holy the sabbath day" is a duty devolving on the whole Gentile world, as well as upon the "House of Israel," i.e., those of the "seed of Abram." Those commands were formulated for a special tribe, who were released from bondage in Egypt under covenant with Yahveh (Jehovah) who is said to have brought them "out of the land of Egypt; out of the house of bondage." But by sheer duplicity and deceit, these words were omitted from the Introductory dedication in the Prayer Book by the Calvinistic reformers of Tudor days. That Moses had any idea of inflicting his commands on the despised Gentiles, who were beneath his notice, is inconceivable and ridiculous; for he made no claim to jurisdiction over any but the so-called "chosen people." And that this was thoroughly understood by both Jew and Gentile is undoubted. The Apostle Paul in his controversy with the Jewish converts on circumcision—assured the Roman Jews (Ep. ii. 14), that the Gentiles were "under no law, but that of their own consciences.

When the wealthy young Jew, interested in the promises of eternal life offered by the preaching of Jesus, asked what he should do to obtain such, he was told to "keep the commands." The youth asked "which be they?" A code of precepts was presented to him, amongst which that of sabbath keeping was *not one*, but was carefully excluded. The aggregate of these eight precepts termed for convenience "The octologue," will be found in the three synoptic gospels (Matt. xix.; Mark x.; and Luke xviii); and in the epistle of Paul to the Roman converts (xiii.).

Practically all the converts previous to 41 C.E., were circumcized Jews; for it was not until Peter's visit to Cornelius, the centurion, that the Gentiles were appealed to with a view to conversion. The Bishop of Jerusalem was a circumcized Jew, as was Jesus himself. Certain of these Jewish converts gave trouble to "The Dispersion" as the converts called themselves, by insisting that it was obligatory on the Gentile converts to be circumcized as they were themselves, by which a difficulty arose which Jesus and Paul had to contend with, and make them understand that the old law had been repealed under the new dispensation. The former is said to have stated to the Pharisee Lawyer that the "great and first command" was, briefly put: "To love thy God"; the second—equally great "To love thy neighbour as thyself"; and that on these two commands "*hangeth the whole law*" (Matt. xxii. 37-40). Paul held forth continually on brotherly love and its complete fulfilment of the law (Rom. xiii. 10), telling his hearers that they were "dead to the law"; that the circumcision of the Christ "was buried with him"; that he (the Christ) had nailed (metaphorically) to his cross the "ordinances" of the old law; that none was now and hereafter to be condemned for neglect of sabbath observance (Col. ii. 12-16); and warned them (i.e., the convert Jews) that their attempt to burden their brethren (Jew and Gentile) with such a yoke of bondage

was "a falling away from grace" (Gal. v. 1-4). Can anything be more explicit or final?

There is then, and can be—judging from authentic scripture—no such thing as a Christian sabbath; and twaddle about a Lord's Day—*Dies solis venerabilis*—is nothing but clerical bunkum, engrafted on to Jesusism by the sun-worshipping murderer Constantine, who decreed the keeping of a weekly "bestai of the god Sol. "The Invincible"—*Dies natalis solis invicti*.

W. W. HARDWICKE

Acid Drops

The Rev. R. J. Campbell who, while at the City Temple, created a stir with his "soulsful" eyes and wavy hair, and the bellowing of a few mild heresies that had been preached at street corners for nearly a century, has been sermonizing on the war. He says that his "heart was deeply moved on Christmas Day when I saw that the largest single element at early Communion in which I ministered consisted of single men in uniform." Evidently the war marked better business for Mr. Campbell, and the maker of spiritual munitions hoped to make as much profit as did the ordinary armament firms. Getting happier as he went on Mr. Campbell felt, "There is comfort in the knowledge that Christ is sought by millions of the rising generation in many lands, and not least on both sides in the struggle whose climax is approaching." A truly glorious hope! Bigger and better business. More people coming to Christ—via the parsonry. Who was it said that war was God's instrument? It must have been a parson.

It is worth noting that in England is found a censorship equally as indefensible as anything in Ireland, and Freethinkers should make their voice heard wherever possible about it. Take, as an example, the film "Professor Mamlock," which is now being shown in many parts of the country. Bad as it shows the state of things in Germany, it actually *understates* the real truth; yet it was banned by the Censor before the war, presumably because it might get decent people in this country to loathe Nazism, and all it stands for. Even now, as in Hove, it is banned by some "censors," or perhaps it would be more truthful to say by the secret band of Nazi lovers we are here cursed with. And one other thing. Our noble censors have actually blackened out some of the English captions in case the public might be contaminated by some of the expressions used by the characters in the play. We were not allowed to know that Mamlock's son actually coupled the names of Marx and Lenin with those of Darwin, Pasteur, and Koch! If idiotic censorship could go much further than that we should like to know how.

How much some of the most advanced thinkers in the Church actually know about the Atheism with which they have to contend can be seen in the Dean of Canterbury's defence of Communism, which he has recently published. He says that even a passionate assertion of Atheism does not mean that a man is fundamentally irreligious. It is, of course, possible that the Dean has not the ghost of an idea of the meaning of the words he uses; in which case it is useless to argue with him. But if by Atheism he means what we mean, we can only say that it would be impossible to pack more undisguised nonsense in so few words.

At the Convocation of Canterbury, the Rev. J. E. Boggis moved:—

That this House would welcome the provision of a supplementary Lectionary that would enable the clergy to substitute selections from non-Biblical literature in place of lessons from the Old Testament.

This is delightful, especially as Mr. Boggis hastened to explain that what he wanted was to "exclude the Jewish element" from public worship. What "Jesus" (if he lived) would have said of this proposal to exclude his favourite and oft-quoted Scriptures from "public worship," especially as he was a Jew himself, Mr. Boggis did not tell Convocation. But had Mr. Boggis put forward the same suggestion, say a hundred years ago, he would in all probability have suffered the same fate as the Rev. Robert Taylor, that is, two years hard in a felon's prison for "blasphemy." Mr. Boggis must thank his lucky stars he is living in a country civilized by Freethinkers like Taylor.

The Bishop of Sheffield complains that religion is discarded by many people, and parsons are despised by them. We are not concerned with deciding how far this is true, but what else can a really thoughtful Christian preacher expect? Intelligent people realize that if they really wish to know the truth about religion they must go outside the Churches to get it. Readers of history also know that in every case the most "advanced" of Christian ministers have kept it in the dark concerning the new light that science and research in general has cast upon religion. The education of the people in this direction never came from the pulpit. And one cannot go on fooling all the people all the time. Sooner or later the intelligent layman gets hold of some degree of the truth, and there has been no religion in the whole history of the world to which the truth about religion was not fatal.

From the Protestant to the Catholic side. The Rev. Owen Dudley speaking the other Sunday at the Cathedral of Westminster was astonishingly frank. He admitted that "since the last war the belief in the Divinity of Christ has been gradually diminishing in all England." Fr. Dudley did not make it clear whether he included in "all" England the Roman Catholic part; however, he considers this terrible unbelief to be a "crime." Catholics must "stand up against this crime and defeat it." They must make it clear that "Christ is God or he is not God." We cordially agree. All Mr. Dudley has to do is to prove the truth of religious doctrines. That is all.

The Rev. R. Bulstrode does not care much for detailed descriptions of the glories of heaven. We can quite understand that. The more detailed a statement, the more it is open to proof or disproof, and that is a situation never favoured by theologians. He prefers something said by a man who had been listening to one of these descriptions of heaven and said afterwards:—

It was very pretty, but for me one steady look into the dark is worth a hundred of your farthing candles.

Now that, we hold, is good, sound theology. Use a candle to look into the dark and you may either see something or find there is nothing to be seen. Either may be disturbing to one's religious convictions. But to take a good, long, steady, fearless look into the dark, minus the illumination of even a farthing candle, that is the outlook for one who does not wish the religious faith of his followers to be disturbed. Mr. Bulstrode really did say a mouthful.

Mr. Maurice Collis writing on "Indian Art," in *Time and Tide*, tells us all about it in a very few sentences. He appears to have become an authority on Indian Art (and doubtless every other aspect of Indian life) by reason of his 23 years service in the Indian Government employ. "Indian Art," says this very English "critic."

is a representation of the metaphysic of the Vedanta and the Mahayana.

Now, the metaphysic of the Vedanta has been summed up in the three words "tat tvam asi"—"that art thou": the metaphysic of the Mahayana in one word "Tathata"—"Suchness." The first apophthegm means that the soul is the absolute. Suchness has been defined as not existence or non-existence nor both or neither—a vision of truth empty of particularity.

Whether there is any ultimate difference between the Vedantic (that is the Brahmanical) and the Mahayanist

(or Buddhist) plenitude is a problem which could be debated at very great length and with very little result. They are admittedly analogous.

It seems, too, that analogous to each other they are both analogous to the plenitude glimpsed by the Neo-platonists, the Fathers and the Saints of the West.

We cannot congratulate the journal in which this review appears, on the intelligence of their readers if the latter swallow words of this kind as descriptive of an ancient and very human national expression of a people's love of beauty.

The *Church Times* does not conceal its contempt and hate for some rather prominent clerics with whose views it disagrees. No doubt, the violence of its language is at least a tribute to its honesty. This is part of what it says about Dr. Inge:—

Dr. Inge is a man of great gifts, though certainly not an original thinker. From our point of view, his tenancy of the deanery of St. Paul's was deplorable, and the disservice that he did to the Church of England and to religion is a tale that has yet to be told. Now, in his well-paid journalistic retirement, Dr. Inge is regarded by the man in the street (or so Lord Beaverbrook supposes) as an exponent of Christian opinion.

The *Church Times* is equally opposed to the Dean of Canterbury, of whom it says:—

Intellectually, Dr. Hewlett Johnson is not to be compared with Dr. Inge.

. . . The Dean's new book, *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, is in consequence as mischievous as it is silly.

. . . To-day one ex-Dean and one Dean are something like public nuisances.

There doesn't seem much evidence here of the value of divine guidance.

The Rev. Conrad Noel writes to the *New Statesman* condescendingly approving some satirical verses by Archibald Oldys. Those verses which appeared in the *Statesman* biting described the complacency of a lady-worshipper after she had piously listened to a very average sermon in Westminster Abbey. "Ah Yes," says the Socialistic Vicar of Thaxted, such sermons ARE preached. But what a pity the lady didn't go to the Abbey when somebody else was preaching! There is point, of course, in Mr. Noel's choice of a tiny handful of clergymen, some of whom are as Socialistic as he is, even if they do not plant the Red Flag on their church-tower. Nobody doubts that some clergy talk more sense—or shall we say less nonsense—than others. But an institution cannot be judged by its rebels.

Mr. Noel's idea of man's destiny is revealed in the concluding words of his Guide to Thaxted Church:—

O God, whose glory the heavens declare and whose handiwork the firmament sheweth. Grant, we beseech thee, that all the workers of the world may be delivered from the dominion of Mammon, and that all labour and craftsmanship may be a work of ministry in thy kingdom of grace.

Mr. Noel himself is quite a fine specimen of fair-mindedness and toleration. But his "Collect" might inspire a Torquemada, an Ignatius Loyola, the ex-Bishop of London, or anyone else who wished to drag Artists and Workers back into a clerical domination which is none the better for being re-christened "The Kingdom of Grace."

We have borrowed the following story from a contemporary:—

They were burying the sergeant-major and sitting in church at the funeral service the men were listening to the chaplain's address. As the virtues of the dead man rolled off the chaplain's lips the "Bad Lad" of the crowd became more and more amazed. When the chaplain referred to the deceased's "lovable qualities," he could stand it no longer. He rose in his place, and after a cough to attract the chaplain's attention, asked: "Excuse me, sir, but are you sure you've got the right corpse?"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

JUBILEE FREETHINKER FUND.—J. W. Adkins, 5s.; T. H. Pugh, 21s.

W. G. WILKINSON.—Sorry, but we have no recollection of the man you name. We are afraid that Eastbourne is not the only town in Britain that is priest-ridden. But there are some there who read the *Freethinker*, so we must count that much to them for righteousness.

NORMAN NORTH.—Thanks for what you are doing with regard to this journal. We always aim at giving of our best to its columns, and so, we are sure, do the rest of our contributors.

F. FINNEY.—You should be subject to no special annoyance in the army for declaring yourself an Atheist. You may be subject to other tasks in place of Church parade, but much here depends upon whether your officers are gentlemen or not. We do not know what Professor Sherrington calls himself: a Theist or an Atheist. Does that really matter? We should say that very few scientists believe in a personal God. If they profess a "God," it is probably a nebulous something that amounts to nothing.

The "*Freethinker*" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.

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Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Roselli, giving as long notice as possible.

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

Sugar Plums

We received news of the release of Mr. Woodhall, the Jersey "blasphemer," just in time to hold up the printing of last week's *Freethinker* while the note was being written. So ends the most ridiculous conviction for blasphemy that we have come across. Jersey is a very small place, and it must certainly contain some of the most laughable specimens of humanity in the British Isles. But it is a little more than a matter for laughter when some fussy narrow-minded official gets hold of a picture that shocks his religious feelings, a photograph not taken by the man who is charged with the offence of blasphemy, and the said official then runs round the office seeing whether others are shocked also—almost inviting them to be shocked. There was no complaint that the general public had received offence, and so might cause a breach of the peace. It was one official who having accidentally got hold of the postcard solicited others to be shocked, and then a nice little meeting of the other easily shocked officials decided to make the Jersey legal world a laughing stock. And they must have met with considerable success. Intolerance and foolishness are close companions.

But while the Jersey case may be dismissed with a laugh, it has a more serious aspect. We are at war, and among the evils that war always brings is a fall of social and political life to a lower level, even though that fall may be to some extent inevitable. Things are done, laws

are passed that admittedly dare not be done in times of peace. The right of public meeting, the liberty of the press, the rights of the individual, all may be attacked during war-time, and all are so attacked. The blasphemy laws are here, and there are enough bigots in high places, from the Cabinet downward, and enough of them in the House of Commons itself, to utilize these laws and to apply them in a wider sense than they have been applied in recent years. As we have said more than once, the choice before the people was not, last September, the choice between war and peace, had it been that, there are few would have chosen war. The choice was between war and something worse, and we may if we are not alive to what is happening, and the possibilities of what may happen, find that we are getting the war with that something worse. The Blasphemy Laws should be repealed. Even the bigots of Jersey may be used to good purpose, if people are awakened to that danger.

The *Freethinker* for 1939, strongly bound in cloth, gilt-lettered, and with title page, will be ready very shortly. Would those who require the volume kindly send their order without delay? There will be extra cost entailed this year in rebinding this volume owing to increased prices of paper, etc., but the price will remain as usual, i.e., 17s. 6d., plus 1s. postage. Orders will be executed in rotation, and it will not, in the circumstances, be possible to bind further volumes for those who do not place their orders now.

Subscriptions to the N.S.S. for 1940 are now due, and a good number have already come to hand. There are, of course, members with every good intention of sending the subscription along to-morrow, and this is just a kindly reminder that there are a lot of to-morrows in a year, and one selected as soon as possible after this notice would be gratefully appreciated.

We have given our opinion as to the invasion of Finland by Russia, and as we owe no allegiance to any political party, and are not hide bound by any party control or economic theory, we feel that this opinion remains justified. But it is well to recognize that as between Nazism and Russia, the latter is infinitely preferable. Russia has not made the torture of men and women and children a policy and a pastime for the amusement of a section of its people who have undergone a training in obscene brutality. But Germany remains religious, while the Russian Government is formally Atheistic. And the Russian Government has never set itself to the complete extermination of people as the Germans are doing with the inhabitants of Poland. Those who are fortunate enough to escape into Russia must obey the Russian rule, but it permits them to live as do the Russians themselves, and that is something to be remembered.

The *Church Times* is our authority for the statement that in the Polish slave gangs that are being created by Hitler, Goering and Co., the boys and girls are being sterilized. We do not know what truth there is in this, but it is not a new practice with German Fascists, and it is the kind of beastly brutality common with Nazi leaders. Russia must appear to the Poles as very heaven. The really strange thing is that those who have been loudest in their denunciation of this war, not of all war, are those who are completely silent concerning these German brutalities in Poland. They do tell us of the cruel dictatorship that existed in Poland before the Germans marched in, and the miserable state of the poor in Poland is undeniable, but why the silence concerning the sufferings of these same people since the annexation?

We are asked to announce that Freethought meetings will be held every Sunday at 3 o'clock in the Kit-Kat Café, opposite the King's Theatre, Albert Road, Southsea. The presence of all interested is desired. Further information may be obtained from Mr. A. W. Scott, 35 Lynn Road, Portsmouth.

As announced last week Professor Levy will lecture for the Manchester Branch at the Market Street Picture House on Sunday, February 4, at 3 p.m. His subject will be "The Eclipse of Western Morality." Doors will be opened at 2.30 p.m. Admission will be free, with Reserved Seats, Sixpence and One Shilling.

On Sunday next, under the auspices of the North London Branch of the N.S.S., at the Cricketers's Arms Hall, Inverness Street, Camden Town, Mr. Archibald Robertson, better known under his pen name of Robert Arch, will speak on "Society and Superstitions." In Mr. Robertson's hand the subject is certain to be interesting, and we hope to hear of a good meeting. Chair will be taken at 7.30.

"The Clergy and the Bible"

IN the issue of the *Freethinker* dated January 14, 1940, the editor (in an article under the above heading) in dealing with the attitude of the clergy towards the Bible wrote: "To the informed and critical mind the Bible is admitted [by the clergy] to be little more than a book of folk-lore with ethical common-places that are common in either fact or teaching to almost all stages of human society." Some of the readers of the *Freethinker* might have been a little doubtful if Mr. Cohen had not gone too far in stating that the clergy are prepared to admit that the Bible is "little more than a book of folk-lore." But confirmation of Mr. Cohen's assertion came under my notice quite recently.

The latest book issued by the "Welsh Book Club" is called *A Biblical Anthology*. It consists of selections from the Welsh Bible. The selection was made by the Rev. E. Tegla Davies, a Methodist Minister, who is a well-known Welsh writer and novelist, as well as a Biblical scholar. Nothing need be said about the selections other than this: that the parts of the Bible which are indicated in Part IV. of *The Bible Handbook*, by references only, and not by quotations, have been carefully ignored. But Mr. Davies wrote a "Preface" to the book, and it is to this preface that I wish to draw attention. Referring to the "Anthology," he writes:—

Herein are a very few of the selections which could be taken from the Bible, which is, itself, a book of selections—selections from the literature of Israel for a period of more than a thousand years. That literature grew in a manner similar to the literatures of other nations, beginning with a story or song which would be narrated or sung on the march or in camp, or in the solitude of the desert to kill time whilst watching the flocks, and were transmitted orally from one generation to another long before there was any idea of putting them on record. And it developed in its turn to the more complex forms of literature which are common to the different countries.

So overboard, in a couple of sentences, goes the much-vaunted "uniqueness" of Biblical literature! Mr. Davies proceeds:—

Demi-gods, appearing through the mists of the past, are the characters in the earliest stories and romances. Such was Noah, like Bran Fendigaid [Bran the Blessed] or Llyr [Lear]. With the lapse of ages the story gathers round men who have trod the earth, such as Moses, men like St. David, who gave direction or trend to their epoch, but over whom the moss of romance has grown. The earliest songs are old war songs, such as the song of Deborah and Barak, and they show the signs of very low civilization and ideas. These were their *Gododdin* [early Welsh Poems], with the difference that one sings of victory and the other mourns a defeat. Wandering

tribes could not be expected to write anything. That came when the tribes had become united into a nation, and had settled in a certain country. In the time of David Court Chronicles began to be kept—the foundation of some of the historical books of the Old Testament. An opportunity also occurred to write the old traditions of the nation concerning her giants and patriarchs, and the bravery and valour of the days of yore. After the days of David came Solomon and his oppression, and Rehoboam and his still heavier oppression. The North, under Jeroboam the Ephraimite, revolted, and two kingdoms instead of one came into being, and the national traditions developed in each of them on different lines. We get two written traditions concerning the Creation, the Deluge, and the chief incidents which are recorded in the "Pentateuch," and *The Book of Judges*, like the two traditions we have [in Wales] regarding Arthur's Cave, one from the North and the other from the South. This difference can be seen even in the *Book of Psalms* (compare Psalm 14 with Psalm 53), as different forms of the same hymn can be found in the hymn books of the different denominations in Wales. And these two traditions united together, added unto, and edited, comprise the books mentioned.

There you have it: none of the earlier historical (?) books of the Old Testament was written for hundreds of years after the alleged events recorded therein happened. And, apparently, the Biblical narratives of the Creation, the Deluge, etc., deserve as much credence as the Arthurian legends—and no more. The above quotations contain some frank admissions. But more follow. Says Mr. Davies:—

Some special characteristics belong to the literature of Israel. Nobody wrote a book for the sake of writing a book. The idea of "pure literature" had not dawned on anybody. It is a circumstantial literature, that is, some special event in the history of the nation awakens the *littérateur*, or the poet, or the dramatist, or the hymnist, and moves him to endeavour to find an explanation of it, and to express his vision concerning it, or to write about it as an inspiration for the future. . . . It is also a preaching literature. The author almost invariably has some religious message to declare, and a vision to explain it. Whether it is a story, a song, or a fragment of history he has in hand, he writes with a religious object in view, and he gives to it his own colour, to attain that object—even to historical events. This can be seen by comparing the use different authors make of the same events. And it is not too much for them even to change the event itself to serve their purpose, because the idea of history as a science had not been born.

That was the way they wrote history "down in Judee"! Having started on the reckless downward path the author must have thought that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, because he goes on to give instances of this preacher's kind of literature. He says:—

That is the standpoint of the *Book of Ruth*: it was written in favour of internationalism, arguing that the blood of David, the great hero, was not absolutely pure—that his great grand-mother was not a Jewess. On the other hand, *Esther* and *Daniel* are intensely nationalistic. *Daniel* made use of the traditions about the Captivity to intensify the national spirit in face of a later enemy, when Greece was the oppressor, and he adopted a style of writing consistent with a time of oppression—pretending that he was living in an earlier period, and prophesying about the period in which he lives. A proof of this is that he is not sure of the history of the period he asserts that he lived in, whilst he is sure of the history of the period he claims to be prophesying about.

So much for the Old Testament. Mr. Davies deals much more gingerly with the New Testament. But he admits that:—

Short writings containing Sayings or Parables or Acts of the Lord Jesus for the use of young preachers who were not amongst the first twelve, or for the preparation of converts for full membership, or a letter as a spark from the anvil to a young Church to comfort it, to reprove it, to enlighten it, or to commend it, such is the bulk of the earliest writings of the New Testament. Bit by bit these fragmentary writings were collected together to be made the basis of larger works. One of the earliest examples of this is the work of "Mark." Later, Mark, and similar collections, are utilized in larger collections by Luke and "Matthew." . . . It was a man seeking to console Churches who were in the furnace of persecution that wrote the *Book of Revelation*, and that in secret figures understood only by the elect.

What about Divine Revelation? On this the author is silent. All he says is:—

The final proof of the spiritual and literary value of the Bible is not any theory of ours about it, but that it has consistently inspired humanity to strive after a higher world ever since it came into its hands, and that its impress is deeper on the literatures of the different countries than that of any other book that has ever existed.

It has often been said that the Highlands of Scotland, Cornwall, and Wales are the strongholds of Evangelical Orthodoxy. Well, if many more pronouncements on the lines of the Preface to this book are published, Wales will have to be counted with the lost.

THOS. OWEN

Our Pious Publications

IN glancing over the rack of magazines and periodicals in our principal free library, I have often been struck by the great number of those devoted to religion. Every brand of superstition that gives a printed exposition of its absurdities, whether weekly, monthly, or quarterly, is here afforded "a local habitation" and a cardboard coat. Though other interests and activities are mostly content with one or two organs of publicity, those dealing with religion might easily be reckoned at a score or more. The cause of this preponderance may perhaps be found in the fact that, while other subjects are pursued with more or less regard for reason and truth, and are therefore necessarily confined within certain limits of expression, religion is hampered by no such restrictions, but enables its votaries, by means of faith, to range at will over a shoreless ocean of credulity. But this liberty of expatiation, like many other kinds of liberty, would appear to be attended by some disadvantages, inasmuch as it has led to many conflicting beliefs concerning certain things which they regard as vitally important. Unfortunately, these differences afford no prospect of ever being settled owing to the awkward fact that the existence of the matters in question is not merely beyond the power of demonstration, but, peradventure, beyond the range of possibility itself. But the faithful are by no means discouraged by such obstacles as the unknowable or the impossible, on the contrary, they are inspired by them, and hold that there is no merit in their faith if they believe only on evidence; the merit they say consists in believing, not only without evidence but in defiance of it.

In order the more distinctly to mark their divergence from each other, they have adopted names more or less significant of the points on which they disagree, such as Roman Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist, Baptist and so on in fantastic variety. And such is their passion for

contrariety, and such the fissile nature of faith, that many of these have been further split up into "persuasions," "connexions," and "brotherhoods." Under such titles they have ranked themselves, each party regarding the other with a bigoted exclusiveness and an animosity which—the trifling and absurd character of the matters in dispute considered—are not a little amusing to the rational outsider. There was a time, however, when the consequences of these mutualities were sufficiently serious. But the spirit which once manifested itself by means of the fagot, the sword and the dungeon, is now reduced to display its activities in the pages of a journal, where, instead of disgust and horror, it merely excites ridicule and contempt.

Among these multifarious products of credulity those devoted to Catholicism bulk largely. As this faith surpassed all the others in the old methods of argument and persuasion—the stake and the rack—so, it is now once again well to the fore in that which has, in deference to modern ideas, superseded them—the method of the pen. Thus we have such publications as *The Universe*, *The Month*, *The Dublin Journal*, *The Tablet*, *The Catholic Times*, etc., each of which is to be regarded simply and solely as an instrument of sacerdotal policy that would cease to exist without the *imprimatur* of the priest. Ample evidence of this is afforded by a perusal of their pages. Every article whether dealing with religion, history, literature, science or politics must contribute its quota in support of the Church—indifference is not tolerated. Thus we meet with panegyrics on saints, popes, and priests, in which the faith—i.e., gullibility—of the Catholic reader is well exercised: Denials or extenuations of some past enormity of Catholic bigotry, in the course of which, the plainest facts of history are distorted or falsified: Attacks on modern science based on the arguments of medieval theologians: Expositions of Catholic doctrine wherein would-be Sorbonists complacently twist ropes of sand to the required toughness, or hobble painfully round questions which Science has long since traversed and dismissed as futile. The political article is a most important feature of every Catholic journal. The faithful must be carefully instructed and guided in what they are to think and do on every emergent question, otherwise, reason and commonsense might easily lead them to act in a way diametrically opposed to the interests of the Church. The general rule of procedure is to condemn, misrepresent or suppress everything that is, or is likely to be, inimical to the schemes and projects of Catholic policy, and to extol and enjoin everything that is favourable. Other considerations simply don't count as being more or less of the devil.

We now come to the other religious publications (lumped together by the Catholic under the comprehensive, if somewhat contemptuous title, "non-Catholic") such as—to take them in order of Anglican priority—*The Church Times*, *The English Churchman*, *The British Weekly*, *The Christian World*, and so on through the descending scale of Christian discord. The religion represented by these is of a paler and more feeble cast of character. It lacks the rigorous intolerance, firm cohesion and impenetrable front which strictly disciplined ignorance and superstition have given to Catholicism. They may be said to exhibit Christianity in its silliest and stupidest form. As evidence of this, I need only refer to the religious articles and sermons constantly appearing in these journals, a perusal of which is sufficient to convince anyone whom a natural disability, or the habit of religious intemperance has not made incapable of perception. The Catholic writer writes within bounds and under the rod. He is not allowed to wander at will giving his

readers the benefit of his own "lights" on religion. Everything is settled for him *there*. When he writes nonsense, it is not his own nonsense, but his Church's authorized and sanctioned by the faith and practice of centuries. With the non-Catholic journals the case is different. In accordance with the divine injunction, "Let your light so shine before men," etc., every "sap" who is under the double delusion that he has great things to say and a great gift for saying them, has full scope in their pages to augment the world's stock of balderdash. Thus we have members of almost every class and calling—parsons, professors, M.Ps., M.Ds., lawyers, journalists and business men—suffering the throes of literary parturition trying to deliver what each feels to be the real-and-as-yet-unappreciated-significance of Christ's message to mankind. The result is a hodge-podge of absurdity enough to turn the stomach of one's sense.

The paradox holds good that among the greatest enemies of Christianity are its advocates. Such is the perversity of religious beliefs that, no matter what a man's ability in other respects may be, as soon as he attempts to expound or defend them, he drops by a fatal necessity into a composite drivel of sophistry and nonsense. It is not my purpose to reproduce any of these "stirrings of the spirit" here, nor is it necessary; the reader has only to turn to other columns of the *Freethinker*, where he will always find a good selection dished up with a piquancy of comment I could not hope to rival.

I have said nothing as yet, beyond mere allusion, of the other periodical proofs of Christian disunion. Most of these belong to the freak phase of Christianity; but in the matter of religion, our Municipality does its duty impartially, and all tastes and fancies are duly catered for. The Latter-Day Saint, the Christian Scientist, the Salvationist, the Spiritualist, the Swedenborgian, each is accommodated with his own particular dope, gratis.

Someone (Cowper, I think), says:—

Variety's the very spice of life,
That gives it all its flavour.

As "life," in the case of most Christians must necessarily include their religion, the observation has an application which the pious poet certainly did not intend; and to which he, of all men, would never have given apothegmatical expression. But, whether intended or not, his remark is as true of religious diversity as of any other kind. It is their differences that have given to the religion of most Christians its greatest zest. Like the Pharisee of old, they have exulted at the thought that "they were not as other men," and their cock-sure self-righteousness has led them into the worst excesses of sectarian hatred and intolerance.

But though there is nowadays a greater variety in religion than ever, it has not the same "flavour" it once had; it lacks the fierce "bite" of bigotry that formerly "spiced" it. This is mainly due to the spread of Rationalist thought which, permeating religion on all sides, has weakened, where it has not destroyed, its essential constituent—superstition. The only variety that may be said to retain anything of its old pungency is that served up by Father O'Faggott of St. Dominic's, but it requires a strong stomach. All the others without exception, from that of the Rev. Sidney Sillitop, of St. Clementina's to that of Pastor Bangtext of Siloam Tabernacle, are as salt that has lost its savour.

The religious vagaries of the writers in these journals, like those of the parson in the pulpit, are carefully shielded from criticism. I have, on one or two occasions, provoked thereto, by some transcendent effort of fatuity on the part of a contributor, ven-

lured a remonstrance couched in the blandest and most innocuous terms that the matter would admit of. It had the same fate as that of the Archbishop of Canterbury's peace-prayers—neither answer nor acknowledgment; and, in the following week's issue, the same writer surpassed himself. It was a case of—to borrow from Pope:—

Destroy his fibs and sophistries in vain,
The creature's at his dirty work again.

I have often wondered how much of what they write the contributors to these journals really believe. The question is, of course, purely speculative, and admits of no positive answer. But much that cannot be demonstrated may be inferred; and where we do not know what is certain, it is always legitimate to consider what is likely. When a man gets so many pounds, shillings and pence for writing balderdash, the writing of balderdash naturally becomes of more importance to him than the writing of good sense, for which, as things are at present constituted, he would probably get nothing. Besides, the work is easy and safe. Religion is the only subject on which one may talk or write nonsense without fear of ridicule or rebuke; and certainly no other subject offers equal scope. When we come to consider these exceptions, and the immunity and emolument attending them, is it too much to suppose that the chief, and perhaps the only, purpose for which these journals exist, is to take advantage of them? It seems to me that weaker presumptions have decided more doubtful questions.

A. YATES

Lourdes

I HAD been holidaying in the French Pyrenees and, with companions, decided to see Lourdes before continuing the journey home. We had but a few hours to see the town as our train for Paris left at ten o'clock. In that short time, however, we saw and understood all that the Catholic faith implied.

Partaking of refreshment at a small "English" café of cosy interior, we made our way through the streets of the town. Rows of shops on either side proffered for sale various knick-knacks: statues of the Virgin, wooden crosses and other impedimenta of Catholic origin. Somebody evidently knew the practical value of the Church.

My interest in churches is on a par with the feeling that is aroused in me when inspecting castle dungeons. I speculated on what the inner precincts of the Basilica would hold, taking into consideration all the eccentricities of ecclesiasticism; but even so was a little surprised. My reaction to the gaudy tapestries, and the people who bowed and scraped, and murmured piously in the pews, was one of mental nausea. The place had a distinctively unhealthy atmosphere about it—rather like that which one sometimes meets in a doctor's surgery when his district is suffering from an attack of some spreading disease. There is a difference; a doctor does in some measure relieve his patients.

We could not stand the strain and escaped into the fresh air; thereupon taking ourselves off to the Grotto.

It was here, the story goes, that Bernadette Soubirous saw the Virgin, dressed in white and wearing a blue scarf, who told her that if a shrine were erected on the spot, the waters of the Grotto would acquire healing properties, and thousands of cripples would come from afar and be cured.

Bernadette told the clergy about it, and then retired into a convent. (It is believed that the lunatic

asylums were full at the time.) A shrine was erected, and now keeps the many sons of God at rest. Thousands of pilgrims certainly do arrive; some of them, poor people of the lower-class, struggle for years to save enough to visit Lourdes—and spend it in a few weeks. Some leave their crutches behind after indulging in the mystic waters—which means added expense when they get home in buying the new pairs.

A mass of candles stands in the centre of the cave and numerous crutches hang from the roof and around the sides. The most noticeable adjunct of the Grotto, however, is the alarming percentage of unhealthy humanity. Sizing them up, I came to the conclusion that fifty per cent of them could have cured themselves without any expense whatsoever, by the simple expedient of taking natural exercise.

That night we stood and watched a tremendous procession of "Believers."

Carrying shaded candles, and chanting in unison, they trooped piously before the Basilica.

"Mass hysteria," I said.

A certain reverend English gentleman who chanced to be there, objected to my words, and an argument ensued. I have since sent him a copy of the *Freethinker*.

FRANK WHITEHOUSE

Hindu Orthodoxy and Divine Revelation

In her book, *Slaves of the Gods*, re-issued in "Florin Books," 1933, Katherine Mayo, author of *Mother India*, repeatedly points out that the Hindu Religion is responsible for the social evils and the suffering human and animal, twelve instances of which she brings forward vividly and on apparently unshakeable evidence. Speaking of British India, she writes in her preface:—

To the influence or dictates of the current orthodox Hindu creed are directly traceable the most devastating evils that to-day prey upon the Hindu world.

And the Rt. Rev. Henry Whitehead who was we read "for twenty-three years Lord Bishop of the great Indian diocese of Madras," wrote to her, in reference to *Mother India*:—

If I may venture to make one small criticism of your book, it is that though the connexion of the evils you describe with Hindu religious ideas is mentioned, it might be more strongly emphasized. It is this religious sanction that has made the efforts . . . of Indian social reformers so ineffective.

As representing what may be termed, Hindu *Modernism*, Miss Mayo also quotes a passage from "That eminent Hindu, Sir Surendranath Banerjea," who in his book, *A Nation in Making*, declared:—

You cannot think of a social question affecting the Hindu community which is not bound up with religious considerations . . . thus the social reformer in India has to fight against forces believed to be semi-divine in their character, and more or less invulnerable against the commonplace and mundane weapons of expediency and common sense.

Freethinkers will agree that the truth there is in this statement extends far beyond the borders of any one religion. However opinions may differ on this aspect of social reform, the facts dealt with by Miss Mayo prove that Hinduism, with all its intellectuality, has somehow got hold of the wrong sort of religion, and one which from the social standpoint has no redeeming features. But the Bishop, and perhaps Miss Mayo also, hold the belief shared by many, that Christianity, viewed from this standpoint, is the right sort of religion. How then can we account for the fact this has been divinely revealed only to a limited number to begin with, a very small and ignorant portion of the human race?

A God who showed favouritism in this way, and who deliberately withheld revelation from the intelligent Hindu, must surely be held responsible for the social conditions laid down by the revelations which became incorporated in Hinduism. The question narrows itself down as follows.

If God has revealed morality through Christianity, who is responsible for the revelation to Hinduism? It can apparently be answered in one of two ways.

Either we must return to the good old-fashioned belief in the Devil, who not so long ago was believed to be an active personality working for evil, and often successful. Or we can accept the saner view that human ethics have got to be tried and tested by the ideals which humanity works out for itself free from the shackles of supernaturalism.

There is, however, another aspect of the situation and that is racial. The Englishman, even if ecclesiastical, does not carry into action his religious orthodoxy beyond the bounds of—what the Bishop of Madras terms "expediency and common sense." The orthodox Hindu, on the other hand, throws these qualities to the winds in his attitude and his brutality towards women, and bases this on the dictates of religion. He is blind to the proverb, "Quos Deus Vult perdere, prius dementat."

E. MAUD SIMON

Correspondence

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE U.S.S.R.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

SIR,—In your issue of January 21, Mr. William Gallacher, M.P., speaks of "the great achievements" of the Soviet Union. If Mr. Gallacher means to say that the standard of economic life of the mass of the Russian people has been much improved, he is certainly wrong.

The best test of the well-being of any people is the average length of life. Judged by that standard Russia stands very low. According to page 54 of the current Statistical Yearbook of the League of Nations, the average length of life in Russia is only forty-four years, while in many countries it is over sixty. Unfortunately the figure is twelve years old, but the mere fact that the Soviet Government has issued no more recent statistics is a damning one.

In 1930, G. T. Grinko, Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Commission of the U.S.S.R., published his book, *The Five-Year Plan of the Soviet Union*. On page 37, he says:—

"The area planted to grain in 1927-1928 was 94.8 per cent of the 1913 acreage, and the total grain production in the past few years has fluctuated between 90 and 96 per cent of the average for the five years 1909 to 1913."

All observers agree that bread is the main food of the Russian people. Soviet writers constantly say that their population is growing rapidly. If therefore, the grain crop was less in and about 1928 than it was twenty years before under the Czar, the only way in which the Russians could be even as well fed as under the Czar was by exporting much less to other countries.

So much for the first eleven years of the Soviet regime. What about the last eleven?

In 1933 Maurice Hindus, a born Russian, very friendly to the Soviet regime, wrote as follows:—

"The beginning of the Second Five Year Plan . . . finds Russia face to face with a crucial food problem, a problem more extensive than it has ever been since the days of the famine. The rations of meat and of fat have not been so meagre in a whole decade!" (*The Great Offensive*, p. 20).

In 1937 Trotsky wrote:—

"Notwithstanding Russia's indubitable progress in recent years, preserves, sausage, cheese, to say nothing of pastry and confections, are still completely inaccessible to the fundamental mass of the population. Even in the matter of dairy products things are not favourable. In France and the United States there is approximately one cow for every five people, in Germany one for every six,

in the Soviet Union one for every eight. But when it comes to giving milk, two Soviet cows must be counted approximately as one. Only in the production of grain-bearing grasses, especially rye, and also in potatoes, does the Soviet Union, computing by population, considerably surpass the majority of European countries and the United States. But rye bread and potatoes as the predominant food of the population—that is the classic symbol of poverty." (*The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 25).

I have read a great mass of literature about Soviet Russia, and the above testimony coincides with that of almost every born Russian, who knows the language and the country. The glowing tributes come from globe trotters, who do not know a word of Russian, and depend entirely on what the guide tells them. Some years ago I heard the late Michael Farberman, a Soviet agent, publicly rebuke an enthusiastic lady who declared that the abundance of food in Russia was "positively startling." What Lourdes was in the nineteenth century, Moscow is in the twentieth. Many people have the happy gift of seeing miracles which they expect to see.

R. B. KERR

BUDDHISM AND FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—Mr. Du Cann, in his excellent article on Buddhism, says at the close of the penultimate paragraph, "I have not yet heard of a Buddhist Freethinker." May I say that, for many years now, I have been quite definitely, at least, a *semi-Buddhist* Freethinker, and I think I could point to at least one prominent and active member of the R.P.A. and worker for Freethought who could say the same.

If one exclude, not only from Buddhism, but also from Quakerism, the elements of magic and the assumptions with regard to some other world than this one, and of continued existence after physical death, there is still left in each of these faiths a valuable body of doctrine, precept and principle not found elsewhere, by which it is highly profitable to endeavour to steer one's way among the rocks and shoals of *this* life. Both these systems contain philosophical conceptions and the resultant principles of life, conduct and duty that are in accord with the most penetrating analysis of human character and motive, and that can meet every wind of criticism unflinchingly.

R. H.

BIBLE ORIGINS

SIR,—I can assure the Rev. Mr. Scrutton that, while he says that he is unable to decide whether I am a lady or a lord (in spite of the fact that he noticed my name in "Sugar Plums") I would never have taken his article as emanating from anybody but "an ordinary parish parson." He should have cut a lot of the cackle and got on with the job. As it is, there seems very little indeed to reply to—even though he hastily assures us that he does not wish to be drawn into any further correspondence. Mr. Scrutton objects to my "rhetoric"—that is, I have no right to say that the manuscripts of the New Testament are in a state of *hopeless* confusion; confusion, yes, but not *hopeless*. But if, after carefully reading Sir F. Kenyon's work, that is the conclusion I come to, why should I not say so? Similarly, I have no right to say that most Biblical critics show a *touching* faith in the Hebrew Old Testament. But again why not, if that is what many years study of the problem show me is the case?

Then in reply to my question as to whether there is any evidence that there was a Hebrew Bible before about 100 A.D., Mr. Scrutton says there was the Samaritan *Pentateuch* "about 432 B.C." But when I say *Bible*, I mean *Bible*. I distinctly admitted the existence of some manuscripts; the question is—were these manuscripts written in the Hebrew of our *modern* Hebrew Bible, that is, was the Hebrew exactly the same in the "Old Hebrew," as it is in the Massoretic Hebrew? If not, why not? If yes, where is the proof? In any case, there is great controversy with regard to the Samaritan text, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica's* authority on this point is actually

only the authority of the author of the article. I claim the right, on evidence, to challenge even the *E.B.'s* authorities. For the rest, I see nothing in Mr. Scrutton's article to bother about.

H. CUTNER

FOOD AND HEALTH

SIR,—Is it possible for Mr. George Wallace to give us some further details of the "Hydro Carbonates" mentioned in his "Health" article in this week's issue? (source of the term, structural justification, etc.).

"CHEMIST"

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, W. B. Curry, M.A., B.Sc.—"Some Aspects of the Population Problem."

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