

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

VOL. LX.—No. 52

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1940

PRICE THREEPENCE

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Does it Matter?—The Editor</i> - - - - -	709
<i>The Genius of "George Eliot"—Mimnermus</i> - - - - -	770
<i>Thin Gruel—T. H. Elstob</i> - - - - -	771
<i>Idealism—Geo. B. Lissenden</i> - - - - -	772
<i>An Appeal for Mental Liberty—T. F. Palmer</i> - - - - -	776
<i>Critics—George Wallace</i> - - - - -	777
<i>Fear, Ignorance, Godism and War—Athoso Zenoo</i> - - - - -	778
<i>Writing Worth Reading—S.H.</i> - - - - -	779

Views and Opinions

Does it Matter?

BRADLAUGH, it is well known, had not been for long a Member of the House of Commons before he won at least the admiration, and in many cases the confidence, of his religious fellow members. It is also reported that one of his Christian opponents said to him in the lobby, "Good God, Bradlaugh, what does it matter whether there is a God or not?" Presumably there was in the speaker's mind the idea that everything for which Bradlaugh was fighting could be obtained without entering into the question of whether "God" was a myth or an actuality to be reckoned with. From one point of view that might be the case. Land Reform, housing reform, protection of the working-classes, political equality at home and abroad, etc., might be achieved without bothering whether God existed or not. At least one might concede as much on purely theoretical grounds. But as all genuine and intelligent reformers realize sooner or later, what is correct as a mere theory is not always correct in actual practice. For belief in the supernatural is the foundation of all religion and in the State religion soon becomes a very powerful interest in itself, and a very real bulwark protecting all sorts of other vested interests. So much so that the reformer who has the real interests of the people at heart, and thinks more of them than he does of his own personal interests—his career or profession or general standing—sooner or later "finds himself up against it."

Bradlaugh was not, I believe, by natural inclination one who had a great liking for philosophical disputes. His mind was more of the realistic, political, and so-called practical type. But he did realize that whenever reform touched the real depth of things, there was established religion to be reckoned with. Of course, had Bradlaugh been an ordinary politician he would have decided that his career might be wrecked by opposition to religion. Being what he was, he, most probably, never even counted the cost, but, with that blindness that is characteristic of men of high principle, he just went straight on, and the more the ecclesiastical watch-dogs of vested interests snarled and growled and roared, the more determined he became to persevere in his purpose. Hence the surprise of at least one of his religious fellow members. That member believed in the truth of religion, of course, but, practically, this meant that religion was a thing that no shrewd politician, with an eye to his "career," would be foolish enough to oppose.

Does God Matter?

Yet there was, quite unconsciously I believe, an important truth embodied in that "Good God, does it matter whether there is a God or not?" for while so long as one thinks only of getting through life with the minimum of discomfort, and duly and daily worships at the shrine of that British deity, the God of "getting on," it does not matter whether God exists or not, any more than when one refers to the greatness and graciousness of King George the Sixth. It does not matter to the value of the proverbial brass button whether God is great or gracious; there is an important sense in which he has ceased to matter. This consideration does not of necessity affect the question of the existence of God. He, she, or it, may exist; but unless we are to throw overboard all our science and all our culture, whether we believe in God or not does not matter.

Consider the situation. The belief in universal causation is generally accepted. The whole of science is consciously based on that conception, and we admit it in all our actions and in all our calculations. We are conducting the war in a way that we should conduct it even if we had all given up belief in God. Formally, there are a large number of people, the vast majority, who still openly profess their belief in God. But in practice they act as they would act were they to make an open profession of real Atheism. They say we must have more guns, more planes, more ships and more determination to win the war. The Germans, the Italians, every nation involved in the war say exactly the same. But in all this they make no real allowance for any act of God. And, if they did, it would in terms of modern science make no real difference. Guns, aeroplanes, ships, and all the paraphernalia of modern war, including the feeding and clothing of men, and the appeals to love of liberty, love of native country, devotion to certain ideals of freedom, would still be made whether we believed in God or not. Whatever religious differences exist between Russia, Germany, Turkey, and the British Empire simply do not count. Of course it may be said, with that onesidedness of view that is characteristic of religious argumentation, that the religious appeal has an effect with multitudes that a non-religious appeal would not have, and with that I agree. It is as true as it is that children were frightened into obedience by believing that the devil would have them if they disobeyed parental orders. But the devil is dead and children are brought up in much the same manner. All of this means that we are thrown back on human motive, and the operative motive here is anything in which people believe provided that belief does not run counter to known operative facts. Faith in an amulet protecting one from danger may make one more confident—so long as one believes in the amulet. But once the amulet is recognized for what it is, all its power is gone. And in this understanding of human motive, be it noted, we are moving along the lines of universal causation.

The resounding logic of all this is that we have reached a stage in mental development when belief in God really does not matter. Water will run down hill; chemical combinations will act as they have always acted; ships will still float and aeroplanes will still soar; the human mind will have its actions and

reactions; everything, in short, will go on whether we believe in God or not. There is no discrimination, and no deterioration, so far as anyone has been able to trace, between those who believe in God and those who do not.

God does not matter. If there is a God things will continue. Our concern is not really whether things are as they are because God is what he is, but in knowing what things are, how they act, and in framing our conduct in accordance with that knowledge. With that unnamed Member of Parliament we may say "Good God, does it matter whether there is a God or not?" unless we hold the thesis that God exists only so long as we believe in his existence. And anyone who holds that theory will find that he has the whole of the science of anthropology to back him.

* * *

Does Jesus Christ Matter?

There is another aspect of the same question. Everyone knows how much time has been devoted to the question of whether Jesus Christ ever lived, and also what exactly did he teach. The first question has been answered by what has already been said. If we accept universal causation, and above all, if we estimate the meaning of what happened centuries ago by what we know of nature and human nature to-day (and there is no other sane way of dealing with history) then the reply as to whether some two thousand years ago a god became incarnate in a man, and this incarnate god finished up by being killed and buried, to rise again from the dead and to float up to heaven in the presence of his followers, then we can say with absolute certainty that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament had no more real existence than did Bacchus, or Horus, or Dionysius, or Jack the Giant Killer.

There is then left the question, What did Jesus say? And the answer to that is the same as one may give to whether God exists or not—"Good God, does it matter what Jesus said, whether he said what he is said to have said or something entirely different?" The intrinsic value of a statement does not—other things equal—depend upon who said it, but upon the nature of the statement itself. Someone must have first grasped the fact that fire could be created by artificial means—surely the greatest discovery made by man. But we do not know who it was, and we trouble very little about our ignorance in that direction. And if anyone laid down the proposition that unless we believed that the making of fire was first discovered by a particular person at a particular place and on a particular date we had no right to create or use fire, he would be looked upon as a lunatic. We should be told that while it would be very interesting to know who it was that found out that rubbing two sticks together brought about fire (if that was the way it happened) it makes not the slightest difference to the utility of fire itself.

Now I am not concerned at present with what exactly it was that Jesus taught, or what exactly he meant us to understand by what he said, or whether he ever lived or was one of those fabulous creatures that appear in human annals, and whom we know are figments of the imagination. Neither am I going to challenge the value of any of the teachings attributed to Jesus Christ. More, I am willing to grant—for the moment—that the teachings of Jesus are so valuable, so indispensable that society would fall to pieces if they were completely ignored. All this may be taken for granted. And after taking it for granted I then ask "What does Jesus matter?" Does it matter whether Jesus Christ lived or not, and does it matter whether when we put his alleged teachings into practice whether Jesus is the name of a man, or a myth?

The answer is clearly, No. A teaching once given must stand by itself, whether that teaching be concerned with morals or the mending of boots, or the cleansing of a city's sewers. If "love thy neighbour as thyself" be a good and wholesome teaching it must be good and wholesome teaching whether it was first said by Jesus, or by someone else. If Natural Selection be an adequate explanation of organic evolution it is not adequate because some one discovers in the year 3000 that Darwin never lived, but that somehow or the other the teaching made its appearance by gradual accretions. How we have acquired knowledge of this or that, how we have developed an appreciation of this or that line of conduct, may be an interest-

ing study, but it does not in the least raise or lower the value of what we do know.

Why then is it so insisted upon that we must believe in Jesus, not merely believe in his existence, but worship him under penalty of losing sight of the good things he taught? The reason for this is quite plain. It is, in fact, indisputable. It is because Jesus Christ is claimed to be not a man but a God. He is the king-pin of a religious system, and at all costs the belief in him must be maintained. The old and original teaching of the Christian Church that men were saved because they believed in Jesus the God, and that mere morality would not save them from damnation, was at least religiously respectable. It was foolish but its presentation was, so far, honest. But the modern harping, not on Jesus the God, but on Jesus the teacher of morals is religiously ridiculous and riddled through and through with dishonesty.

As usual with modern Christian defences, we have more or less deliberate double-dealing. The Jesus of the Churches and Christian advocates put before us to-day is the ethical teacher, the hawker of moral platitudes that are, in their essence, as old as civilization. But the figure they substitute, once the ethical commonplaces are swallowed, is the supernatural Christ. Current Christian policy is first cousin to the old swindle of purse-sharpening, in which the poor dupes buy three half-sovereigns for ten shillings, only to find on examination that they are the saddened owners of just three farthings.

So it really does not matter whether there is a God or whether Jesus Christ gave us certain ethical teachings or not. If natural forces act as they do act without the direct action of God, then things will be what they are whether we believe in a God or not. And if the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ are good they remain good independently of whether Jesus Christ is a real or a fictitious character or not. We should much like to see some responsible Christian leader deal with this position. But we are too familiar with the trickery and the dishonesty of Christian leaders—lay or cleric—to expect them to exhibit the degree of honesty necessary for the task.

CHAPMAN COHEN

The Genius of "George Eliot"

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

George Meredith.

To be acclaimed as "Shakespeare's sister"; patronized by royalty; applauded by Freethinkers; and read by millions; is evidence of a striking personality. Yet "George Eliot," to whom all these things happened, has been dubbed a typical Victorian, and fun poked at her portrait. Maybe, these youthful critics fail to realize that the great novelist was ageing when the portrait was painted, and that she was not the only woman to wear that particular head-gear and to display a cameo brooch. There may even be pious malice in these jibes, for the same critics never seem to notice the face fungus of the eminent men of that same era.

Sixty years after "George Eliot's" death, her books are still widely read, and a fresh full-length biography has been published. After all is said, her *Adam Bede* is a great novel, and its publication made her famous at a single bound. Nor is this to be wondered at, for in Mrs. Poyser she had created a character which not only amused and interested her contemporaries, but has survived the winnowing fan of generations of readers. The saying of this farmer's wife were on many tongues, and were even quoted in newspaper articles and in Parliament. Here are some samples:—

I'm not one who can see the cat in the dairy and wonder what she's after.

I'm not denying the women are foolish. They're made to match the men.

It was a pity he couldn't be hatched over again and hatched different.

Mary Anne Evans (1819-1880), for that was her real name, was Warwickshire born, as was Shakespeare, and she had a spark of his genius. Her father was a farmer near Coventry; her mother died when she was but seven-teen. Always studious, she learned French, German, Italian, and the classics. Although brought up in a very religious home, she soon displayed scepticism, and finally refused to attend church. Coming to London, she worked at John Chapman's publishing-house in the Strand, and soon began to mix with famous people. Hale White ("Mark Rutherford,") worked at the same place 1852-54, and was favourably impressed. He says:—

She was attractive personally. Her hair was particularly beautiful, and in her grey eyes there was a shifting light, generally soft and tender, but convertible into the keenest black.

He complains that Sir Frederick Burton's portrait (the one that is generally known) lacks the qualities which we find in portraits of the great masters. She numbered Herbert Spencer among her friends and thought at one time that he might marry her. All this time she was working hard, translating Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. This proof of scholarship procured for her the post of assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*, an important publication. She met George Henry Lewes, a wise and witty man-of-letters, and the couple fell in love. Lewes had a wife who had eloped with another man. Divorce at that time was a long, costly and difficult business, very different to what it is to-day. Miss Evans visited Lewes's wife, and finding that she did not intend to return to her husband, took the plunge and went to live with Lewes. The union was an ideal one, and lasted until Lewes's death, a period of about a quarter of a century.

It was Lewes, who was a good critic, who turned her towards the writing of fiction. It was her true calling, and her genius raised her to a position among the foremost novelists. So great was her vogue that she was lionized, although known to be "living in sin." Everybody wanted to know her. The then Princess Royal, who was herself a Freethinker, and had befriended Strauss when he was dismissed from Tübingen, Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, and hosts of well-known people visited her at the house near Regents Park. The old Queen, Victoria, had to be content to read George Eliot's novels, for the great novelist was never received at Court. Royalty, it was thought, might "live in sin," with impunity, but not ordinary folk.

"George Eliot" was a born sceptic. "I admit discussion," she said, "upon every matter except dinners and debts. I hold that the first must be eaten and the second must be paid. There are my only prejudices." Her philosophic attitude may be judged by the fact that she coined the word "meliorism" to indicate her midway position between optimism and pessimism. George Eliot took many of her characters from real life, and it is interesting to recall that she portrayed Gerald Massey in her novel, *Felix Holt the Radical*. It was a superb tribute from one pioneer to another, especially as the world looked askance at them both. She was born in the Victorian era, but she was anything but a Victorian.

The earlier novels were largely reminiscent, but in *Romola* she turned to the religious conflicts of the past, and challenged Charles Reade's *Cloister and the Hearth*. In *Daniel Deronda* she dealt with heredity and the social difficulties of the English Jew. They are admirable, but lack the spontaneous character of the Warwickshire novels, which were a part of herself. When all is said, she remains the greatest woman novelist of the nineteenth century, and her only serious rival in English literature is Jane Austen.

A great woman, "George Eliot," is free from the effusive egoism so common with so many writers. There was something of the Stoic in her fine nature, and she soared above the uneasy vanities of her contemporaries. Indifferent to luxury, fame, and custom, she did her work very bravely. Freethinkers welcome in her a sister, not silenced by the terrors of theology, or limited by the bonds of conventionalism, but capable of pioneer work in life. She must be judged charitably. With all the drawbacks of her essential womanliness, this gifted woman fought the battle for Freedom. It was a warfare not without scars, with rallyings on the stricken field; with its moments of triumph. If her later works exhibit this warfare and this perplexity on too many eloquent

pages, we judge with the forbearance springing from that larger wisdom which tempers justice itself with sympathy. Her first claim on us is, indeed, genius; but Freethinkers will always be keenly interested in the record of a brave woman born of that heroic temperament to which, after life-long recognition of the vanity of vanities, Liberty never waxed old, nor Love failed of its loveliness.

MIMNERMUS

Thin Gruel

THE old doctrinal porridge of the orthodox was a disgusting mess. No matter how unpalatable, it was eagerly swallowed as long as God was believed to be the chef. Some of the lumps were most distasteful, but God had put them there for their soul's good, and they knew by the historic case of Job that God liked nothing better than subjecting the faithful to alarming tests. God would see to it that what looked like an unwholesome morsel was really good for them. So down the lump went with a wry face. Whether the lump proved wholesome was not a matter for the swallower. That was an academic point to be considered by the historian who conducted the post-mortem.

Nowadays we find that those who sit down to a good meal of divine truth in an orthodox restaurant not only turn up their noses at the objectionable portions of the fare, they quickly and unceremoniously refuse to eat them. They say in effect: "That unappetising mess it was that killed my uncle William. I'll have none on't." This is, of course, only a prudent application of scientific method whether they know of it or not. But the religious, if they are sophisticated as well, call this process progressive revelation. That is their name for it. No doubt the Greeks had a word for such intellectual jugglery, too.

In this year of Christian grace when the working of God's particular providence is plainly visible before our eyes, God's dishes served to us are getting most unmercifully criticized. The divine porridge is considered to be almost full of lumps. "Don't swallow the mess," said the unbelievers centuries ago. "We know where there's better fare." "Don't swallow the stuff," say our Christian modernists to-day. "It was grand stuff in its day when mankind was not so fastidious. It was a beautiful porridge; its lumps were just adapted to the state of his stomach. Very fine lumps indeed they were, and on these lumps were men nurtured. They are in fact the source of England's greatness."

We know theologians have rarely been guilty of calling attention to the lumps in the porridge; that, in God's own way, has been left to the unbeliever. This pariah has seen them, and not only refused to eat them, but has called the attention of others to their unwholesomeness. This, of course, was unpardonable. Attention to the lumps should have only been called attention to in God's own time by God's own men. God knows when that would have been. It is folly to believe that things of the spirit can be furthered by the unspiritual. If the unspiritual plunge into spiritual waters it is only right that we, the spiritual, should treat them as God would have treated them. Justice to Freethinkers is not yet cheerfully accorded, so it would appear as if God's dislike of those who treat him with unbecoming neglect and contempt is still not considered to be one of the portions of the divine fare that have to be avoided. In God's plan of Progressive Revelation the hour has not yet come for the admission that the discovery and rejection of the lumps in God porridge was the work of Freethinkers.

I have heard two debates on Christian theology during the past twelve months; in both cases the Christian ministers admitted the bad social record of the Christian Church. In both cases they have rejected the idea of verbal inspiration of the Bible and chosen to play the game of pick and choose and put and take. In both cases they have sniffed at Jehovah and expressed a desire

to clothe themselves (to avoid absolute nudity), in the diaphanous garb of the Sermon on the Mount.

God reveals himself, we are told, in all kinds of ways. It is for man, developing man, to find out which is the up-to-date message and which is the obsolete, out-of-date method. Or put differently, which is the old God and which is the new. The fatal difficulty that modernists are met with, though they try to avoid the meeting, is that developing man faced with a *Thus Saith the Lord* meets with an obstacle which retards that development. Put brutally, man develops, but develops the less quickly because of the revelation of a never-changing God. This is what we can guess would happen; a glance at History will show that this is what did happen. In man's march forward, *Thus Saith the Lord* has been as a weighted chain attached to his ankles.

Slowly and most reluctantly are the spiritual removing the unsavoury lumps from their platters. They find there is but a meagre pittance left after this operation. There is a body of men called the Modern Churchman's Union which claims the liberty of rejecting every distinctive Christian dogma; this means in effect that they have been attracted to this body because they wish to reject them, though the acceptance of them "symbolically" is still generally professed. The creeds which their formulators intended to be accepted literally are therefore thrown overboard. God's Revelation, the Holy Bible, is not God's Word; it contains it. The bits and pieces which are in accord with the ethics of the present day are "of God." They reject the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, that doctrine which claims that the Bishops have magical properties, handed down from ordained bishop to ordained bishop and reaching back to God himself. Those outside the Church often are more spiritual and "truly religious" than those in the Church. The only admission they draw the line at is that those outside of the Church have done all the work to make their existence tolerable, in fact, but for them, their existence would have been impossible. For the spiritual have always had very rough and ready methods when confronted with hostile opinion.

Such people serve up thin gruel. Any virtue the food may possess is not the historic diet of the Christian Churches but has been borrowed from outsiders. It is the purveyors of such food who are those mainly vocal in proclaiming that secularists are flogging a dead horse. When those who proclaim that the Bible *contains* the word of God can get an edition published of the authentic passages, when they issue a Prayer Book without the Athanasian Creed and with a note before the Apostles Creed, that this need not be recited, or if it is believed need only be in "a symbolic sense," then and then only the secularist will feel inclined to sit up and take notice. The fact of the matter is, of course, that bodies like the Modern Churchman's Union, and others akin thereto, have not adherents enough to even attempt any such thing. There are many other things that they would be required to do by the Secularist before the Freethought attack would cease. Even the unobjectionable ingredients in the thin gruel will have to be served up in a vessel, morally, scientifically, and aesthetically unobjectionable. This requirement will prove more difficult than any. Meanwhile the militant attack will go on. The dead steed is sufficiently alive not to be wagged by its tail.

T. H. ELSTON

Idealism

ONE of the preoccupations of the human mind is to cherish an ideal. When we are quite small we want to be an engine-driver, a lamplighter, a soldier or a sailor, or one of the many other things that children imagine themselves to be, and we make known our wants to our immediate associates—especially to our mothers, to whom we are in the habit of opening our hearts and confiding our secrets when we are being bathed and put to bed, so very, very tired. But as the years go by our ideas and our ideals change, and we become less communicative. We tell ourselves at different times that we will do this, or that, or the other—that we will achieve distinction in some walk

of life—and we generally leave it at that. Time has that effect upon most of us: we create vision, but knowing our own short-comings we say little about our aims and objects—except, perhaps, to one who is very near and dear to us, but probably only then under stress of some emotion.

As animals, with the power of speech and the ability to think and to reason, we commence to fashion things out for ourselves at a very early age, and this fashioning takes on different forms, with varying effects, in proportion to the extent that we become "aware"—conscious. As children, our sense of what is right and what is wrong is imparted to us by our parents and those few others with whom we come into contact, but in the process of growing up we move out and about, mix with a far greater number of people, perhaps travel a bit, acquire a little knowledge and develop a new standard of values—or rather, new standards, because these too vary with the passage of time and the onrush of events.

Our awareness—our consciousness—is the mainspring of our conduct, and it makes men or cowards of us all, according to the degree of its development and the hold that it has upon us. If we tell ourselves that our "conscience" is something that is God-given, we shall most likely act in an orthodox way, whereas if we agree that it is a purely social product we shall govern our lives in accordance with the fearlessness with which we face that fact, and the system of ethics which we develop for ourselves as a result of it.

If we are honest with ourselves we have to admit that we invariably do that—we invariably fashion our actions in the light of our understanding of our environment and all that that implies, notwithstanding any ideal that we may have set ourselves. In our public as well as in our private lives we generally do those things which we think will bring us the best results—"best," that is, according to our prevailing standard of values and personal requirements. If this standard is low, and our conscience is elastic and accommodating, we may be guilty of some mean or unworthy act; if, on the contrary, we think neither of self nor public approval but only of what is right and proper in the circumstances, we shall do whatever we do because it is the *ideal* thing to do, and because to do it pleases us more than if we did not do it. Very few, however, have the strength of mind and character to live up to that standard. To most of us the other is the easier and more profitable way—profitable, that is, in the material sense of course.

It is somewhat the same with a people as with a person—"somewhat," mark you, to indicate that it is only a question of degree, and there is no doubt that as individuals our moral standards are lower, to use a convenient descriptive word, when we are in a crowd than when we are on our own—yes, it is somewhat the same with a nation as with one of its members: none lives up to its ideal. This may be "Peace on Earth and Good Will Towards Men," or some other copybook maxim, but in the main men think first of themselves and of others—well, at some more convenient time, if at all. Sundays and holidays are the days for fine sentiments; to-day they have to earn their living. Business is business all the world over, and the business of the nation as of the individual is first and foremost to plan for progress—and progress is not brought about by over-indulgence. . . . "An ideal? Of course we have an ideal! But surely you must understand that first things must come first, and that this is a highly competitive world!"

That is the story which we all tell when it suits our purpose; and if it is true that hell is paved with good intentions then, judging by the contributions which some of us have made to it, the flooring must be a veritable crazy paving, with "ideals" as its base.

But we should cherish our ideals nevertheless—even though we may be fairly certain that they are unattainable. Indeed, we never can attain to our ideal simply because, as someone once said, the nearer you get to it the further it gets away from you—meaning, presumably, that the more we advance and the more our knowledge and understanding grow, the bigger and better becomes our ideal.

It is the lot of mankind to struggle, some for one thing some for another, each according to his appetite, but it does not necessarily follow that those with the best intentions are bound to secure the best results—best that is, from the view-point of humanity as a whole. Far from it—as a look around to-day makes quite clear. But in the final analysis it is the appetite—the “ideal”—that counts.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN

Acid Drops

A reviewer in one of our religious weeklies (should not this be written an “a” instead of an “e”?) says that one of the most “palpable requirements” of to-day is “a supply of really intelligent, competently argued handbooks of Christian apologetics.” The writer is crying for the moon, and he is as likely to get the one as the other. Where is there to-day a competently argued and intelligent discussion, written by Christians in authority, that really meets the criticism which modern science and philosophy bring against Christian beliefs? We do not know of one. The assumed answers given by such men as the present Dean of St. Paul's never come within reasonable distance of meeting the case against religion. The fictitious cases they refute are prepared for those who, under their guidance, are not acquainted with real Freethinking criticism. Public men are afraid to bell the cat, editors of newspapers are afraid to print a real attack on religion; politicians think too much of their “career” to speak plainly; writers of popular science go out of their way to mislead their readers where telling the undisguised truth would endanger their position; and that great organ of much that misleads, the B.B.C., sees that nothing is said that would affect the non-intelligence of a newly-fledged curate. We do not know of any period of Christian history when the defence of Christianity was so saturated with dishonesty as it is to-day. Why does not one of the religious papers summon up enough courage to invite a really informed representative of the “other side” to state in its columns what are the real objections to religion to-day?

The parson, with his dog-collar, adenoidal voice, and cheap theatrical mannerisms is often regarded by folk as one “set apart” for the service of God. The *Church Times* does not desire this to be taken too literally, and it reminds its readers that parsons are “after all, only ordained laymen and though ordination conveys essential graces there is no theological warrant for including among these either sanctity or immediate infallibility.” Dear! dear! What a collection of words. And what do they mean? What are the “essential graces” that a clergyman acquires on and through his ordination. His sanctity is not complete. But what is sanctity? Generally it stands for holiness, pureness of life, saintliness. But these only confuse. Is a parson directly he is ordained, holier than he was, purer in life than he was, more saintlike than he was? If so what a miracle is worked, and how little ordinary folk recognize the change. And what a doubled-barrelled piece of deliberate humbug and fraud this ordination is!

We see that Professor Joad is cited as saying in his latest book that the only way to win the war is to revive “a Liberalism founded on Christian claims and fortified by the additional principle of federation.” That is so like Professor Joad's utterances that we feel we can safely take the citation as a correct representation of his changing and often incoherent mentality. What are Christian claims? Are they the claims of the Church of Rome, of the Church of England, or one other of the numerous claims of Christians. Professor Joad, who seldom holds the same opinion on many subjects for long together, is not likely to waste time on defining Christianity in such a way as will suit Christians. To produce a book on

every subject that comes along may be evidence of industry, but not necessarily of capability. One moment a Pacifist, then in favour of war in a way which shows he had never even grasped the principle that underlies Pacifism, the next moment seeking publicity by running after some fantastic Spiritualistic story, he presents us with variety but not consistency.

Air raids during church services have been the subject of much discussion recently, the congregations not being quite sure whether to put their trust in Jesus or in a safe shelter. The Ministry of Home Security, however, feels that it is one thing to blather about being safe in the arms of Jesus in peace time, and quite another thing when German planes are dropping bombs; so it advises the pious either to go to a shelter, or back to their homes, the holy service notwithstanding. Most devout Christians, as they survey the ruins of the hundreds of churches which ought to have been protected by God Almighty, but weren't, will, we think, agree with the Ministry.

By forty votes to thirty-eight the Stoke-on-Trent City Council have turned down a proposal of a Committee to permit Sunday opening of Cinemas in the City. We note that Councillor H. Hopwood made many excellent points in favour of the Committee's proposal to make an Order for Sunday Opening, after being told by the Town Clerk that “a public meeting would not be necessary.” He stressed the fact that he was particularly concerned with the liberty of the subject, and he considered the Council as a minority ought not to dictate to the majority on such a matter. “If cinemas were opened on Sunday, those who wanted to go could do so; those who wanted to go to Church could still go to Church, and the people who wanted to stay at home could please themselves.”

At this point, the Lord Mayor intervened and said that all members of the Council “had already made up their minds on the matter.” Although several members expressed a desire to speak, they were not allowed to do so. The effrontery of the Lord Mayor (Mr. A. E. Hewitt) will, we trust, be borne in mind. We daresay even that person has read somewhere during the past few weeks that we are engaged at the moment in a war for Liberty and against tyranny. Stifling of discussion is not only an assumption of infallibility—it is a declaration of faith in Hitlerism. Stoke is not exactly a city of beauty—it is evident that many of its citizens still are content with darkness rather than light—but we simply do not believe that the majority of its citizens can hold in anything but contempt the museum-piece they are at present experiencing in the shape of a Lord Mayor.

At the Ruri-decanal Conference held in Leicester, it was reported that the day schools there are meeting during the winter months at 9.30 a.m. instead of 9 a.m., which takes out the major part of the time given to religious teaching. The Archdeacon of Leicester and others had met the Director of Education (Leicester) on the matter. They had met a person “keen about the religious teaching in all schools, and the clergy are always sure of a sympathetic hearing.” All will be well therefore, we can assume, with the daily dose of religion served up to youthful and unsuspecting intellects and paid for, willy-nilly, by Freethinkers and non-Christians who are interested in education, but opposed to clerical plugging.

Still the Church is a business, and we can expect no other from a business interest. When we read that an association of tanners has met and passed a resolution to the effect that “There's nothing like leather” we are not surprised. Still we should be more than surprised if the public hoardings and the walls of school-rooms were covered by the State with this legend, and if the children received the *pros* (but not the *cons*) of this proposition in the schools of the nation. We cannot prevent and have no wish to prevent children being drilled in the virtues of religion by those who wish to do so in their own time

and at their own expense. But we do object to it being at the curtailment of education, for education is vital, indeed, to the future of the nation.

Sybil Lady Eden has been advocating a more efficient and sincere teaching of Christianity in our schools—and compulsorily. For “until man agrees upon the object or purposes of existence how can we expect general and permanent peace?” This agreement even amongst theologians does not exist and yet a selected body of truths not accepted by all the Churches is to become universally agreed upon by compulsorily inflicting them upon youngsters. “The cultivation of a Christ-like character must be the primary object of our children’s education.” Then, in time, we shall become a peaceful nation. For example, we must love our enemies [Hitler] we must judge not [Hitler] and when Hitler asks us to go with him a mile [Czecho-Slovakia] we must go with him twain [Czecho-Slovakia and Poland]. In short we must resist not evil. It is not difficult to see that in this way we shall obtain a peace “which passeth all understanding.” Sybil Lady Eden’s path has been set in pleasant places, and one could hardly have expected her to view the triumph of the Christ-like with such enthusiasm. Probably, however, she, herself, is but a victim of a compulsory system of education forced upon her by well-meaning parents in her early years.

We have often wondered why so many of our admirals are very religious—and one reason at least lies in a recent Admiralty communication to the British Navy. It runs:—

In battleships and cruisers all possible steps should be taken to provide a space set apart for the worship of God. . . . We wish to emphasize the need for observing the instructions for the holding of divine service and prayers.

We learn further that this communication “is issued in the conviction that the present war is a struggle between good and evil, and that in the practice of the Christian religion may be found to-day the same support experienced by our forefathers in establishing in the Royal Navy those ideals of service and sacrifice which we have inherited.” All this is very amusing, especially when we remember that one of the ideals endured by our forefathers in the Royal Navy was almost unlimited flogging, a punishment nearly all the pious Lords of the Admiralty together with their very Christian Admirals fought hard to retain.

Bishop Marshall of Salford recently told his hearers that “England finding herself at war, made the sad and astonishing discovery that a large number of her children are pagans,” which seems to reflect at least on the capabilities of our religious instructors, or it proves that a large number of children are no longer as gullible as they were in the good old days, or that they have at last found out religion as a fraud. At all events, it seems fairly certain now that large numbers of people are, if not exactly “pagan”—whatever is meant by that term—quite indifferent to divine claims. Perhaps the fact that so many terrible disasters have always followed National Days of Prayer will now all the more strengthen their scepticism.

Whatever may be thought of the activities of the late Eddie Guerin both before he became a convict on Devil’s Isle and after his famous escape, when he never seemed to be able to avoid contact with our police, Catholics are rejoiced that he died a full believing Catholic. So are we.

The death sentence has been pronounced on one Daniel Doherty, of County Donegal, for a particularly revolting murder. The murdered girl had been strangled by him, and there were sixteen wounds on her head. In his statement he said, “I saw her yesterday morning when I was leaving the chapel. . . . I went to Confession yesterday morning and received Holy Communion.” It is more than probable therefore that Doherty is now “all right with God,” and that on December 28, the date fixed for his execution, there will be special, if slightly un-

reasonable, joy in Heaven, when this brand plucked from the burning arrives in Paradise, or one of its ante-chambers.

The Bishop of Peterborough has been dedicating a new chapel in Northampton General Hospital, the funds for which came from a private bequest of a Church of England devotee. He seized the opportunity to ask a few questions. “Why is it that in every hospital worthy of the name there is a chapel?” The answer is simple: wherever there is no such chapel (!) the hospital is not worthy of the name. Bishops are qualified by God to speak authoritatively on points like these.

We remember a hullabaloo in Newcastle-on-Tyne over the provision of a place of worship when the present Royal Infirmary was erected. It was discovered that the building was supplied with a neat and compact little Church (Church of England). It was never quite known how it got there: these things never are. But the Non-conformists raised Cain. Why, they asked, was the Church of England singled out for such a privilege? The row got bitter, and the Nonconformists—not inflamed by a very high principle—were *accommodated*, and then the dispute died down. This will serve as an example of how these things happen. All it means is that the shepherds of the flock are very, very vigilant about some things—they call them spiritual things.

The Bishop of Peterborough also asked his audience to remember

the skill of the doctor, the surgeon and the nurse, the scientific research and all the careful, patient inquiry undertaken—all come directly from God Himself, and are undertaken by the guidance of his spirit, and blest continually by his presence.

A most incomplete catalogue! It should have included the disease-germ, the disease-carrying insect, the weakly bodily frame, and the sins of the parents. If these things conceived, created and controlled by God, had not “happened” then the Hospital itself need not have happened. If God had made health infectious instead of disease, the time spent on combating disease could have been more usefully employed in other directions. God acts and man counteracts. God sends pain and man attempts to cure it.

A new book on the way the Nazis are acting and have acted towards the Roman Catholic religion has just been published, and, of course, Roman Catholics are horrified that Hitler should be doing his best to put the Church of Rome out of action in Germany and in the other countries under his heel. They very conveniently forget that what the Divine Fuehrer, as his more immediate followers like to call him, is doing against their religion is exactly what they did towards other religions when it had the power. Heresy was ruthlessly stamped out, heretics, Jews, backsliders, and opponents were burnt at the stake or horribly tortured, or imprisoned in foul dungeons. These are historical facts; and although two blacks do not make a white, it is very interesting to find Catholics squealing when the tables are turned.

It cannot be too strongly or too often pointed out that Nazism will brook no rival any more than Catholicism. Hitler considers himself, no doubt, quite as good a man as the Pope, and with a mission no less divine. He has said himself scores of times that God is with him; and just as Roman Catholicism went out to convert the world by force, if necessary, so does Nazism. The European New Order which Hitler wants to impose on the world with himself as High Priest and with many of his followers as, so to speak, Cardinals, seems very little different from historical Christianity; not of course the kind of washed-out religion which is being preached now, but the real thing of the Dark and Middle Ages. And we have an idea that if Hitler was winning, and was kind to Roman Catholicism, he would find no better friend than the Pope and his all-believing followers.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

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.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen did not return from Glasgow until Thursday, December 19. As this issue of the *Freethinker* had to be finished by the 21st, owing to the Christmas holiday, many things have had to await notice until next week. As it is, and with the delay that occurs normally at this period of the year, many of our readers will be late in getting their copy.

In a special chapter in his *God and the Universe*, Mr. Cohen dealt "faithfully" with the fallacies of Dr. Julian Huxley on the question of religion. That gentleman's views on religion and the historical function of Free-thought grow neither clearer nor more substantial with the passing of the moons, and Mr. John Rowland has done Dr. Huxley a distinct disservice in publishing an account of an interview with him. There is, at the opening of the interview, one clear sentence. Dr. Huxley says, "I am not a Christian and do not believe in God." One was tempted to expect the logical conclusion, "I am an Atheist." What one does get is the following: "I feel that there is religious spirit in many men and women which has to be satisfied in some way." What is a religious spirit apart from belief in religious doctrines, in God, a future life, and that that follows from belief in these things? We do not know, and Dr. Huxley does not tell us. He simply says it must be satisfied merely because some men and women have it. That kind of preachment may hold good of everything if in the absence of explanation and definition it holds good of anything.

Here is another heroic utterance. "Human reason, valuable though it is, has to be checked up against experience. Brute facts must be faced and swallowed." What is reason based on if it is not experience? And how is human reason checked if not by experience? No sensible person has ever suggested that reason does not as often lead to wrong conclusions as to right ones. The only weapon we have to correct error or establish truth is reason. Does Dr. Huxley know of any other? Or could anyone make a more monstrously foolish statement than to say "Early Rationalism . . . was optimistic in thinking that human reason was a more or less infallible instrument." Now we should like to know what "Rationalist," early or late, ever said that reason was infallible? And how does a statement become "more or less" infallible? And all this confusion because Dr. Huxley fights shy of calling himself an Atheist.

Here is one more startling statement that might have come from any parson. "It must be admitted that in the past Free-thought and Rationalist organizations performed work that was primarily destructive." We fancy we know just a little more of Free-thought and Rationalist organizations than does Dr. Huxley, but in case our

(Continued on page 776)

War Damage Fund

We are unable to do more than merely acknowledge the many kindly letters we have received in connexion with the War Damage Fund. Up to date the response has been both prompt and generous, and many have promised to "come again" if necessary. We never had the slightest doubt that *Freethinker* readers would do their share in meeting the necessities of a situation that has been the most trying in the history of the movement. Once again we must satisfy ourselves with a simple "thank you."

	£	s.	d.
Previously received	232	11	4
Dr. A. W. Laing	10	0	0
J. Kilpatrick	10	0	0
R. G. Morton	5	0	0
J. Hart	0	10	0
Mrs. A. Shiel	0	10	0
O. Vallance	0	10	0
Muriel I. Whitefield	0	10	0
Glasgow Executive	0	10	0
H. Orgen	0	10	0
H. B. Flanders	0	3	6
F. Terry	1	1	0
A. W. Davies	1	0	0
C. B. Little	0	7	6
A. H. Devereux	1	1	0
E. Henderson	0	15	0
H. Ormerod	10	0	0
D. Christie	2	0	0
P. O'Dee	0	10	0
C. Rudd	10	0	0
Owd Jack	0	2	6
C. Morley	0	2	6
H. Sylvester	1	1	0
W. T. Newman	0	5	0
S. Berry	0	2	6
W. J. Parnall	1	1	0
Miss A. E. Draper	0	10	0
G. Varley	0	2	6
P. Foster	10	0	0
H. J. V. Templeman	5	0	0
J. L. Harris	0	5	0
A. L. Niven	2	2	0
"Devonshire"	3	0	0
W. Griffiths	3	0	0
Total £314 3 4			

In our issue of the 15th inst., the donation for A. W. and Dorothy Coleman should be £5 5s., not £3, and donation for A. S. Lugg, should be £1 1s. not £1.

We shall be obliged if any who note inaccuracies in the above list, or that any subscriptions have escaped acknowledgment, will be good enough to write without delay. Amendment has been made of amount previously acknowledged last week.

It is generally admitted that the Arabians were the first restorers of literature in Europe, after the extinction which it suffered from the irruption of the barbarous nations and the fall of the Western Empire. About the beginning of the eighth century this enterprising people, in the course of their Asiatic conquests, found manuscripts of the ancient Greek authors, which they carefully preserved; and in that dawn of mental improvement which now began to appear at Bagdad, the gratification which the Arabians received from the perusal of those manuscripts was such that they requested their caliphs to procure from the Constantinopolitan Emperors the works of the best Greek writers. These they translated into Arabic; but the authors who chiefly engaged their attention were those who treated of mathematical, metaphysical, and physical knowledge. The Arabians continued to extend their conquests and to communicate their knowledge to some of the European nations, which at that time were involved in the greatest ignorance.

Tytler, "Universal History."

acquaintance with them is faulty we should really be obliged to know of any such organization, or any leader in such movements that ever was or aimed at being primarily destructive. That remark of Dr. Huxley is one of the cheapest, the stalest, and most wholly untruthful of Christian Evidence slanders. We quite appreciate the fact that Dr. Huxley is in the position of many other public men in this country, who where religion is concerned lets "I dare not wait upon I would," but why not remain silent? Or why not take the bull by the horns and say boldly, I am not strong enough to brave public opinion to the end, and so will decline to say what I believe where religion is concerned until men and women are sufficiently civilized to permit freedom and honesty of expression?

Mr. Rowland closes his remarks by saying that Dr. Huxley had "incidentally given utterance to several ideas which should prove most useful for the Rationalist movement in its future progress." Oh, artful, sarcastic Mr. Rowland! For ideas may be useful in the warning they give to avoid as well as advising what we are to follow. Mr. Rowland evidently has a strain of sarcasm in his make-up.

In the same number of the *Literary Guide*, which well maintains its standard under the stress of war, we find it recorded that Lord Snell has said "Nobody has ever asked me if I am an Atheist, Agnostic, Materialist or a Mystic. I should not tell." The conclusion is not very courageous, but if Lord Snell has never been asked during his long life whether he was an Agnostic, Atheist, Materialist or Mystic, he has had a most remarkable want of experience. What he has not experienced is far more wonderful than anything that has happened to him. We suggest a book: Wonderful things that have not happened to me.

Here is a passage from that gigantic investigation of the rise and fall of civilizations, *A Study of History*, by Arnold Toynbee. The passage deals with the nemesis of militarism:—

The militarist is so confident of his own ability to look after himself in that social—or anti-social—system in which all disputes are settled *manu militari*, and not by process of law or conciliation, that he throws his sword into the scales when the issue between a regime of violence and a regime of organized peace is trembling in the balance. The sword's weight duly tips the balance in favour of the old barbaric dispensation; and the militarist, exultant at having once more made his will prevail, now points to the latest triumph as a final proof that the sword is omnipotent. In the next chapter of the story, however, it turns out that he has failed to prove his thesis *ad hominem* in the particular case which exclusively interests him; for the next event is his own overthrow by a stronger militarist than himself. His success in prolonging the militarist regime has simply insured that he himself shall learn at last what it feels like to have one's throat cut. We may think of the Aztecs and the Incas, each remorselessly warring down their weaker neighbours in their own respective worlds, until they are overtaken by Spanish *conquistadores* who fall upon them from another world and strike them down with weapons for which they are no match. It is equally illuminating, and considerably more profitable, to think of ourselves.

The *Tablet* says we are "pretty angry" over a reference by one of its writers who revived the "watch-story," and this time fixed it on Colonel Ingersoll. We can assure the *Tablet* that we were neither angry over the story, nor surprised at its resurrection. Nor were we even amused. We recorded it simply as illustrating the manner in which Christian writers hang on to a very old and particularly stupid lie. Our interest in noting its appearance in the pages of so very religious a journal as the *Tablet* was purely psychological. It helps the informed student of survivals to realize how little Christianity varies in its essence from generation to generation. The religious leopard does not change its spots. They appear and reappear in different colours, that is all.

An Appeal for Mental Liberty

WITH the fourth and final volume of his scholarly and discriminating *Development of Religious Toleration in England*, Professor W. K. Jordan has completed an onerous task. This work (Unwin, 1940, 21s.), in its entirety, covers the important period from the Reformation to the Restoration in 1660, and at this latter date, Dr. Jordan considers that, despite the pronounced clerical reaction in the opening years of Charles the Second's reign, the great principle of religious liberty had been practically conceded by all enlightened men.

The many contributors towards the triumph of a more tolerant spirit surveyed in this concluding volume include the Latitudinarians, Moderates, Cambridge Platonists, Rationalists and Sceptics, such as Cowley and Milton; Erastians such as Harrington of *Occana* fame and the mighty Hobbes of Malmesbury, and the by-no-means inconsequential rank and file whose innumerable pamphlets exercised a powerful influence in liberalizing public opinion. Jeremy Taylor and other broad Churchmen also helped the good cause, while even Romanists themselves at long last realized the loathsome character of religious persecution. They were leniently treated by Cromwell, although they had almost unanimously supported the Crown in the Civil War. And now Dr. Jordan records: "The Catholics, like Englishmen at large, had learned much of humiliation from the heavy hand of repression and from the harsh tuition of war."

Despite all freedom's gains in the past, our author, like all other humanists, deploras the menace to intellectual liberty in the world to-day. "Liberty stands," he says, "as the symbol of a momentous cultural gain—as the symbol for ideals of freedom, justice and decency of human relationships, which, as these lines are written, appear to be under formidable and ruthless attack."

Not only are the better known champions of theological toleration considered in detail, but Dr. Jordan recalls to remembrance many of the humbler reformers of the Cromwellian era. In this heroic group of human benefactors was Henry Robinson. A prosperous city merchant who had travelled extensively on the Continent, Robinson's commercial experiences made him familiar with many men and modes of thought with which the immense majority of his fellow countrymen were unacquainted. Also, his interest in and advocacy of intellectual liberty, were purely abstract. He himself, bold as his contentions were, had suffered no repression. Had there been any danger of this, he declares: "I am not such a stranger to foreign countries, both of several climates and professions, that I can find the way thither again to purchase my enlargement."

Robinson's first publications were pamphlets dealing with social and economic themes, and it was not until the Presbyterian divines betrayed their persecuting intentions that he entered the arena in defence of religious liberty. Then, for five years, he published in succession a shoal of pamphlets vindicating independent opinion.

Now that the Civil War was over, England might enter, he said, into a closer and more remunerative relationship with foreign States if sectarian tranquility were established. But all progress would be postponed and possibly prevented "if England were to be torn by chronic religious conflict and wracked by persecution." Firmly convinced of this danger, Robinson began his sustained onslaught on every aspect of sectarian intolerance. A sound and practical reformer, he engaged Continental composers and founded his own private printing press in London. As the Independents favoured religious freedom he allied himself with them, although his speculative opinions were far in advance of theirs. For while always writing as a Christian Theist, he was apparently a genuine Rationalist.

Every citizen, he contended, possesses the native birth-right of intellectual liberty. Dr. Jordan thus epitomizes Robinson's argument: "Every sane man realizes that

faith cannot be forced, though the clergy have erected and maintained a fiction upon which their impious persecution has been based. This fiction, predicted upon the necessity for the maintenance of Christian unity has been warped to mean a formal and dead uniformity. The whole fabric of uniformity and the organization of institutional religion has been nothing more than an effort to support the interests of special privileged groups at the hideous price of the suppression of human and spiritual liberties." This uniformity could only be maintained in the Dark Ages by pitiless sacrifices, while in a more enlightened period, with its many more modern commitments, religious liberty becomes imperative. Frankly, intolerance and persecution are "brutish survivals of a mean and shameful past."

In the Middle Ages the clericals prostituted civil life to serve their own avaricious cravings. "A yoke was solidly riveted on the conscience of mankind by the perpetuation of a fraudulent fiction that the magistrate must intervene in religious causes at the bequest of the church." This "palpable lie, however, the Presbyterians were grimly seeking to perpetuate anew in England."

Nor were the community to tamely submit to the cult imposed by the secular ruler. For in England life itself would have been extinguished had "the sword of persecution followed the successive shifts of its rulers in religion." Moreover, the Papists of several nationalities and the Anabaptists and Brownites from the Low Countries who resided here for commercial reasons, were an even greater menace to a State imposed creed than dissenting members of our own population, inasmuch that they possessed ampler opportunities for disseminating their unorthodox opinions.

After their overthrow of a dominant and dictatorial Anglican Church, the Presbyterians' cherished ambition was the erection of a persecuting dictatorship of their own. But the thoughtful citizen, Robinson urged, should be free to fashion his own faith. Pious fanaticism forges coercive weapons, so as to validate its claims to the sole possession of truth. Robinson sternly characterized this procedure as "at best a fanatical delusion, at worst a damnable fraud."

Truth itself, Robinson stated, is relative. No one possesses all the verities that Nature reveals. Yet, the practical faith "by which men have been saved in all nations and in all ages, are very simple and universally entertained." But Papists and Protestants alike hate and persecute one another to the very death over such mysterious matters as the eucharist and other rituals of no real "spiritual" importance.

Unless we possess mental freedom we cannot enlarge our acquaintance with truth. Robinson asserted that every church which denies religious liberty is undeserving of the Christian name. During the opening sessions of the Westminster Assembly, he boldly declared that the Presbyterians "constituted a far more serious menace to liberty of conscience than had the harsh and blundering policy of Archbishop Laud."

What benefit was gained, Robinson indignantly demanded, by removing the head of one prelatial persecutor "when a hydra, a multitude, above 77 times as many presbyterial prelates succeeded instead thereof?" For the dour Calvinists claimed an even greater infallibility than their Anglican foes. They arrogantly defined the precise limits of truth and strove to create a discipline of iron-bound exactitude. These Presbyterian zealots conspired to produce a tyranny fatal to any form of mental freedom or liberal interpretation. Therefore, at any cost, their humiliation must be accomplished.

Robinson was convinced that a National Church controlled by the civil power would prove far less dangerous to toleration than any sectarian body that obtained supreme authority. But persecution conducted by prelate, the State, or any dissentient group is disastrous, mentally, morally and economically. He bluntly tells us that persecutors of any kind "one worse than birds or beasts of rapine; . . . bears and lions are not so hurtful in a country as a misguided zeal grown furious." If we allow that there is only one true religion "who can tell me the precise and just precincts thereof? What mean they by one true religion, one way, one faith? The Papists, Lutherans, Calvinists, all Episcopal and Presbyterian disciplined men are of this opinion; each of them,

whole nations and people, damn for the most part, hand over head, all other professions but their own."

War, asserted the sceptical Robinson, is the worst affliction of mankind. Yet since Europe became Christian conflicts have steadily increased in number and ferocity. The noblest human aspirations have been shamelessly exploited for sectarian and partizan purposes. The only remedy for these appalling evils is complete freedom of thought and expression. And Dr. Jordan pertinently reminds us that: "This bold and startling teaching of the enlightened London merchant hurled into the teeth of an extremist opposition which was even then hysterically demanding the extirpation of heresy in England."

The valiant advocacy of Robinson and his many contemporary publicists produced a profound impression on lay opinion which materially aided Cromwell, when he became Lord Protector, to initiate and sustain a system of religious toleration practically without precedent in Christendom, save in Holland. And Oliver's tolerance would doubtless have been greater had the time been less embittered by pious zeal.

T. F. PALMER

Critics

THE judge at a dog show is a highly esteemed person. A capable critic of the animal, he can see it as it is, and what, with due care, it will become. By this skilful authority the breed of "the first to welcome, foremost to defend," its morality, its mentality, its accomplishments, etc., are all creditably summed up. His findings—dogmas!—may be said to be so scientific that they preclude humour.

Of man—the paragon of animals—quite another tale must be told. He cannot be as satisfactorily summed up as his friend the dog. If but the branch of man's literary achievements be broken from the tree of his accomplishments, much may be learned. For instance: estimates of the merits of his prose, poetry, dramatic art, etc., made, some of them, by men of great creative genius, differ to such a degree as to provide us, in the absence of scientific criticism, with a perfect feast of fun, as the following few, selected quotations will I think demonstrate:—

To early critics the Scott novels were mere pantomimes, while those of Dickens were but pot-house pleasantries; Ritson discovered that Burns was a failure as a song writer; Mrs. Lenox was of opinion that Shakespeare lacked invention, and was deficient in judgment; Pepys tells us in his Diary that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the most insipid, ridiculous play he ever saw in his life, that he was pleased with no part of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, how he had esteemed *Othello* a mighty good play, and how it became a mean thing in his eyes after reading *The Adventures of Five Hours*.

Oliver Goldsmith was especially offended by the *To be or not to be* soliloquy, which he tries to prove a chaos of incongruous metaphors, thus:—

If the metaphors were reduced to painting, we should find it a very difficult task, if not altogether impracticable, to represent with any propriety outrageous Fortune using her slings and arrows, between which there is no sort of analogy in nature. Neither can any figure be more ridiculously absurd than that of man taking arms against a sea; exclusive of the incongruous medley of slings, arrows, and seas, jostled within the compass of one reflection. What follows is a strange rhapsody of broken images, of sleeping, dreaming, and shuffling off a coil, which last conveys no idea that can be represented on canvas. A man may be exhibited shuffling off his garments or his chains; but how he should shuffle off a coil, which is another term for noise and tumult, we cannot comprehend. Then we have "long-lived" calamity, and "Time armed with whips and scorns"; and patient Merit spurned at by Unworthiness; and Misery with a bare bodkin going to make his own *quietus*, which is at best but a mean metaphor.

These are followed by figures "sweating under fardles of burdens"; and "flying from evils." Finally we see "Resolution sicklied o'er with a pale thought," a conception like that of representing health by sickness; and a "current of pith" turned away so as to lose the name of action, which is both an error of fancy and a solecism in sense.

Voltaire and others might follow, here, did space and time permit.

An anonymous Frenchman, on *Macbeth*, must suffice, at present, for Shakespeare:—

You have told me that Shakespeare is de poet of nature and common-sense; good! Now, vat is dis? Here is his play open—*Macbeth*—yes, good, very good! Vell, here is tree old—old vat you call veetch, vid de broom, and no close on at all—yes; upon de blasted heath—good, One veetch say to de oder veetch: ven shall ve tree meet agen? De oder veetch she say: "In tondare," de oder veetch she say "In lightning"—and she say to dem herself agen: "In rain!" *Eh bien!* Now dis is not nature! dis is not common-sense! Oh no! De tree old veetch nevare go out upon de blasted heath mit no close on, in tondare, lightning, and in rain. Ah no! it is not common-sense! *Ma foi*, dey stay at home! Aha!

And so he continues.

Matter of fact criticism like the above, is well summed up by a story told by the Rev. Newman Hall: a negro preacher informed his flock that Adam was made of wet clay, and set up against some pailings to dry. Upon a sceptical darkey rising to ask "who made de pailings den?" the preacher retorted: "Sit down, sar! Such questions as dat would upset any system ob theology!"

In thanking James Thomson for a presentation copy of *Winter*, Joseph Mitchell wrote:—

Beauties and faults so thick lie scattered here,
Those I could read if these were not so near.

This ungracious acknowledgment struck the following show of fire from the poet:—

Why all not faults, injuries Mitchell? Why
Appears one beauty to thy blasted eye?
Damnation worse than thine, if worse can be,
Is all I ask, and all I want from thee.

Thomson's experience was eclipsed by that of a later poet. Had it chanced to be Jimmy's lot, he wouldn't have had an "O" left in him to grace his famous Sophonista line.

Complaining of receiving no acknowledgment brought forth a poem of which the following is a sample verse:—

Your book of verses, underneath a bough,
Or shelter of a dry stane dyke, I trow—
Of all the substitutes I've ever tried
Each page of it brings Paradise enow!

What shall we say then? Should we not rest thankful that, owing to the absence of *Scientific criticism*, we can gather humorous outpourings like the above? And, to-day, if, after scanning the dogmas of the *scientific critic*, we need not crave forgiveness if we exclaim:—

Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?

GEORGE WALLACE

Fear, Ignorance, Godism and War

(Concluded from page 766)

THE evil influence of Godism (Religion) is so widely and deeply spread that it is often quite unsuspected by its victims, who have lost their will to understand as a result of mental confusion. Many who understand evolutionary economics seem to have little or no understanding of psychology—individual and/or social; while many who do understand psychology, have as little understanding of evolutionary economics. History ought to be a science; and such history enables us to understand the psychologic, as well

as the economic, factors in the national evolution of the British people. Our present condition is the resultant action and re-action of *all* the factors—individual and social, mental and material. When one understands the failure to understand this; one can understand how we are where we are. Some political "leaders" (God save the mark) tell us that the problem is an economic one, and that *if* only we solve it, we needn't trouble about religious beliefs! To those who understand the sinister part Godism plays in party politics, this is not only unscientific but viciously absurd. It is comparable to the conduct of a chemist, in analysing some compound, who allowed himself to be influenced by a strong liking for oxygen or dislike for carbonic acid gas. He'd be as much use in chemistry as some political "leaders" are in politics! Other "leaders" (g.s.t.m. again), tell us it is a spiritual problem and, if we put "spiritual values" first, "fear will go and God's great plan for mankind will be revealed"! Some fifteen Labour "leaders" (g.s.t.m.a.) signed that manifesto in September, 1938—which enables us to understand quite a lot. Hitler was justified in thinking he could burst Britain, as he has done France; but he doesn't know what history might have taught him about national psychology. However, that's *his* funeral!

British financial credit power is concerned in this war; and we hear about "frozen credits" as an effective economic factor against "Hitler." Godism Religion is "frozen error"—primitive mistakes frozen in creeds, doctrines, myths, etc., which might be called "frozen discredits." What the more than 40,000 professional apologists for Godism tell us about spiritual forces is, probably, as false in morals, sociology, economics and politics, as in astronomy or meteorology; and not even the most archaic "Fundamentalist"—now—believes his prayers can bring rain or cause the sun and moon to stand still while we slaughter the Germans. Their stories about God are false. What they say about the Bible is not true. Their "Man Jesus" is as misleading a myth as their "God Christ." All sorts of contradictory ideas can be, have been, and are being, justified from the Bible and in the name of Christ. The historical record of Christianity is horrible. Most of the best features of Democratic civilization have been developed *against* the influence of Christianity. From 1931 down to to-day, Christianity has spoken, and speaks, in a multitude of contradictory voices, ranging from absolute non-resistance to anti-German jingoism; and it could give no guidance to an anxious, confused and worried people. Their Godism is a palpable flagrant failure. Those individuals e.g., the Dean of Canterbury—who *did* offer some definite guidance, spoilt the effect by trying to base it on the reputed teaching of Jesus Christ and so made as much mental confusion as they cleared away.

The same is true now, during the war; and it applies, also, to our war aims and peace plans when the war shall have come to an end. It is general talk in public that Lord Halifax and others—*because of their Christian belief*—have done, and are doing, irreparable harm to the British people and world peace. These various forms of Christian ideology have vested interests of millions: so God and gold are linked together; and exercise a baneful influence in politics—national and international. Yet, in spite of all this, more or less well known, in *no* political party can the place and influence of religion in politics be freely discussed in the light of reason. Even Prof. Iaski, dealing with the causes and the aims of the war, in his "Where do we go from here?" has three lines dealing with Religion! "The decline of the traditional religious faiths into a polite ceremonial expressing a creed upon which most people do not dream of acting has been remarkable." Three lines in a "Penguin Special" of 128 pages—and such lines! In a few books, some reference is made to the influence of the Vatican upon its ideological subjects throughout the world; but, so far as I know, no book deals freely, fully, and frankly with the influence of religion, in general, as being the most serious cause of mental confusion and failure to understand the problem of world war and world peace. How can we expect the great mass of the people—who have to do, and to bear, it all—to understand what it's all about;

what the aims must be; and how peace with the possibility of lasting security and progress can be established? Religion is the enemy of understanding.

Probably we shall have much to do, and to endure, before the end; but I see good ground for reasonable hope. There is little of the one-time jingo patriotism, hatred against the enemy, and national or empire arrogance, among the "common people"—in spite of endeavours to arouse such feeling. The great majority seem to be going into this in a cold-blooded but determined way: they regard it as a dirty and dangerous but necessary job which must be done to defeat the danger to us all: they realize—if they do not fully understand—that we fight to maintain the liberties we have in our democratic civilization and for our right to extend those liberties in breadth and depth. A new seriousness of purpose and inquiry animates youth in the fighting forces and in civilian life—if any life be "civil" now. This is so, just because religion is discredited with the bulk of youth. In spite of all the desperate attempts by religious interests to regain their power, average youth regards religion as a blue pencil fraud—which it is. This is good—so far; but it requires a basis in reason and an understanding in scientific proof. That can never be provided by political parties, as these are. It can only be done by Free-thinkers, as pioneers, to expose and expel the belief in spiritual and supernatural forces from morals, sociology, economics, and politics; and so to extend the rule of science to the whole of human life.

If there be any general principle of real democracy it is equal liberty for all and privilege for none. Hence, in any real democracy, religious beliefs must be a private and personal matter and must not be obtruded into public affairs.

That is Secularism; and that is what we have to do to "bring the bright new world to birth."

Why, courage, then! what cannot be avoided
"Twere childish weakness to lament or fear.

ATHOSO ZENOO

Writing Worth Reading

In the last few years there have been many strange experiments in the arts. The Virginia Woolf school of novelists has from time to time produced memorable passages. James Joyce has written at least one masterpiece in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and two incomprehensible masses of literary raw material in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. And in poetry and music, painting and sculpture, unusual and queerly experimental work has been done—the inevitable indication of a period of decay in a traditional civilization. I am not sure, however, that the periodical publication known as *New Writing*, first published in 1936, by John Lane, and later taken over by the Hogarth Press, is not the most promising experimental work of all. It has contained contributions by a large number of the most prominent of the younger writers with ideas, but it has had one grave disadvantage—its price has been high. Now that has been remedied, and the first number of the *Penguin New Writing* has been published at 6d.

Under the general editorship of John Lehmann, this is the first of what all readers interested in the modern developments of literature must hope will be a lengthy series. It includes contributions from English, Chinese, American, German, French, Indian and Soviet authors, and it reveals a general approach to the manifold problems of modern life which is astonishingly similar in those different peoples.

There are so many artificial barriers between the workers of various countries that anything which will assist in destroying the sour old superstition that there is something fundamentally different between people of the same class in different lands must be welcomed by progressive folk, whether they are Free-thinkers, in our sense of that word, or not. A story by Ralph Fox, contained in *Penguin New Writing*, for instance, shows with

perfect clarity the way in which a Tibetan lama can appreciate the attitude of a British left-wing intellectual. Poles asunder though one would consider such people to be, there is yet that central core of fundamental human decency which the Nazis or the parsons, in spite of all their efforts, are not able to destroy.

And what of the attitude of the contributors to *New Writing*? How do they view their job as literary artists? Is there really something fundamentally new in it? Well, a short passage from Christopher Isherwood's "Berlin Diary" (also contained in the Penguin volume) should serve to make that clear. Here it is:—

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite, and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.

That may seem not an entirely original attitude towards the art of letters, but it is an attitude that would in the past have been utterly and absolutely unthinkable. The job of the artist is to record; that is, of course, common ground with us all. But only the writers who have adopted the *New Writing* attitude are able to see that if this recording is satisfactorily carried out there will be a reasonable chance that everything reported will stand forth, real and genuine, for future historians of our era. The big, resounding, fashionable names of literature may die. In fifty or a hundred years' time not a single "best-seller" of our commercialized epoch may remain. But writers who try faithfully to reflect what the ordinary people of the day are doing and thinking will be read.

Their works will become the best sort of historical novels—just as the works of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, in their so-different spheres, have become historical novels of the nineteenth century for us of the twentieth.

S.H.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Sunday, Mr. L. Ebury.

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Godwin Hotel Cafe): 7.0, Mr. E. Broadley—"Daisy Hill."

History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science

BY

Prof. J. W. DRAPER

Price 2s.

Postage 4d.

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus

BY

W. A. CAMPBELL

Cloth 2s.

Postage 2

THE MIRACLES OF ST. MARTIN

BY

C. CLAYTON DOVE

Price post free

7d.

BOOKS WORTH READING

BOOKS BY CHAPMAN COHEN

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT. A Statement of the Case for Freethought, including a Criticism of Fundamental Religious Doctrines. Cloth Bound, 3s. 6d., postage 3½d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.

DETERMINISM OR FREE-WILL? An Exposition of the Subject in the Light of the Doctrines of Evolution. Second Edition. Half-Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Series. Five Vols., post free 12s. 6d., each volume 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION. A Lecture delivered at Manchester College, Oxford, with Appendix of Illustrative Material. Paper, 9d., postage 1d.

FOUR LECTURES ON FREETHOUGHT AND LIFE. Price, 1s., postage 1½d.

CHRISTIANITY, SLAVERY AND LABOUR. Fourth Edition. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE. With a Reply by Prof. A. S. Eddington. Cloth, 3s., postage 3d.; paper, 2s., postage 2d.

LETTERS TO THE LORD. Cloth, 2s., postage 2d.; paper, 1s., postage 2d.

LETTERS TO A COUNTRY VICAR. Containing eight letters in reply to questions from a South Country Vicar. Cloth, 2s., postage 2d.; paper, 1s., postage 1½d.

G. W. FOOTE

BIBLE ROMANCES. 2s. 6d., postage 3d.

SHAKESPEARE & OTHER LITERARY ESSAYS. Cloth, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. For Freethinkers and Inquiring Christians. (With W. P. BALL). Seventh Edition 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

THE JEWISH LIFE OF CHRIST. Translated from the Hebrew. Preface by G. W. Foote. 6d., postage ½d.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SECULARISM. 2d., postage ½d.

WILL CHRIST SAVE US? 2d., postage ½d.

G. W. FOOTE and A. D. McLAREN

INFIDEL DEATH-BEDS. Cloth, 2s., postage 3d.

Col. R. G. INGERSOLL

ABOUT THE HOLY BIBLE. 3d., postage 1d.

MISTAKES OF MOSES. 2d., postage ½d.

ORATION ON THOMAS PAINE. 2d., postage ½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Reply to Cardinal Manning. 3d., postage 1d.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. 2d., postage ½d.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH. 1d., postage ½d.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH. 1d., postage ½d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? Contains Col. Ingersoll's Confession of Faith. 1d., postage ½d.

WHAT IS IT WORTH. A Study of the Bible. 1d., postage ½d.

Dr ARTHUR LYNCH

BRAIN AND MIND. 6d., postage 1d.

MATERIALISM RE-STATED. Contains chapters on: A Question of Prejudice—Some Critics of Materialism—Materialism in History—What is Materialism?—Science and Pseudo-Science—The March of Materialism—On Cause and Effect—The Problem of Personality. Cloth, 3s. 6d., postage 2½d.

OPINIONS: RANDOM REFLECTIONS AND WAY-SIDE SAYINGS. With Portrait of Author. Calf, 5s.; Cloth Gilt, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

PAGAN SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT. Cloth, 2s. 6d., postage 3d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

RELIGION AND SEX. Studies in the Pathology of Religious Development. 6s., postage 6d.

SELECTED HERESIES. Cloth Gilt, 3s. 6d., postage 3d.

THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH. A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Future Life, with a Study of Spiritualism from the Standpoint of the New Psychology. Cloth Bound, 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.; paper, 1s. 6d., postage 2d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM? The Great Alternative. An Exhaustive Examination of the Evidences on Behalf of Theism, with a Statement of the Case for Atheism. Bound in full Cloth, Gilt Lettered, 3s. 6d., postage 2½d.

WOMAN AND CHRISTIANITY. The story of the Exploitation of a Sex. 1s., postage 1d.

W. MANN

MODERN MATERIALISM. A Candid Examination. Paper, 1s. 6d., postage 1½d.

SCIENCE AND THE SOUL. With a Chapter on Infidel Death-Beds. 3d., postage 1d.

THE RELIGION OF FAMOUS MEN. 1d., postage ½d.

THOMAS PAINE

THE AGE OF REASON. Complete edition, 202 pp., with a 44-p. introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d., postage 2½d. Or strongly bound in cloth with portrait, 1s. 6d., postage 3d.

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

THOMAS PAINE. An Investigation of Sir Leslie Stephen's criticism of Paine's influence on religious and political reform. An indispensable work for all who are interested in Paine and his influence. 6d., postage 1d.

BAYARD SIMMONS

FANFARE FOR FREETHOUGHT. A Collection of Verse, wise and witty, filling a gap in Freethought propagandist literature. Specially and tastefully printed and bound. 1s., postage 2d.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

SOME CHRISTIAN TYPES. 4d., postage 1d.

WITHOUT RESERVE. 2s. 6d., postage 4½d.

Almost An Autobiography

CHAPMAN COHEN

Fifty Years of Freethought Advocacy. A Unique Record

5 plates. Cloth gilt

Price 6s.

Postage 5d.

THE REVENUES OF RELIGION

BY

ALAN HANDSACRE

Cloth 2s. 6d. Postage 3d. Paper 1s. 6d. Postage 2d.