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Views and Opinions

A Poor Creed, My Masters!

THOSE who have read the articles in the *News-Chronicle* dealing with "God and the War" will hardly need to have pointed out to them the appallingly poor character of the contributions. Those who have read the last two issues of the *Freethinker* will have as clear a proof of the intellectual deterioration of current Christianity as it is possible to provide. Indeed, if the editor of the *News-Chronicle* had deliberately aimed at dragging Christianity in the mire by exposing the mental calibre of its professional advocates, he could hardly have published anything more deadly. Not an argument has been used that lacks a stale fishlike smell. There has not even been enough mental liveliness displayed to redress these often exposed defences of God. Even those who have not been definitely orthodox in their statements have often enough played into the hands of those who must chuckle over the easy way in which they have been, if not enrolled in the ranks of the godly, at least induced to write as though we must have some sort of a religion, and there is none better than "real Christianity."

For example. One of the laymen who contributes an article to the series is Mr. C. Day Lewis, who is introduced by the editor as "Novelist and Poet." Well, a poet is permitted to indulge in flights of imagination and a novelist to invent situations. But the imagination should bear some relation to actualities and the situations should be either drawings from life, or at least should not misrepresent the truth. Mr. Lewis says that "in war-time masses of men and women turn towards religion, if only to curse God for letting things happen," and that does not bear a reasonable relation to facts. No one that we know of has observed masses of men going about cursing God. It would be a foolish job for an Atheist, and it would need more intellectual manliness than the average believer commands to tell God what he thought about him. But "masses of men and women" suddenly taking an interest in God is good business for the clergy, and it gives Mr. Lewis the feeling that he is really dealing with a subject which is agitating the mind of the public.

It may well be that a large number of men and women who were in the habit of going to Church irregularly have gone there more frequently since the war commenced. But it would be a pretty safe bet to make that for one who went a little more regularly to Church, as a consequence of the war, there would be at least two who were disgusted with the God-business, lock stock and barrel, and stayed away.

God and the World

It would take up too much space, and would be rather boring, to go over each of the clerical contributions to this exhibition of incapacity. I will content myself with taking situations. Herbert Spencer, speaking of the origin of religious beliefs, said that given the situation they were in the nature of logical deductions from world phenomena as understood by primitive mankind. Speaking generally that is true. The primitive world is a world of "spirits," a world dominated by caprice, or, to put it in another way, a world of "wills." The growth of positive knowledge gave rise to another situation. There were two worlds, in one of which the competing wills of the gods operated; there was also the world of actual knowledge, in which man had acquired an understanding of the nature of certain phenomena, and regulated his conduct accordingly. In that mixed world there was no very clear line of demarcation, and the history of the Christian religion—until very recent times—presented us with a continuation of this phase. It is, indeed, still with us in the appeal to God to do this or that, in prayers, and in a hundred and one ceremonies which have not the slightest relevance to modern knowledge.

But a great many of the leaders of religion in this country are too sensible of the influence of modern science openly to challenge the scientific conception of the world. On the other hand they have before them the impossible task of reconciling two mutually destructive positions. They must keep on talking about a God, and they must pretend to believe that in a world that is so dominated in the most civilized circles by scientific ideas God yet does something. That is really the problem that the *News-Chronicle*—quite unknowingly we believe—has set before the public. How can one reconcile the existence of a God with what science tells us concerning the nature of the world? And only in a very secondary sense has it stated the question, "What is the place of God in the world war?" It is a form of the old task of trying to justify the ways of God to man.

I need spend but a little space with those who argue that the war is man's fault, not God's, that we have sinned, and the punishment must follow. Follow what and whom? What have the young men of to-day done who are fighting and dying in so many parts of the world? The wars of to-day have resulted from the blunders of yesterday, and the blunders of yesterday from those of the day before, and one works back, finding always a "yesterday" out of which the to-day has come. For good or ill that is a plain statement of fact. If the war is, as many religious folk have told us, because we have sinned and must suffer, those who believe in God may well ask what they have done, and by what principle of justice are they suffering for conduct that expressed itself generations before they were born? These millions of young men who will die as a result of war, the children who have been bombed out of existence, the old people who have had their last years filled with terror, need not kneel to their God asking for his forgiveness and confessing their own unworthiness. If there is a God they may well stand as accusers, charging him with the responsibility for what is happening, and with using a Hitler or a Mussolini as unscrupulous instruments for his insensate revengefulness.

The Free-will Bogey

Many of the professional representatives of God, one must assume, are awake to this situation. They cannot, they dare not, openly reject the scientific view of life, neither dare they throw over the belief in God as a mere survival of primitive superstition. So they apologize in a way that retains God in name, but a God with nothing to do, directly responsible for nothing, and unable to interfere in the course of events with either dignity or efficiency. He must be praised for everything without being responsible for anything. Gods were once fearful, now they are merely ridiculous. God, it seems, created the world, and also the material of which it is formed. That we may call God in the pre-scientific stage. But having done this God leaves man, after having warned him as to what he must do, to his own devices. And God is not responsible, either for the ill that man does or for the consequences of what he does.

The trouble, if we listen to modern preachers, results from man having "Free-will," and nature being governed by law. (I disclaim all responsibility for this phrasing, I am, for the moment following my religious guides) and the startling result of this apology for God who has permitted the world to get into the present state is what one may call Atheism, burdened with the ghost of a God. God does nothing but just exist.

There is one Jewish Rabbi in this symposium, a Mr. Ephraim Levine. (He is called "Reverend," but there are no Reverends in the Jewish Religion. The Rabbi is merely a reader, and nothing else.) Mr. Levine's function appears to be to show that when it comes to "darned" religious foolishness the Jewish Rabbi can hold his own with the Christian priest. For Mr. Levine agrees with most of his Christian colleague in attributing all the trouble to man having "Free-will," although he and they appear to have yet to learn what is meant by that much used and greatly abused phrase. He says, "God has endowed man with . . . Free-will. . . . If we deliberately defy God's teaching and chose evil and ignore good . . . why should we attempt to throw the onus of our own deeds on Him?" This is very poor, but I have often noted that when it comes to arguing for religion, the believing Jew can be even more childish than his Christian opposite number. Perhaps this is because while the Jew has had to fight for his existence he has never had to argue for his religious beliefs as the Christian has had to argue for his. He is less familiar with the situation.

Still it is very poor. For, after all, man chooses, and choice is a matter of judgment. And the fact that man does, when he sees the consequence of his choice, grumble at it, is sound evidence that if he could have realized the consequence of his choice he would have chosen otherwise. So that if God when he gave man "free-will" had also given him enough intelligence to chose infallibly the right course instead of the wrong one, everything would have gone as merrily as the proverbial marriage bell. God pulling one way with the devil pulling the other is a comparatively respectable hypothesis to that of God giving man "free-will," but not giving him enough intelligence to exercise it profitably. It is as bad as giving a little baby a packet of razor blades to play with, and then covering up the consequences with, "It should have left them alone."

The other and complementary apology for God put forward is that the world we live in is a world "governed by law," and actions and consequences are inexorably determined by this fact. Several of the clergy in this symposium have a shot at this, but it is put most clearly by Dr. A. E. Garvie, a very eminent Nonconformist—who, by the way, in the portrait of

him that is given, looks far wiser than he apparently has any valid right to look. He says:—

I believe that God is all and through all and over all directing and controlling the order of nature. . . . His sovereignty is exercised *through and not apart* from the natural and moral order. *For both orders he is ultimately responsible.*

The italics are mine. But Dr. Garvie is quite clear, so are the other apologists, including the Jewish Rabbi. God made the world, he, to use the language of theology, endowed nature with all its qualities, he did the same for man, but endowed him with freewill minus adequate intelligence, and so everything from the formation of a planet to the choice of man whether he shall take home his weekly wages to his wife or put half of it on a "dead cert," for which he has had a straight tip, may all be expressed in terms of cause and effect. God says, via Dr. Garvie and the other doughty defenders of deity, "It is no use blaming me when things go awry, you should have acted differently and then the results would have been other than they are." He says to the workman, "it is no use complaining that Saucy Polly came in last instead of first. I knew it would, but it was not my place to tell you." To the people suffering from the war he says, "It is no use complaining that Government after Government has played into the hands of Germany, and so has brought about the war. I who know the end from the beginning knew that this war would follow the policy of your leaders, and that your rejoicings over 'appeasement' would end in disaster, but you have Free-will, and I neither guide nor interfere with the consequences of your choice. I do not interfere with the operation of cause and effect in the world of human nature. I created both the natural order and human nature, and having done this leave it to you."

This, in plain language, is what these apologists tell us. And I am now not going to contradict them. I am only going to point out that the logical deduction from their apology for God amounts to the statement that it really doesn't matter the proverbial "damn" whether God exists or not, or whether one believes in him or not. If he, or it, exists, he does not interfere with things. He *created* everything, but when he finished that job he left everything to man.

Does God Matter * * *

Now take the positions as stated. Man has "free-will." In its exercise God does not, must not, interfere. We have the authority of these clergymen that things go wrong because man has exercised his free-will badly. We must not blame God for it; for it is quite possible that God, if he exists, has more intelligence than the Archbishop of York, Dr. Garvie and Rabbi Levine, and sees quite well that these followers of his are making him ridiculously useless. But if man has to make the choice between A. and B. entirely on his own, then so far as the choice between one course and another is concerned it doesn't matter to the value of a brass button whether God exists or not. To that extent we must be without God, for we can only be with God by not having "free-will." We act and must act as though God were not interfering, and therefore need not exist. For a force that doesn't act is to all intents and purposes a force that doesn't exist.

Of course religious people pray to God. They pray for God to give them victory in this war, they pray for recovery from sickness and a host of other things, all of which imply that God does interfere if we do enough grovelling, but perhaps that merely illustrates the fact that man is far more kaleidoscopic in his stupidity than he is in his wisdom.

Now take the other position, or perhaps we ought to say, the other aspect of the same position. God

(Continued on page 119)

Resurrection of the Body

WHEN one thinks of the thousands of airmen, soldiers, and sailors, who nowadays "go to their graves like beds," as Shakespeare has it, believing that their bodies will rise from the dead because they were told so in childhood, one feels sorry they should be so deceived.

Most of them, in spite of their childhood's Christianity, probably do not really believe in bodily resurrection. If you discuss this question with modern people, they nearly all say that they believe not in the survival of the dead body, but of its soul. "The soul," they say, "that is immortal." Even professing Christians talk like this, running away from The Apostles Creed, which uncompromisingly states: "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body." Not of the Soul—the Body!

Let us first see what the real teaching of the Christian Churches and sects is upon the question of rising from the dead. Then we can enquire why modern pseudo-Christianity (there is, of course, no real acceptance of Christ-teaching in any of the Christian Churches) runs away from its own creed on this point. Then perhaps we may get at the truth about it.

The Four Gospels speak of four persons raised from the Dead: Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, the Widow's Son at Nain, and finally Jesus Christ. All of these rose in their same physical bodies. Indeed, you will remember how insistent the story of its being Jesus Christ's own body with the nail-prints in the hands and the hole in the Side is, because the Apostle Thomas doubted and wanted those pieces of evidence—and got them! It was the body that was raised without doubt.

Now the Early Church taught unquestionably that the body was raised. The Resurrection for which the Nicene Council "looked" was a physical resurrection. That the "soul" was immortal was a pagan, an ancient Egyptian, Greek idea. The Christian idea was that the "dead" rose (all of him) and you will not find one word in the Gospels suggesting that a soul or a mind rose only. Not one word!

Up to recent times Christian Churches taught, and Christians believed, that. But belief grew difficult. If a man, woman, or child, is burned to a cinder and his, her, or its ashes scattered to the four winds, would God go to the trouble of picking the dusty bits up? Or if high-explosive blasted you or me to fragmentary pieces, what then? Bitterly the Church hated cremation and dispersal, and denounced it. But hygiene and sanitation led to a shrinking from earth-burial, and belief in a bodily re-integration waned.

Also sick folk rebelled. "I don't want my body, aged, ugly, cancerous, worn-out, to rise again." Or "I don't want my poor unmeaning babe that lived for a day or a week to have its wretched deformed body again."

Science too struck at the belief. We learned that every single cell in the body every seven years has gone and is replaced by new cells. The bodily "I" of seven years ago is gone never to return. Sophisticated moderns can distinguish easily (unlike primitive folk) between their ego and their physical bodies. Rapidly the Church began to talk of the resurrection and the immortality of the Soul instead of the body. How unfortunate that the Anglican Church burial service quoted the book of Job. "Though after my death, worms destroy this body yet *in my flesh* shall I see God." Those Elizabethan compilers with their emphasis on fornication in the Marriage Service and a bodily rising in the Burial Service, have been a great nuisance to modern-minded pseudo-Christian clerics anxious to bring religion up-to-date.

But one should not allow pseudo-Christians to run away from the tenets of their faith, and especially they

should be held to this one, of the revival of corpses. It is theirs, and we should not deprive them of it. Yet if they will change it to "The Soul—that never dies," they can be met on this ground also. Body and brain we know: executive brain and governing ego we know. But what is this soul? The soul is surely an expression, not a reality. "For when the breath of man goes forth he shall return again to his earth," as the Psalmist says. What remains? Only that which he has thought, said, or done in his lifetime and what springs from those thoughts, words, and actions. Nothing more; certainly nothing of the dead flesh.

There is no evidence whatever of the resurrection or the immortality of the "soul." Indeed, what is a soul apart from its body? How shall it be recognized? How shall it think without the mechanism of brain, or how shall it act without the mechanism of a body? There's no human comfort or reality in this "soul" chimera. Tell the mother whose adored son, tell the young girl whose admired sweetheart, is killed, that they will never see *him* again, but only a disembodied what "a breath, a wind, a sound, a voice"? They will not desire that unreal "soul." It is Tom, Dick, or Harry that they want, living and loving in earthly flesh, improved and transcended perhaps! but still as they knew him, only a better edition of his lost self!

Some times very old and senile folk, worn out with the burden of the years, often say quite truthfully that they do not wish to live longer. And some sensible younger people, beholding the sorrows and cares of old age in this cruel and selfish modern world (bereft very often of "that which should accompany old age—honour, love, obedience, troops of friends") say that they prefer to die before old-age claws them in its clutch. Do they want to rise again? Do they want "eternal life"? For many folk one life is enough. For some wretched suicide, one life is even too much.

Faced by the dislike of many folk for their own imperfect bodies, Christian apologists are driven to explain that the "risen body" although the same, will be different. Our "vile body" will be a "glorified" body, a body fit for Heaven. Certainly a bald old gentleman having to put up with his false teeth and wooden leg in Heaven is no reward for earthly piety. Hence the glorified body idea. But there is no authority in the Gospels for any suggestion that Christ or Lazarus or the other two risen folk returned from the dead in anything but their former bodies. It can hardly be argued by a Christian that we shall do better in our resurrection than Christ did in his, and that we have our mutilations made perfect when he did not.

Resurrection-believers are fond, even in these scientific days, of using misleading analogies, such as those of the seed and of sleep. This was excusable in the days of St. Paul. But we can no longer argue that "that which thou soweth is not quickened except it die." We know too much about the germination of seeds for that, and seedsmen can, and do, test their seeds' germination. Dead seeds do not germinate. And death is not a real sleep, any more than a brave man who is a lion in battle is a real lion. These are but metaphors—with no more reality in them than most metaphors. We moderns may well exclaim to St. Paul: "Tell that to the Corinthians."

But, of course, Paul was absolutely right in asserting so emphatically that if there is no "risen Christ" and no resurrection for us, the Christian faith is in vain. The doctrine of Resurrection is its cardinal tenet, and once that doctrine is destroyed, the credulity of millions will go. To-day that doctrine is feebly, faintly, and fitfully held—it is a vague, dubious hope dimly clutched at by loving humanity grief-stricken at the graveside. But the clear-sighted educated mind, knowing that the populated earth has existed for millions of years, and may exist for millions more, knowing that man has evolved from the protozoan—

unpleasing blob of animate jelly;—through an elaborate ancestry of worms, snakes, lizards, sloths, and monkeys, doubts whether all those millions and millions and millions of human lives (of no more importance for the most part than the lives of midges) are worth resurrecting.

Do you want to rise from the dead? When I was a boy I possessed a black-and-white Dutch rabbit that I loved beyond all things. It died. Gladly would I have bartered my Christian resurrection if only someone would have raised my beautiful and beloved pet from the dead. Why should I live again and that innocent and pleasant life be eternally destroyed?

For my part I find it hard to believe that a God of justice will give to a black-and-white clergyman in a church what he denies to my black-and-white rabbit in a hutch. That really would be too monstrous. She was more to me than all the clergy in Convocation. . . . And the little Paschal lamb that Jesus ate at Passover-time . . . is there no hope of a Christian resurrection for that mangled and digested innocent? . . . Perhaps we had better realize that mankind, which is said to be "more than many sparrows" is considered by Christians, the only proper subject for religious doctrines like the Resurrection. But why? Is there no holy priest who will say a Mass in church for my little dead rabbit's "soul," so that it can go to Heaven? I present the Pope with this idea. There's money in it. Even I, after all these years, would pay for my long-lost little pet's eternal felicity—if I could be sure of it!

C. G. L. DU CANN

Jehovah and George the Drayman

You all know what constitutes a good-natured man. You are all fond of him. In his presence you relax a little. You can talk with him in homely and rather inexact phrases in the knowledge that you will not be pulled up verbally, and your meaning wilfully misunderstood. You can speak of something you have done without it being attributed in his mind to some deep underhand motive. You can mention a friend of yours who is in the public eye without being suspected of "showing off." You can lend him a pound without his considering that you evidently think such a gesture worth your while. You can even at times put an antic disposition on and run no danger of being considered a lunatic. He will, in short, in the absence of any plain circumstance to the contrary, think creditably of you. And you know that any faults you possess, glaring though they may be, are merged in true proportion in a comprehensive judgment. You may be laughed at, at times, but there is no malice actuating it. You know you will not only get a fair deal; you may rely upon thirteen to the dozen.

Is it not strange that although all, including the religious, admire a good-natured man, the religious can rarely rise to the conception of a good-natured God. This is mainly accounted for by the fact that fear is always, to some degree or other, an ingredient of the act of *worship*. In my own time the pious always had a phrase ready to their lips whenever they spoke of things to come. "I will see you Tuesday, two-thirty sharp," they would say, and then add, "If God spares me." The phrase is now out of vogue—but it still flourishes in disguise. Nowadays, they *touch wood*. Both addenda spring from the identical state of mind. The belief is there that the President of the Immortals not only gives life but takes it away. He is, as well, prone to take it away suddenly and unpleasantly, if you don't placate him by making some gesture which admits his right to snuff you out like a candle with or without notice. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away." "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you." A man,

even an ill-natured one, wouldn't act so with his pet rabbit although (and because) it is an utterly dependent creature. If his cat fails to purr when it is given a herring, his reaction is not to plunge it in the rain-water butt.

When Cardinal Manning was a boy he was impressed, and quite legitimately, by the fact that God had prepared for him in certain contingencies a lake of fire and brimstone. He fell for the belief—and all his life he was in dread lest he fell into it. Rich in his life he was in dread lest he fell into it. Rich in fundamental good nature was the Cardinal's deity! Most good-natured Christians nowadays wouldn't touch the dogma with a barge pole. This is sufficient to show that they consider their god not to be a *fiend*, but the distance between that point and the point of being good natured is an immense one. They would need seven league boots to traverse it. An acid test exists for all Christians. Is there one who will give whole-hearted approval to the lines of Omar? :—

Why, said another, Some there are who tell
Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell
The luckless Pots he marred in making. Pish!
He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well.

In this there is indeed a Good Natured God: Good Sense and Generosity wrapped up in one princely parcel.

The Christian peruses the lines, thinks a little and then exclaims "Righteous over much." He can see the folly, even the wickedness of it. Would it then be right that he who attends the Means of Grace quite frequently, takes the sacrament on a scale that he thinks the Lord accepts as a permissible minimum, contributes liberally to the Circuit Funds, is it right that he should meet with the same treatment as George the Drayman (*Good-natured George*), who loves his children, and whose children love him; who loves his wife, and whose wife loves him (although she would never confess it)? Good-natured George is foolishly liberal; he spends his shillings in the grand manner and is more than occasionally drunk. He hasn't even been inside a tabernacle since he was fourteen—save once, one Saturday night, when quite mysteriously he found himself in some Salvation Army Barracks. No, no; it cannot be. God is a Good God, but not so foolishly sentimental as all that. He is bound by the terms of his Contract to pay out liberally to those who cry on Sundays

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty

and praise the Lord unceasingly, who drop readily to their knees in obeisance as the Prayer Book tells them. God is Good! Yes, but God is also just. God will discriminate, never fear, between well-groomed Manfred Merrilees and George the Drayman. God will, in short, construe Good Nature as Manfred construes it. An eternity of bliss for Manfred; an occasional Bank Holiday in Heaven (Excursion) for George the Drayman—just sufficient, in fact, to show George what he has missed. Besides, God, being good and also omniscient, knows that George would be infernally uncomfortable (Manfred would see to that) moving heavily amongst the divine *hors d'oeuvres* and vintage ports. So God sees to it that George has his wheelks and ale; all goes merry as a marriage bell.

Christians tell us that Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and told by Jehovah [Father of Jesus and Emanator (wholly or partly) of the Holy Ghost] to keep off the apples. And when Jehovah returned and found (as he expected) our first parents savouring the first parent of the Cox's Pippin, he gave vent to curses in a manner which has made Sergeant-Majors envious and emulative ever since. *Never was heard such a terrible curse!* He cursed the Snake and changed its neat erect posture to that of crawling on its belly. He cursed the ground and said: In sorrow shalt thou (Adam) eat of it all the days of thy life. . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. And to Eve he said: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow

and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children . . . thy husband shall rule over thee. And he taught Adam and Eve to reproduce little Adams and Eves—and the Curse of Adam, including the Lake of Fire and Brimstone, was prepared for those who couldn't correctly guess his conundrums. There was richness for you!

George the Drayman had a favourite story with which he would regale any visitor to the Dog and Drake. It was how he had once experienced a difficulty in physicking his kiddies. So one day he prepared a big table of children's delicacies, positioned the little ones on chairs round the feast and then said: Your mother and I are going out. You can eat as much as you like, but you mustn't on any account take anything out of the little bowl in the middle of the table. This he said, in his full wisdom, having been young himself once. And he explained how, when he returned (and as he surmised), everything had disappeared including the contents of the central dish—a mild purgative. And Heavens! didn't Good Natured George laugh at the success of his stratagem? And all laughed with him.

Yesterday I looked in to see George the Drayman, and this is what I heard him saying to his missus: Tommie will be seventeen to-morrow. He's a good lad and he's started to earn a little. You 'an I 'ill give him a *special* birthday. You'll see to it, lass. Dang me, do you remember that time when he stole Old Gibson's apples, and I had to pretend to give the lad a floggin just to please the old chap. I didn't like it, mind yer, but I didn't really hurt lad. If it hadn't been for Old Grumpy I'd a' dealt with 'im different. Bless yer heart, I'd stolen tons of apples in my time. How could I feel mad with Tommie when he was just the spittin' image—in every way—of his old dad. And now a better son you've never met. I know you're proud of him too. Now, you know what he likes—"DOUGHNUTS"—and don't forget the jam.

Good Nature is an excellent thing in George the Drayman. It would be an excellent thing in a God.

T. H. ELSTON

On Pitchforks

LORD REITH (more familiarly known as Sir John Reith) became known to the general public as the head of the British Broadcasting Corporation. His experience in producing "fakes," and in completely Christianizing the atmosphere of Broadcasting, by that mystical process which develops political Ministers, qualified him for becoming Minister of Aeroplane Production. Experience gained in this post, after a very short period, led to his becoming Minister of Works and Buildings. The connexion between these three posts is easily discernible. A few months of experience of buildings and "works," ought soon to qualify him for becoming First Lord of the Admiralty.

Meanwhile it is reported that Lord Reith has appointed a Director of Building Programmes, a Director of Constructional Designs, and a Director of Roofing. Each one of these appointments will, one may presume, pave the way for a large staff for each of these important posts, and may possibly lead to an increase in Lord Reith's own personal staff.

But this division of labour, if it is to be effective, must go farther. One can visualise the rapid appointment of a Director of Chimneys, of Front Doors and Back Entrances, of Bolts, of Door Knockers, of Window Blinds, to say nothing of a Director of Directors, each with his appropriate staff of Secretaries, which will well serve as a practical reminder that we are in earnest in building a new Britain.

There is another post which Lord Reith might well fill. This is either a Director—or a Minister—of Back-stairs and Keyholes. Everyone familiar with our history, since at least the reign of Charles II, is aware of the important part played by backstairs. Many of our noble families have to thank these for their origins, and Colonel Bingham might be cited to give evidence—if it were needed—that it is to our aristocracy to whom we owe a stream of men of such skill and enlightened patriotism that they never fall down on their job. Even to-day, the rapid change from office to office of these representatives of a naturally superior body, furnishes striking evidence of the unique adaptability of these descendants of the back stairs.

Keyholes have shown their utility on a wider field. Much of the political education of our people has depended, and still depends, upon the devotion to this. Listening at the right kind of keyhole is a source of the enlightenment of the press. The movements of prominent people, the forthcoming marriage of people who really count in the world's affairs also have much to thank keyholes for.

It is to be hoped that Lord Reith will not delay appointing the Directors named, and we may rest assured they will in turn appoint an adequate number of sub-Directors, who will, thanks to the example set them, would not fail to appoint a staff of subordinates. Long ago it was pointed out that the way to avoid revolution is to give man as big a stake as possible in the country, and what better guarantee of stability can a country have than for the majority of its people to feel that their own welfare and the maintenance of "order" are bound up with existing institutions?

We are a Christian country, and we feel that Lord Reith, will not forget the rule of Sir John Reith, to ask every applicant for a post, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" In that way will be secured unity of outlook as well as unity of belief.

QUONDAM

Acid Drops

It is worth while chronicling a statement made in the House of Commons by Mr. Ramsbotham, President of the Board of Education. "Religious education in schools is a subject to which I attach great importance." Now Mr. Ramsbotham is a paid servant of the public, and if he understands his position, he has no right whatever to inform the House of Commons that he is deeply interested in religious education. For his official connexion with religion is of a negative character. He cannot, for instance, compel any council in the country to have religion taught in the schools under its control. Mr. Ramsbotham's duty is to see that if a council decides on having religious instruction it shall not be of a kind characteristic of an particular denomination. Interest in religion, as such, is his own affair, and if one were not so well acquainted with the timidity of Members of Parliament where religion is concerned, he would immediately have been called to order. Mr. Ramsbotham's opinion of the value of religion is of no consequence to anyone but himself, and when he announces as a paid official that his interest lies with religion in education, he is abusing his office. That is an outrage on democracy. We are fighting for a democracy, is the official cry. Directly this war is over we ought to take some serious steps to see that democracy is established in this country.

It is interesting to remind oneself in this connexion that Mr. Morrison who, while on the L.C.C., strongly objected to Sunday entertainments, has now made it legal for Sunday performances in theatres to take place. We congratulate him on his conversion. But we should like to know why he did not reach his present stand earlier.

Recently Mr. Attlee informed the House of Commons that the Prime Minister is discussing with the "ecclesiastical authorities" the advisability of having another

day of National Prayer. We wonder what Mr. Churchill has in view. It never struck us that his religion is of a very robust character, but why wait for the ecclesiastical authorities? Does he really expect to get direct information from headquarters whether God would welcome such an approach? Of course, that is the policy adopted in the relation between different countries. So perhaps Mr. Churchill thinks that if he appointed a day of prayer on his own, he might meet with a snub from headquarters. But why does not some Member of Parliament have the courage to ask the Prime Minister whether he can provide evidence of the results of previous days of prayer, and is he satisfied with the consequences? Or if days of National Prayer bring any help, why not have them say at least once a month, and fine all those who do not join in. This prayer business should be taken in hand seriously.

The Master of Balliol, Dr. A. D. Lindsay, writing in *Time and Tide*, for February 22, repeats a common misstatement concerning a very simple historical situation. He admits that with regard to certain social evils in the Roman Empire, such as slavery, Christianity "was powerless to abolish or reform it," but it did, in the Christian Church, create another society beside the other society which finally reformed it. This is one of those misrepresentations of fact very common with Christian writers, who write for a Christian audience. But it is quite false.

Dr. Lindsay says that Christianity was "powerless" to abolish slavery. The truth is that it never attempted to abolish it. It laid down the rule that the slave was to be obedient to his master, and if he were not so he deserved damnation. Dr. Lindsay also says that within the Church all were equal. There are certain qualifications here, but granting the statement there is the plain fact that this form of equality already existed in the Roman State, and in both Rome and Greece, while the political and even the social status of the slave was lower than that of the citizen, the human equality of the slave with the freeman was admitted. As we have said elsewhere, slavery was with Greeks and Romans a political disaster, it was not the brand of an inferior human type. Rome would not have understood the German theory of a superior race. Christianity had it in its sacred books. The theory of a "chosen people" is Christian, it is neither Roman nor Greek.

So much may be stated, but the real issue that arises is not the legendary one named by Dr. Lindsay. The real questions, the testing questions, are, Were the ideals and teaching of this "society within a society" higher than those current in the Pagan State? Was the war against freedom of thought set going by the Christian Church an improvement on the Roman and Greek practice? Dr. Lindsay must know that there was in neither Rome nor Greece deliberate legal prohibition of freedom of thought and speech. No one under Christian rule was permitted to criticize the Christian God and the Christian Church, as people were permitted to criticize the Roman and Greek State and the Roman and Greek gods. Did the laudation of the celibate life by the Church indicate a higher ideal of the family than did Roman or Greek teaching? Was the Christian burning of men, women and children for the crime of heresy really less brutal than the gladiatorial games? Was the creation of a colour-bar under Christianity an improvement on the ideas of ancient Rome or Greece? Has the lust for conquest, the scope of war, the praise of war and the war-like qualities, or one may say, the diversion of human endeavour from peace to war, been greater or less under Christian rule than it was under Roman? These are the questions one would like Dr. Lindsay to answer, but we have no hope that he will do so. He has the protection of a press dominated by Christian influence and of a mis-educated Christian populace. Why should he attempt to justify his statements? He has little to gain—as a Christian—and he has everything to lose.

In the closing pages of his irreplaceable work, Gibbon sums up in a single sentence: "I have described the triumph of barbarism and religion." The culture of ancient Rome fell before the inrush of barbarians from

the outside, and the growth of eastern superstitions, of which the Christian Church stands as the surviving synthesis. To-day modern civilization is threatened by barbarians within Christendom, barbarians who are the heirs and the product of Christian power and influence. Can anyone doubt but that if the Christian religion had never been born, if the Christian Church had never flourished, if civilization had gone its way from the times of Augustus, we would have been far more advanced than we are and with a more humane outlook than we have?

Professor Cory of the University of Washington, recently described Atheism as a superstition, and then proceeded to define Atheism as "the explanation of phenomena in terms of an inadequate cause." That is the most fantastic sentence we have read for some time. Atheism has obvious reference to a belief in a God, the Atheist being on the negative side. But according to the definition given any explanation that one cares to give becomes a superstition. That clearly comes under the head of "clotted nonsense."

And this, that follows. "The most superstitious person is the Atheist who attempts to explain the universe and its marvellous order as due to anything or everything but an omnipotent creator." We do not know any Atheist who ever has or ever does set out to explain the universe. It is the theist who claims to do this, and his explanation consisting of a string of words really means nothing at all, since analysis proves it to be without any conceivable meaning. So we do not even call Professor Cory's position a superstition. We prefer the plain term "Nonsense." It is the mouthing of quacks intended to impose on fools.

We confess to ignorance concerning Sir William Davison, beyond the knowledge, recently acquired, that he is a Member of Parliament, a position that in itself carries little guarantee for either character or intelligence. But Sir William has distinguished himself by asking the Prime Minister whether he would broadcast a suggestion that at nine o'clock each evening everyone in the British Empire should meditate for one minute on the desirability of maintaining the British Empire as essential to the peace and freedom of the world. The picture of everyone suddenly stopping at nine o'clock to meditate on a given subject is—beautiful. It would only occur to a parson, or—Sir William Davison. Still the gentleman draws £600 a year, and must be expected to do something by way of earning his salt.

We continue to call attention to the wide-spread, almost open "conspiracy" to get more religion into the schools, and one may count upon the present Government giving whatever surreptitious help it can. So we again suggest that all interested may do some good work by circulating the two *Pamphlets for the People*, dealing with the whole question. Many of our readers might well expend a few shillings and the necessary time to their distribution. They are temperately written, and state the principles involved.

TO THE MEN OF THE FORCES

ALL men joining any branch of the military or naval services, and who have no definitely religious belief, have the legal right to register as Atheist, Agnostic, Freethinker, or Rationalist, without giving any explanation whatsoever. If they are already registered under some religious heading they have the legal right to apply for a suitable alteration. If difficulties are put in the way of their avowal being registered as requested, appeal should be made to the superior officer. The armed forces will be the better for men placing a value upon intellectual integrity.

Should difficulties be experienced, or the right to be registered as desired refused, a man joining any branch of the services is justified in refusing to sign what to him is a false declaration, and information should be forwarded to the General Secretary, National Secular Society, 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

R. F. HILL (N.S.W.).—We are pleased to get your note concerning Wallace Nelson. He had left this country before our acquaintance with the Freethought platform. But we are pleased to learn (as will those Freethinkers here, a very small number nowadays, we fancy, who remember him) that he is still well and active at eighty-five. Please give our regards to him. We shall use his rhymes, which are to the point.

E. G. CANDLER.—When we stated our admiration for "the many loyal friends and useful men and women who do so much for the *Freethinker*—and Freethought," we had no idea of restricting loyalty and usefulness to Freethinkers. Of course the same qualities are found among Christians. One of the principal quarrels with the Christian Church is that it uses so much of the good qualities of human nature in the service of one of the worst of causes.

E.R.—Your enquiry is answered in "Sugar Plum" column of this issue.

B. OXBURGH (Miss).—The cowardice of the British press in face of religious bigotry is a very old feature. And never was it more hypocritical in that direction than it is at present.

W. J. ARUNDEL.—Your experience with the press is not an uncommon one. Where religion is concerned it gets more hypocritical year by year; which supports what we have so often said, the only honest period with religion is its infancy. Still, it does good to let the papers know that all of its readers are not fooled quite so easily as editors appear to think.

DONALD DALE.—We have not come across the book you mention. Do you know the name of the publishers?

A. WILLIAMS (Birkenhead).—Thanks for what you have done. The times are very hard for many.

S. BURTON.—The circular enquiring why people do not attend Church is almost too silly to rise to impertinence. It is the production of an obvious nit-wit.

W. CORBETT.—Thanks for compliments on the quality of this journal. After twenty-five years subscription you should be able to form an opinion. We hope we may retain you as a reader for many years more.

J. H. CHARLES.—The excellence and straightforwardness of your letter doubtless played a part in securing its exclusion. After all the *Manchester Guardian* is a British newspaper, and must to some extent conform to the ethics of the newspaper world, and that at present is not a very exalted standard. Will publish next week.

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

The Leicester Secular Society registered the 60th anniversary of its birth on Sunday last (March 2). The meeting was a good one, and Mr. Cohen was the speaker for the occasion. The hall was only comfortably filled, and one missed the usual proportion of young people there, although the war is probably responsible for this. Mr. E. H. Hassell, the President, occupied the chair, and his speech was well delivered and was excellent as regards matter. There was no mistaking the warmth with which Mr. Cohen was received, and he was pleased to meet again so many old friends. The meeting was followed by tea and amusements in the main hall. The Committee is making a strenuous effort to clear the hall from debt, and those who feel interested in the good work that is being done in Leicester by this organization, and are able to help, might well bear this society in mind. The address is Secretary, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester.

War Damage Fund

Previously received, £555 12s. 7d.; Sir Julien Cahn, £50; J. H. Charles, 10s.; Per W. A. Williams (Birkenhead), 5s.; Miss D. G. Davies, 5s.; B. Sage, 5s.; The Taylor Family, 10s.; W. Ainsley, 5s.; Mrs. J. Ainsley, 5s.; W. Corbett, 10s.; J. Wilson, 10s.; J. Pearson, 5s.; E. S. Reay, 10s.; J. T. Entwistle, 10s.; A. Davies, 2s. 6d.; W. J. Parnall, £1 1s.; H. Crossfield, 5s.; Mrs. J. Cartwright, 10s.; J. H. Deacon, £2 2s.; F. Porter, £2; R. S. Skan, £1; J. Hayes, 1s. 4d.; H. de Montmorency, 15s.; W. R. Angell, 5s.; H. T. H. Peck, £5 5s.; N. Higham, 2s. 6d.; C. Moore, 5s.; B. Sims, 5s.; "A Reader," 5s.; W. Sprowson, 10s.; W. W. Pearce, £1; T. H. Baron, £1; C. J. Harrison, £1.

Members and Friends Leicester Secular Society:—Mr. Martin, 5s.; A. G. Hassell, 5s.; A. E. Hassell, 5s.; Miss S. Essex, £1; L. Croxtall, 2s.; J. Capenerhurst, 10s.; J. Cooper, 2s. 6d.; S. Woolley, 5s.; Mr. and Mrs. G. Kirk, 5s.; G. Gibson, 5s.; J. Abbot, 2s. 6d.; C. Worley, 10s.; Mr. Deakin, 5s.; Mrs. Capenerhurst, 2s. 6d.; A. Worley, 2s. 6d.; Collection 6s.; H. E. Anderson, 7s.; Leicester Secular Society, £5 (£10). Total £637 16s. 11d.

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.

We went the other day to see Charlie Chaplin in "The Great Dictator"—and came away greatly disappointed. We were the more disappointed because we have always had a high opinion of Chaplin as one of the "brainy" men of the film-world, with that touch of undercurrent of serious purpose that distinguishes wit from mere humour. But the "Dictator" was a disappointment. It gave broad burlesque where it should have given satire. It did not make Hitler ridiculous, it only made him childishly funny. It should have held him up as a not over intelligent fanatic, more the tool of others than their ruler, a mere piece of flotsam thrown up by a human storm. As it stands, the "Dictator" would have well-fitted the Marx Brothers, or the Crazy Gang, but it is not worthy of Chaplin. And admirable as were the sentiments expressed in the closing speech, seriously given, it was out of place. The story did not lead up to it. In itself it was a speech rather than an oration. The cry of a wounded soul, rather than an indictment of brutality and tyranny. We hope that all who write an estimate of so real an artist as Chaplin put the "Great Dictator" on one side as not belonging to the real Chaplin series.

In the *Daily Telegraph*, February 20, appeared a letter over the signature of "Barrister," on the subject of "Agnostic Recruits." The writer having heard of cases in which recruits had been informed that they could not register themselves as "Agnostic," wrote to the War Office and was properly told that such a thing could be done. It seems rather surprising that a Barrister should have felt it needful to write for information to the War Office, since the position ought to have been quite clear to him on such a simple point of law. But the letter was inadequate in the information it gave, and Mr. Cohen sent the following letter, which he hoped would make the situation quite clear:—

Sir,—“Barrister” is not incorrect in his statement regarding the position of Agnostics in the armed forces, but he is inadequate. A man joining the army, navy or airforce, has the legal right to make an affirmation in place of the religious oath. He has also the legal right to be entered as Atheist, Agnostic, Freethinker, Rationalist, or by any other name. Further, if at any time his opinions concerning religion changes he has the right to a corresponding change in his registration.

Unfortunately, bigotry or (and) ignorance leads those who are officiating to meet an honest statement with "You must have some religion here," and to refuse the description given. And the recruit, either because he is unaware of his rights, or is afraid of arousing religious prejudice, gives way and commences his new career with a compulsory lie. Mostly it is an N.C.O. who is to blame. In such cases as those mentioned, if the recruit insists on seeing a superior officer, then this injustice is often remedied.

It does us small service that at the present moment there are many thousands of men in the armed forces who are registered as belonging to some religious body who have no connexion with any.

Since the war commenced we have had a large number of complaints concerning this denial of a legal right to the men, and the National Secular Society has brought them to the notice of the authorities. It is only fair to say that in every case where precise particulars were furnished the wrong done was remedied.

This letter was not published. The *Daily Telegraph* freely expresses its pride in the men of the Army, Navy and Air-Force, but it can spare none of its space to remedy the denial of a legal right to the men of whom it professes to think so highly. They may enter the forces with a lie that is forced upon them, and the chaplains of the Army who are so concerned with the "spiritual" welfare of the forces, quietly stand by while this is being done, and the newspapers refuse to air their wrongs. We are not surprised that the nation-wide campaign to reinstate religion, even through a war that threatens the welfare of the world, has so much kindly attention from the British press.

We welcome the information of a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* that "very many of our elementary school teachers are either Atheists or Agnostics." We know this to be true. The unfortunate thing is that only a few make their opinions known. When it is too late they will regret that greater boldness might have saved them from becoming, as they will become, mere catspaws of the clergy, a state from which greater courage would have saved them.

We must apologize to readers for a blunder in the make-up of this column last week. Paragraphs 3 and 4 should have followed not preceded paragraphs which were printed as 5, 6 and 7. Our excuse, if not justification, must be that a great many things are done in a hurry nowadays.

The Greville Memoirs

INTRINSICALLY, Charles Greville was undistinguished, possessing no great talents, executing no great deeds. He was born in 1794 into a famous English family, his branch of which however was comparatively unpeccunious, and soon after his education was completed Greville took a "job," that of Secretary of Jamaica, the only activity involved being salary collection—in London. But his acceptance of the Clerkship of the Privy Council in 1821 brought him into intimate contact with everything and everybody of historic importance in England for the ensuing 44 years, at the end of which time death ended his duties. And during most of that eventful period he kept, fairly regularly, a frank, copious and well-written diary which was subsequently published.

The scope and interest of Greville's Memoirs can therefore be readily imagined. The reader is taken into the ganglion of British—and European—affairs, political and social, religious and literary. He will obtain inside information on Waterloo and Sebastopol; life in English Palaces and in the Vatican, the aristocracy's reactions to the Reform Bill, Irish Emancipation and Chartism; the 1832 cholera plague and the introduction of anaesthetics. He will vicariously enjoy the company of Macaulay, Wordsworth, the Duke of Wellington, Beau Brummell, Talleyrand, J. S. Mill and a hundred other notabilities, including kings and queens galore. Naturally, English Royalty is well chronicled; George III., "His Majesty," as Tom Paine aptly called him; George IV., extravagant "first gentleman of Europe"; William IV., surrounded by his large but illegitimate family; and lastly the young Victoria, gradually becoming more self-assertive and "Victorian" as the years passed.

It cannot be said that the picture, taken as a whole, of the English "governing classes" is very elevating; rather does the reader feel that in the midst of so much incompetence, nepotism, social uncon-

sciousness and indulgence England had perforce to "muddle through." To what, as the cynics raised eyebrows may ask, she muddled through, is a question to which I must hastily plead irrelevance.

To write anything approximating to a conventional review of this vast gallimaufry is obviously impossible. The most that any single article can encompass is one particular theme and perhaps for present purposes a glance at some of Greville's references to, and reflections on, matters religious would not be without interest.

As an English aristocrat, Greville was nominally Church of England, but his statement of actual belief (April 2, 1847) subsumes him as nothing more than a Deist. One of his typical comments occurs at the end of a brief note to the effect that a Council meeting was convened to offer prayers for the "troubled state" (foster-parent of our own National Days of Prayer). The comment is "great nonsense"! Greville was certainly a sceptic about the ecclesiastical world as he saw it. Discussing the visit to London of fourteen Irish (Anglican) Bishops to protest against the Catholic Emancipation Bill in 1829 he writes: "The English Bishops may by possibility be sincere and disinterested in their opposition (not that I believe they are), but nobody will ever believe that the Irish think of anything but their scandalous revenues."

This was but one of many sectarian quarrels and animosities, which were particularly rampant during the 1830's, when Evangelicalism was increasing—and was being paralleled, as Greville notes, by an increase in distress and crime. One squabble was characterized by "the ferocity with which these holy disputants assault and vituperate each other about that which it is a mere mockery and delusion to say that any of them really believe; it is cant, hypocrisy and fanaticism from beginning to end."

In 1835 the Dissenters' Marriage Bill was tabled. It was to legalize marriages in churches other than the Established, and was therefore violently opposed by the clergy, to whom it would mean loss of revenue. "This has been an enormous scandal, and its continuance has been owing to the pride, obstinacy and avarice of the Church; they would not give up the fees they received from this source, and they were satisfied to celebrate these rites in church while the parties were from the beginning to the end of the service protesting against all and every part of it, after making a most indecent noise and interruption."

Prominent among the new sects were the fiery Irvingites, a great meeting of whom Greville describes rather in the manner of a witness of the strange religious rites of a newly discovered tribe. Edward Irving actually had disciples among the aristocracy and the movement was therefore of immediate concern to Greville. He tells of the unsuccessful proselytizing of the Privy Councillors and even of the Archbishop of York, who "endeavoured to stop his (an Irvingite named Drummond) mouth with a good luncheon." Not all of the patrician devotees stayed with God. Lord Dower, for instance, "apparently became bored with his self-imposed restrictions, and after a little while he threw off his short-lived sanctity, and resumed his former worldly habits and irreverent language."

The mixture of curiosity, contempt and amusement with which Greville regarded English Protestantism generally was not transferred intact when Roman Catholicism became his subject. When, in 1830, he visited Italy he took a lively interest in the workings of the whole Church, from G.H.Q. downwards, in that land of priests. Wonder is perhaps the one word that can best describe his response, a wonder compounded of admiration for the ritualistic and ornamental splendours, mystification at the catholicity of the Church, and surprise at the fusion of chicanery and piety, and of vulgarity and elegance. He had

many such surprises. He explored beautiful churches "all stinking to a degree that is perfectly intolerable." In the Vatican, "arrangements for the accommodation of Ambassadors and strangers were so bad that all these passages were successive scenes of uproar, scrambling, screaming, confusion, and danger." Greville passed through this melee to witness some pilgrims at dinner. "The whole hall was filled with people, all with their hats on, chattering and jostling, and more like a ring of blacklegs and blackguards at Tattersall's than respectable company at a religious ceremony in the Palace of the Pope."

The Pope himself, Pius VIII., was pleased to grant audience to Greville, and is airily described by the latter as "a very nice, squinting old twaddler." But more amusing is the description of the Procession of the Corpus Christi in which the Pope neatly avoided the tedium of several hours' kneeling by *sitting* "covered with drapery, and with a pair of false legs stuck out behind to give his figure the appearance of kneeling"!

Anxious not to miss anything unusual, Greville attended, and wrote detailed descriptions of, a "performance" of Flagellants and—a miracle. This was the daily liquefaction of the blood of San Gennaro at Naples, and the diarist was surprised to find that it still continued, for he recalled the story. When the French occupied that city the priests announced that the blood (which normally congealed each night and reliquefied each morning) refused to change. The French General, realizing the bad effect this would have on the Neopolitans, threatened the responsible priests with galley-slavery whereupon the blood began to liquefy immediately! The Spirit of San Gennaro evidently cared deeply for the welfare of his attendants.

For our final glimpse into the Memoirs, let us return with Greville to England, and note an incident illustrative of a certain changelessness in one aspect of religion. In 1856 there were no cinemas which could be opened to alleviate the proverbial Sunday boredom, but Sir Benjamin Hall bethought himself to arrange for military bands to play in many London parks. The experiment was highly successful. The Sabatarians however inveighed so loudly against this wickedness that the Government thought it would be diplomatic to abrogate the order. The question then arose. How to change their minds without undue loss of dignity? An answer was soon found: the Archbishop of Canterbury was "made" to write a formal letter to Palmerston, the Premier, "representing the feelings of the people, and begging the bands might be silenced." Deference to the Church of England being unattended by loss of dignity, the Government was then able to undesecrate the Sabbath.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN

Adaptation

STUDENTS of nature know that every living thing must either adapt itself to its environment or perish. But it has probably surprised a good many of those who are familiar with this natural law to note how the inhabitants of Britain have, so readily and so successfully, adapted themselves to the prevailing war conditions. In times of peace we all think we know what we will do in an emergency—how resolute and brave we will be if and when. . . . We square our chests at the thought of it and tell our friends to be under no illusion as to our intentions. But things do not always work out that way. Not by any means! Some of us are apt to funk a bit when the testing-time

comes, and we gradually lose heart—eventually, what with the black-out and the Blitz, perhaps actually get scared out of our wits. We had no idea, until the time came, what modern warfare actually involved.

Generally speaking, however, the people of this country have shown a truly amazing spirit since the outbreak of war, and particularly since the raids began. In spite of anything and everything the enemy has been able to do or threaten to do—and there have been threats galore!—there has never been the slightest sign of panic or fear on the part of the populace, much less a desire to give in. Quite the reverse in fact. There is to-day a fixed and a firmer determination than ever in the minds of the people of the United Kingdom to see this thing through to a successful issue, and nothing will satisfy them but a complete and overwhelming defeat of Hitler and his associated cut-throats.

We are ourselves all too close to this ghastly affair, too much engaged with it and with our daily avocations, to appreciate the full significance of what is really happening around and about us and right under our very noses. We can, of course, to an extent at any rate, measure the effect of what is going on upon our own bodies and minds, and the general effect of it all upon other parts of the world. One instrument alone—the radio—helps us in this connexion. A number of books, written by men who have been through hell in Scandinavia and on the Continent, also assist us in our endeavour to understand precisely what has happened here and there, and why.

But when some future historian makes it his business to study in detail the progress of this war and the reactions of the peoples affected by it, he will surely be struck by the contents of the press of these times and the films—because there will certainly be a pictorial record of it all for him to examine—and he will be struck not only by the courage and fortitude of the people of this Island, but also by what they have accomplished during these years of struggle and strife.

This future historian will see a people—the British people—hating bloodshed with all its might, yet having to go to war to defend its life and liberty, getting first one rude and violent shock and then another, setback after setback, and then settling down with a clenched jaw and a fixed determination to come out on top, come what may. And what will probably surprise this recorder whom we have in mind more than anything else is the way in which men, women and children have adapted themselves to new modes of life and the most unusual and hitherto undreamt of things: underground shelters—"homes" to some of them now!—communal feeding and "high life below stairs" as some of them have humorously put it. To ask a body of people to live in the bowels of the earth, and all that that implies, and that is what it amounts to, even if only for a time, as the lower animals do because it is their natural habitat, is to test their loyalty and endurance. But it is, of course, being done daily and nightly, and almost without murmur, because of the will-to-win which animates the people of this Island.

Many columns could be written—and in time to come no doubt very many volumes will be written—to describe how the people of this country have so successfully accommodated themselves to the prevailing war-time conditions. But it all boils down to that one word "adaptation"—the adjustment of the mind and the body to the immediate environment. As a body, the people have adapted themselves, first to one thing and then the other—and many of them have in the meantime suffered untold hardship—rather than give in and so lose their birthright and everything that, to the Britisher, makes life worth living.

GEO B. LISSENDEN

The Perils Confronting Democracy

THE suppression of freedom now so widespread is a grave portent. For, even in what are regarded as democratic communities our liberties seem somewhat insecure. Still, there remains far greater freedom both in Britain and America than has ever existed in prominent European States.

The present menace has naturally occasioned serious concern to the outstanding American humanist, Professor John Dewey. In his recent pronouncement, *Freedom and Culture* (Allen and Unwin, 7s. 6d., 1940) Dr. Dewey opens his survey with an analysis of the problem of human liberty. He inquires whether men normally cherish so great a desire for freedom as is usually assumed, even in countries where its benefits are most loudly acclaimed. Does love of liberty ever transcend a desire to escape some irksome restriction? "And when this is got rid of, does the desire for liberty die down until something else feels intolerable? . . . Will men surrender their liberties if they believe that by so doing they will obtain the satisfaction that comes from a sense of fusion with others, and that respect by others which is the product of the strength furnished by solidarity?" In brief, does mankind value liberty as something absolutely essential to human health apart from purely personal considerations?

When the adversaries of despotic systems have been incarcerated, tortured or reduced to silence and submission, the arts utilized to sustain the State become elaborate. Dewey rightly deplors the fact that the sincerest democrats almost invariably fail to note the far-reaching influences of literature, the theatre and the fine arts generally in maintaining democratic institutions. In the light of recent events in Germany and elsewhere this oversight is obvious. Our author urges that "works of art, once brought into existence are the most compelling means of communication by which emotions are stirred and opinions formed. The theater, the movie and music hall, even the picture gallery, eloquence, popular parades, common sports and recreative agencies have all been brought under regulation as part of the propaganda agencies by which dictatorship is kept in power. We are beginning to realize that emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public sentiment and opinion than information and reason."

While chiefly concerned with the dangers to intellectual liberty in the United States, Dewey sympathizes deeply with the victims of dictatorial oppression in other lands. He holds that the varying moods of men towards their social surroundings are due to very complex causes, and he unhesitatingly rejects the contention of the Marxian school "that forces of production ultimately control every human relationship."

A reviewer does not necessarily agree with all that an author contends, but whether he be an eminent psychologist or a distinguished thinker, such as Dewey is, his views must be fairly presented. All opinions are liable to revision, and Dewey frankly admits that his experiences of a changing world have constrained him to revise some previously expounded views.

He cautions those optimists who assume that totalitarian methods can never obtain in their own country. Nor does he think that despotic systems rest entirely on coercion and intimidation. Despite the atrocities that have disgraced totalitarian States, Dewey holds that no regime can persist in a country where the scientific spirit previously existed unless its subjects are persuaded that the authorities aim at high ideals. This seems a dark and doubtful saying in the light of contemporary happenings in Germany and other despotic States.

Dewey deprecates the tendency to treat his plea as if it were a justification of dictatorial methods. "This

way of reacting," he declares, "to an attempt to find out what it is that commends, at least for a time, totalitarian conditions to persons otherwise intelligent and honourable is dangerous." He urges that this substitutes hate for an endeavour to comprehend, and that hatred, once engendered, may be adroitly directed against things quite unlike those that first awakened it. This attitude, Dewey suggests, leads to the assumption that America is immune to the maladies to which others have succumbed, although Fascist and Nazi theories are constantly propagated in the land of the Stars and Stripes.

Dewey utters wise words concerning totalitarian propaganda in democratic States. "The democratic belief in free speech," he says, "free press and free assembly is one of the things which exposes democratic institutions to attack. For representatives of totalitarian States, who are the first to deny such freedom when they are in power, shrewdly employ it in a democratic country to destroy the foundations of democracy. Backed with the necessary financial means they are capable of carrying on a work of continuous sapping and mining. More dangerous, perhaps, in the end is the fact that all economic conditions tending towards centralization and concentration of the means of production and distribution affect the public press."

The Germans were long credited with the possession of superior culture. But their schools of every grade produced a steadily growing uniformity in outlook. That is ever the danger when higher, as well as lower, education is controlled by the State. The time came when the lower schools produced abundant material for Nazi propaganda, while the universities became deadly enemies to the Weimer Republic.

Dewey opines that nothing has shown that State regulation of industry, even in the form of State Socialism, will prove "essentially different from State capitalism." Yet, this does not imply that democratic control in the interests of the community or even State Socialism itself must of necessity occasion all the evils that rigid Individualists have predicted. Nevertheless: "The extreme danger of giving any body of persons power for whose exercise they are not accountable is a commonplace in democracy." And when officials act as the instruments of a dictatorial Government in order to sustain complete acquiescence, their authority becomes autocratic. "Divinity once hedged about kings. An earlier repudiation in Russia of glorification of individual persons, because of the immensely superior importance of collective action, gives way to Byzantine adulation of the leader."

We have heard a great deal about *scientific* Socialism and now Communism is equally exalted. Dewey notes that Mr. J. Strachey affirms that Communists who refuse "to tolerate the existence of incompatible opinions . . . are simply asserting the claim that Socialism is scientific." This statement is cited as a glaring instance of the lack of any real understanding of the scope of science. Yet, Dewey concedes that "It helps to explain why literary persons have been the chief ones in this country [America] who have fallen for Marxist theory, since they are the ones who, having the least amount of scientific attitude swallow most readily the notion that 'science' is a new kind of infallibility."

Dr. Dewey recalls Herbert Spencer's contention that hasty and ill-considered legislation usually leads to unforeseen evils of a serious character. This view has been justified by recent experience. Dewey summarizes Spencer's argument as follows: "The economic situation is so complex, so intricate in the interdependence of delicately balanced factors that planned policies initiated by public authority are sure to have consequences totally unforeseeable—often the contrary to what was intended—as has happened in this country [the States] rather notably in connexion

with some of the measures undertaken for the control of agricultural production."

Intolerance is despicable in whatever guise it appears. Dewey justly asserts that racial hatred and sectarian animosity constitute an indirect indictment of human nature itself. One must repose confidence in human nature if one is to be truly democratic. Yet, much of the tolerance manifested in what are termed democratic communities is very grudgingly conceded. Speaking of the United States, Dewey suggests that the present reaction against democracy is traceable to the lack of intellectual sympathy with or understanding of alien or sectarian groups. "Certainly," he remarks, "racial prejudice against negroes, Catholics and Jews is no new thing in our life. Its presence among us is an intrinsic weakness and a handle for the accusation that we do not act differently from Nazi Germany."

The theoretical and practical services of science to civilization and culture are beyond computation. Still, some of its discoveries and inventions have been sadly misapplied. Yet, in Dewey's estimation the humanizing features of organized knowledge might be utilized for the purpose of preserving civilization if it were to evolve moral techniques applicable to social well-being. Dewey deems the conclusion axiomatic that the objectives of real democracy "demand democratic methods for their realization." He also holds that: "Our first defence is to realize that democracy can be served only by the slow day by day adoption and contagious diffusion in every phase of our common life of methods that are identical with the ends to be reached, and that recourse to monistic, wholesale, absolutist procedures is a betrayal of human freedom."

T. F. PALMER

(Continued from page 11)

works through but not apart from the natural order; and the natural order is that consequences are not decided or dictated by beliefs about God, but by our understanding of human motive and natural consequences. The motive of Hitler to win the war will not make for victory unless certain other things are done. An earthquake, which for our present purpose is a good illustration, for no one will contend that man's motives or actions have anything to do with it, will sweep across a given area, blasting with complete impartiality a church and a brothel, good men and bad ones, the genius and the idiot. Poison will end life, and healthy food and sound constitution will preserve it, whether God exists or not. It is not I only who says these things, it is the apologists of God, the believers in God who say through the columns of a daily paper, what the proprietors would not permit if they were intelligent enough to appreciate what was being said.

But this is all that the Atheists have been saying for ages. They have said there is no evidence that God exists, which is the theoretical aspect of Atheism, and they have said that whether one believes in a God or not does not matter. Things will be what they are, consequences will follow causes, to become in turn the cause of other consequences, whether there is a god or not.

And if we put away the primitive mentality of such men as the Bishop of Chichester, who believes the whole thing to be just a scrap between God and the Devil, we have the admission of his professional defenders that God really does not matter. You ought to believe that God exists, also that he once did something, but to-day he does nothing. Things will happen as they will whether there is a God or not. But, God bless these theological fumblers, Atheists have been saying this for more than two thousand years!

CHAPMAN COHEN

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

ANCIENT AND MODERN SLAVERY

SIR,—The contention that Christianity aggravated slavery is almost as difficult to justify as the pretence that Christianity abolished it. Any estimate of the character of ancient slavery must take into account the changes that it underwent from period to period and from country to country. In this connexion the article on "Slavery," by John Kells Ingram, the Irish scholar and economist, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (13th edition) may usefully be consulted.

Ancient slavery was a very different thing in Homeric Greece, in militarist Sparta, in democratic Athens, in the Roman Empire in its heyday of conquest, and in the Empire in its decline. Homeric slavery was fairly mild, though even then, in the opinion of the poet of the *Odyssey*, a slave was only half a man. Spartan serfdom or helotry was a foul thing with hardly a redeeming feature. At Athens, especially as the State grew more democratic, the lot of slaves improved; but they were liable to flogging, and their evidence in a court of law, even in the best days of Athens, was taken by torture.

Roman slavery, at the time when Rome was expanding, was pretty bad. Slaves at that time were cheap and plentiful, and whether sold to a virtuous or vicious owner, their lives were little regarded. Cato, one of the heroes of ancient Rome, advised that old or sick slaves should be sold off like cattle. As at Athens, so at Rome, slaves could in general give evidence only under torture; and they were subject under Rome to the frightful punishment of crucifixion. After the revolt of Spartacus (73-71 B.C.) the roads of Italy were lined with crucified rebels. In 67 A.D., on the murder of a Roman noble, the whole body of his slaves, in accordance with "old custom," were executed by decree of the senate, though nearly all were admittedly innocent. In the second century the cessation of conquest and the influence of the Stoics led to measures of protection for slaves; and the system thereafter was gradually modified into medieval serfdom.

Christianity inherited from Paganism the remains of ancient slavery, which it cannot be said to have either abolished or worsened. It was not until the colonial discoveries of the fifteenth and following centuries that Christian countries went in for slavery on a grand scale. The operative cause was the same as in ancient times, viz., rapid territorial expansion and a plentiful supply. There is no reason to believe that Pagans would have acted differently. The atrocities associated with colonial slavery—the inhuman slave trade, the denial of common rights, the burnings alive, the gibbetings, the floggings, the chain-gangs—all have their parallel in antiquity when slavery was at its zenith. True, Pagans did not defend the system by religious arguments, as Christians did. But they had not to meet the same attack.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

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