

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
Our Public—The Editor	121
The Question of Evidence—H. Cutner	123
Jude the Obscure—N. T. Gridgeman	124
Two Pictures—Ian Yule	124
The Scepticism of a Private Citizen—W. Kent	128
Libraries—George Wallace	129
The Makings of a Ministry	130

Views and Opinions

Our Public

As editor of the *Freethinker* I receive many letters from readers. They describe me in all sorts of ways, from suspecting me of being a philosopher, to assuring me that I am a fool. If the first class threatens me with the development of a swelled head, the latter promptly reduces it to ordinary proportions. There are some who think that the *Freethinker* is altogether too flippant, and others who think it is too "high-brow." And so forth. Taken altogether these letters encourage me in the belief that the *Freethinker* is just what it should be, touching all sorts of people, providing something for the grave and the gay, and never forgetting that seriousness is the more telling when it does not regard wit as a major offence. There are, after all, as many muscles pulling the lips upward as pulling them down (I hope no physiologist will be too critical of this statement), and the wisdom that goes with a smile is apt to be more persuasive than a teaching that carries with it an overpowering solemnity. After all, one of the most modern of the ancient Greek philosophers, Democritus, was known as the laughing philosopher.

But there is another class of letter I receive. This comes from friends of the paper, who think that in certain ways it might be improved so as to do its work more effectively. And these I read with the greatest interest, even when I do not agree with the writers. Here is one of them. It comes from Glasgow, part of a country that does not mistake clowning for wit. Concerning the *Freethinker* :—

If I were asked why I read it, I would be inclined to answer that I enjoy its words and phrases which it gives me in support of my various arguments with associates and friends, and puts into words the various commonsense thoughts which I believe I possess. I do not read it because I require the "religion" of Atheism continually presented to keep me an Atheist. . . . (But) time and again (and this is where my gentle "reproof" to the *Freethinker* comes) I have come to the stage of almost having won a convert to common sense, the stage when a little backing from some outside source would have made them take the "dread step," and, thinking to add weight to my argument, I have handed them a copy of the *Freethinker*. The result has almost invariably been a failure, and this, I have come to the conclusion is through the sarcastic, intolerant attitude with which almost all the articles address the readers. One cannot convert a fool by ridicule, arrogant indignation and sarcastic tongue lashings.

I would ask you, Mr. Cohen, to publish a weekly article on the lines of an introduction to Freethought, which I and thousands like me can use to advantage in our campaign for truth.

I think this letter is worthy of more elaborate treat-

ment than a mere word or two in our correspondence column.

* * *

Fools and Their Folly

Let me say at the outset that I agree you cannot convert a fool with sarcasm or ridicule, or tongue-lashing. But so far as the fool is concerned, is there any reason why we should work to convert him? Or if one succeeds is the profit great enough to warrant the capital expenditure? The Churches so admirably cater for such, that we may well leave him to them, until such time as the environment has so changed that his folly will be manifested in a non-religious direction. The Christian Churches—and other churches—are not run by fools, neither are the majority of its supporters fools. But to cure a fool of one kind of folly gives no warranty that he will not immediately grab at another. There are some very wise things in the Old Testament (more than are to be found in the New Testament), and one of the wisest is that which says, "Though you bray a fool in a mortar with a pestle yet will not his folly depart from him." A sensible man, he need not be a very wise one, will appreciate the sarcasm, the satire, the humour that is lavished on parents and children, husbands and wives, on family life, he will laugh at them without feeling hurt himself or, as a consequence, thinking less of parents or children or wives. We have all to put up with fools with whatever patience we can, and deal with them as kindly as possible, but if we are ourselves wise we shall remember that there are levels of intelligence from which the fool is debarred by nature. I do not know how to convert fools, but I do know those who count on them for their adherence and count their folly a very valuable asset. I do not think that I have voluntarily and knowingly ever outraged the feelings of a fool. But then I have never worked for their conversion. Lucian depicts the gods as consoling each other with the reflection that while the wise may be against them the fools will remain on their side, and they are in the majority. And human nature has not altered in its fundamental characteristics during the last two milleniums.

* * *

The "Freethinker"

But our friendly critic in his desire to appease to the less mentally alert of his acquaintances is not quite fair to the *Freethinker*. It is not fair to imply that the *Freethinker* has nothing or even little else in its columns, beside ridicule, arrogant indignation or sarcastic tongue-lashing. It uses satire, sarcasm, ridicule, and even indulges in tongue-lashing, provided the tongue has a proper occasion for it. But these are legitimate weapons of controversy all over the world. Even a parson when, as he believes, God has endowed him with wit and sarcasm, and command of language does all these things, and from the pulpit itself, even though he runs the risk of awakening the intelligence of his listeners. Wit, sarcasm, etc., are powerful weapons in all kinds of controversy, and I am sure that you will far more easily drive folly from its stronghold by their use than you will by paying it unsmiling homage.

Let us look at a few facts. It has been my business to make myself acquainted with almost every kind of Freethought journal issued since the time of Richard Carlile, and even before that period. So far as the

people are concerned—and often the better-educated classes also—these journals have been the agents in opening the eyes of the public to the real nature and value of the Christian religion—and of religion in general. But of all these journals, past and present, is there one that has maintained continuously as high a standard as the *Freethinker* has done? This journal touches in turn almost every aspect of life, and it has done this without sinking into the mire of political advocacy, the useless pedantry of ethical learning, or the semi-religious unfruitfulness of mere teaching. The *Freethinker* has poured sarcasm on religion, but that has been the cover for knowledge, it has lifted fear from the minds of multitudes and kept its readers in close touch with the latest theories and knowledge of the origin, the nature, and the significance of the scientific study of religion. Quite as important has been the manner in which it has made plain the bearing of the survival of religious ideas on our social life and institutions. Let anyone pick up a volume of the *Freethinker* of any year, and he will see that I have not in the least overstated the facts. I think also it would be difficult to show that at any time any other outspoken Freethought paper has been read in so many sections of society. And certainly if one takes a knowledge of the *Freethinker* to his reading of papers up and down the country he will, if he knows it, think of Charles Lamb's description of books that are "damned good to steal from."

The special articles of the *Freethinker* certainly cannot be accused of being full of sarcasm, or ridicule. Probably the "Acid Drop" column would be marked out for rebuke. In that case I suggest that a reader might go through these paragraphs one by one and note how many he will find that does not act as a medium of some positive truth or some much needed and enlightening criticism. If he does not find the vast majority of them stimulating, or at least interesting, he must indeed be a dull dog. As we have so often said, those who write for the *Freethinker* are not encouraged to mistake dullness for profundity, and a timid hesitancy as the mark of a balanced judgment. Or let anyone take up a weekly or daily newspaper which publishes week after week or day after day a column of alleged humorous matter and compare it with the *Freethinker*, and then reflect on what they have gone through. I know that, having so much to do with the *Freethinker*, I may be accused of praising my own wares. But I am not the only writer on the paper, and there are times when reticence of speech is almost a neglect of duty.

* * *

Our Claim for Freedom

Let us look at the question from another angle. Satire, sarcasm, ridicule, are held to be quite legitimate weapons in controversy. They are not even excluded from religious controversy. "Thou fool" is a biblical expression, a "generation of vipers" is the dainty phrase used by the New Testament Jesus with reference to his opponents, and in the Bible the prophet taunts other soothsayers that their God may be asleep, or perhaps has gone hunting and so cannot respond to their prayers. Catholics and Protestants do not hesitate to pass compliments to each other that would not be admitted in the House of Commons, and generally speaking the language of Christian controversialists might well drive to despair the supposed typical Billingsgate porter. The *Freethinker* may well ask the Christian, if not merely sarcasm and ridicule, but deliberate vituperation are legitimate in inter-religious controversy, and quite permissible when the believer is attacking the *Freethinker*, "why then am I judged a sinner," when he uses the weapons of sarcasm, satire, and ridicule in attacking Christianity?

The replies are various, but all are unsatisfactory. It is said that we must respect another man's opinion.

But that is sheer nonsense. One can respect another man's opinion only when one believes it to be sound. As the famous Dr. Arnold of Rugby said, to ask the unbeliever to give to what he believes to be false the same homage he pays to that which he believes to be true is to lose all distinction between falsity and truth. Are Freethinkers expected to respect the primitive and utterly foolish sabbatarianism of the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Caldicote, merely because he believes in it? Must they respect the fantastic, High Church superstitions of Lord Halifax because he believes in them? Or must we respect the belief in charms—from Holy Water to the lucky qualities of a horseshoe or a rabbit's foot because so many millions of people believe in both? No man should be called upon to treat respectfully a belief which he considers to be wrong. What every man should do is to respect the right of all to hold and to express whatever opinion he pleases. If a man delights in making a fool of himself, the sin is upon his own head. But he is not justified in asking others to do homage to his imbecilities. For a Freethinker to play the hypocrite and to pretend respect for the religious opinions of a Christian is to confirm him in his fantastic estimate of their value. Besides, I object to the implication that the average Christian is a poor weak-minded individual who must be honoured in his distorted sense of values as one humours the fantasies of an irresponsible person. I would treat him as a man, and trust to that treatment arousing a proper sense of intellectual values and personal dignity.

There is another consideration. It is one of the planks in the Freethought platform that there shall be no distinction between religious and other forms of controversy. It is upon a denial of this principle that the maintenance of the blasphemy laws is based. The ruling is that methods of attack which are quite suitable for other subjects may not be used in attacking religion, or if they are, must be used with the utmost care. No Freethinker can admit this for a moment. We must claim the right to deal with religious subjects as we deal with others. We do not, as Freethinkers, admit that religion is the most important of topics, and so deal with it differently from other subjects. Our purpose is the secularization of life as a whole. And so far as my own experience is concerned I have always found it most profitable from the outset to drop all pretence of assuming that a man's religious feelings deserve more consideration than his feelings concerning art, or literature, or politics, or the make-up of his dinner. It is this tradition of the sanctity of religion that must be broken down. Admit it and the *Freethinker* is fighting with one hand tied behind his back. Challenge it at the outset by ignoring it, and the Christian will not be long before he adapts himself to the situation.

As to the suggestion that I should write a series of articles for the education of Christians, I will bear that in mind, but meanwhile I have done and am doing this in the series of *Pamphlets for the People*. They are simply written, and are intended to give a plain simple statement of the Freethought position. And in the present situation they should be well circulated—particularly the two dealing with religion and the child.

CHAPMAN COHEN

A more furious bigot than Pope Pius V never sat on the Papal throne; and his bigotry was more terrible from the circumstance that it was conscientious. When he sent a force to the aid of the French Catholics, he told their leader "to take no Huguenot prisoner, but instantly to kill every one that fell into his hands." When the savage Duke of Alva was butchering without remorse in the Netherlands, the Holy Father sent him a consecrated hat and sword in admiration of his Christian proceedings.

Knight's History of England

The Question of Evidence

It has always seemed to me rather strange that most people will require very good evidence before believing that certain happenings are true, except when it is a question of religion or Spiritualism. On these, real evidence is deemed almost, if not quite, unnecessary, the truth being in the believers' hearts, so to speak, or in illimitable "faith."

I have dealt often in these columns with one religious problem—that of the historicity of the God of the New Testament, Jesus Christ; but the subject seems of perennial interest. This is especially the case when the Church is striving with might and main to retain its hold on a people who are backsliding with increasing velocity. Although it must be patent to everybody who thinks, that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, have absolutely no message of comfort or help for those devout believers who really are in dire distress, yet the Church continues to dangle its absurd mascot or mascots before them with the same frantic zeal as do African witch-doctors before the ignorant and credulous tribes in whom they inspire such terror.

How has belief—and really fervent belief—helped the Jew living in Germany, or other Hitler-infested countries? How has Roman Catholicism in any way helped the unlucky Poles ever since the hordes of Bosches invaded their once smiling country, or is helping them now against the pitiless policy of extermination pursued against the race by the foul and loathsome Huns? It is very easy for our own Churchmen to mouth pious platitudes about God's help through "our Lord" Christ Jesus, while they are themselves safely entrenched from the fate of the Poles only through the heroic fight put up by our soldiers, sailors, and airmen. The Church is beginning to see a little of this, and is moving heaven and earth to save its skin; and very amusing are some of its efforts.

But on this question of "our Lord" and his existence two things should be noted by all who call themselves Freethinkers. First, that Gods do not and never have existed—except as literary or legendary creations. And second, that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament is a God and not a man.

Men are not born of "virgins," or perform miracles, or have dealings with angels or devils, or other Gods. Nor, if they have followers who have seen them eat, drink, and perform other human necessities, are they made into Gods or a God, unique in the history of mankind by these same followers.

Whenever Christians talk about Jesus, they immediately assume the very point which can easily be discussed—his uniqueness, his absolute perfection, his utter sinlessness, his terrific courage—and so on. With such qualities Jesus must be a God. On the other hand, many very reverent Rationalists or Agnostics who can be gentle and tolerant on other things, get angry if their Jesus, whom they designate as a rule as a Man—with a capital M—or even as a Freethinker, is declared to be a Myth—also with a capital M. Their argument generally is to the effect that there really was a Great Man, a Wonderful Teacher, who was so marvellous that he attracted many followers. These gentlemen, on the death of the Unique Personality, immediately commenced recording his Astounding Discourses, and to make them more Stupendous, they added a few Legends which can now be ignored. The residue is "a Man and a very remarkable Man"—and a Freethinker, to boot.

This argument always appears to me to assume the very point in the discussion. There is no evidence whatever that there was a Remarkable Man who had followers who wrote down his "discourses" and added legends which last the modern, wise and level-headed Agnostics and Rationalists set aside. That

is, in fact, the whole point for which we require some evidence.

Where is the evidence to prove that "this Christ,"—that is, that this Messiah—was a Freethinker? If we go to the "inspired" documents, the Gospels, we see that "this Christ" was a thorough believer in Devils and Angels, in Witches and Wizards, and therefore, of course, in Spooks and Spirits. In addition, he was so fervent a Theist that he declared that he and his Father, that is, God Almighty—were one. "This Christ" believed in "Heaven" as a real dominion in which were many mansions, and to which he could go to prepare a "place"; and he believed most thoroughly in a Hell, where there would be "weeping and gnashing of teeth," and to which perfectly decent people, who refused to believe "on Faith," and who differed from him, would be consigned for all Eternity, suffering the torture of eternal burning. I admit, of course, that all this can be put aside by the Jesus lover who, ashamed of such balderdash, insists that it was "added" by the superstitious followers of the Great Man Jesus; but I submit not only is there no evidence for such a position, but also that, as I have pointed out, it assumes the very thing we are discussing. What I want is *evidence*, and that, strangely enough, never comes from the many Agnostics who go into raptures over the Christian Deity for reasons which I have never been able to see have any validity.

Many of these people declare that the writers of the New Testament could never have "created Him"—note the capital H—that "certainly Mark could not create Him out of his own brain" as if their mere assertions settled the matter. The whole point is to produce the evidence that Mark could not "create" Jesus. Where is it? No one says that Mark did it without some material; actually, it was all around him—just as the material for the creation of Mr. Pickwick was all around the young Charles Dickens. Stories of the prodigious adventures of Gods, the Sons of Gods, teaching Saviours, moral platitudes, and all the paraphernalia which went to the making of a "Gospel" were swarming in the East. Possibly hundreds of writers had a shot at compiling "Gospels"; and the four that survived were either the best of the bunch, or had some exceptional reasons for being eventually the favoured ones of the Church. That they contain "esoteric" teachings I am absolutely convinced, and I believe that this is the principal reason why they were so cherished by those in the "know." But that they contain any genuine history, I deny just as I deny that the *Pickwick Papers* is a veritable record of people who were once alive.

For me, the most amusing—and absurd—argument for the reality of the existence of a "Man" called Jesus Christ is that "he exists in men's consciousness to-day." He certainly exists there just as Aladdin, or Robinson Crusoe, or Bunyan's famous Pilgrim, fulfils the same function. If that argument is seriously put forward as a proof of the historic reality of the Jesus Christ of the Four Gospels, I realize that there is no need for further discussion. We Freethinkers have plenty of work to do, and it behoves us to gird our loins and get on with the job. It is no use stopping on the way and dealing with hopelessly futile irrelevancies.

There are, of course, some arguments put forward on behalf of a real Jesus, which in the light of historical evidence can be seriously examined. These have nothing to do with "feelings" and sentimental tosh—as indeed those who put them forward know quite well. One of the arguments is that "there is a reference to Jesus in the Talmud."

Whenever I see this "witness" put forward in this way, I am almost certain that its sponsor has never read the Talmud (or the portions of the Tal-

(Continued on page 127)

Jude the Obscure

It is fair to say that of all the novelists who published between Dickens' time and the Great War, none seems to us to-day more likely to achieve lasting fame than Thomas Hardy. He astonished his Victorian readers not only by his demonstration that country folk might harbour strong passions, suffer exquisitely and embroil each other in high tragedy—activities currently assumed to belong only to "county" folk—but by his ability to build with such material powerful and moving novels. The modern reader cannot be similarly astonished: he has been widely assured that country soil is the very mainspring of the starker emotions so that he finds himself perhaps all too much at home in Wessex. Yet, such is Hardy's persuasiveness and sincerity, he reads on. These novels were spread over two decades, the last making its debut in book form in 1895. This was *Jude the Obscure*.

The obscurity is social. As a child—an unusually intelligent child—Jude Fawley dreamed of scholastic eminence, possibly culminating in a fashionable bishopric, but, as a young man, he is slowly forced to relinquish his ambitions under pressure of poverty and unfortunate feminine entanglements. Still in his teens he is seduced by, and marries, the meretricious Arabella from whom he soon separates. He proceeds to Christminster (Oxford), where he works as a stonemason by day and studies the classics by night until his schemes are upset by the advent of beautiful cousin Sue. But he has to step aside while she marries Phillotson, a middle-aged schoolmaster. This marriage too is unsuccessful and Sue and Jude eventually live together in spasmodic happiness. Two children are born to them, and they also rear the miserable offspring of Jude and Arabella. This extraordinary child, under stress of circumstances ("Done because we are too menny"), murders both of Sue's children and commits suicide, after which the distraught Sue returns to Phillotson. Arabella then re-seduces and re-marries Jude who dies shortly afterwards. And the unspeakable Arabella postpones revelation of his death for several hours in order that she might not have to break an appointment with another lover!

This is tragedy with a vengeance. Indeed it is almost too much: thus skeletonized the story seems like a monstrous Hardy-esque parody. Parts of the actual novel heighten this impression, in particular the scenes featuring the Jude-Arabella child, prematurely old, chronically morose and coiner of such remarks as, "I should like the flowers very very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd all be withered in a few days!"

Yes, this—and more—may be said in depreciation of *Jude the Obscure*, nevertheless it remains a fascinating and eminently readable novel. The author's special qualities; his vivid awareness of the role of fortuity in the development of lives and events, his ability to indicate the material explanation behind prayer answering and country superstitions—to give but two of them—without any air of superiority are there in good measure. Moreover in Sue Bridehead Hardy created a character of unusual interest, making her the mouthpiece of views on religion and marriage which must have amazed thousands of complacent Victorians. She laughs at the Saints, ridicules the Church interpretation of the Song of Solomon, prefers the wisdom of the Greeks to the vapourings of the Tractarians, offsets the Gospels with quotations from Swinburne, and actually refers to someone as "the most irreligious man I knew and the most moral." Tut! tut! She also draws the attention of Phillotson and Jude (and many readers, no doubt) to the barbarousness of the marriage contract especially where the woman's "obligations" are concerned. The fact that terrible tragedy impairs the balance of Sue's mind, causing her to recant, augments rather than in-

validates the cogency of her early opinions, for we are left in no doubt that her consequent actions will ruin her chances of happiness.

Jude the Obscure first left the presses nearly half-a-century ago, yet we cannot pretend that the questions discussed in its pages are very much nearer to being satisfactorily answered to-day. I suggest that it could readily be transformed into a modern "psychological" novel; period details would have to be altered, of course, and—most important—the title, to, let us say, *Into Thy Maw, O Obscurity*.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN

Two Pictures

An artist had just put the final touches to a canvas—a commission, a "pot-boiler"—and he felt weary now that the work was completed though he had yet to meet Father McMann, the priest, who was coming to-day to view the finished work before it was hung in the chapel.

The painter sank down on the wooden stool and gazed at the sombre tones in the composition. The "Descent from the Cross" was the title given him to work on by the chapel Committee, and he had known what that august assembly desired; Christ, the central figure to attract all eyes, with the disciples bringing down the body to the awaiting arms of Mary, the Mother.

Yes, the soft ray of light fell dramatically on the pale naked Christ, and contrasted vividly with the warm flesh tints of the two men leaning over the projecting arms of the Cross, and in the deeper shadow at the base the kneeling Mother looking upwards at her Son.

The familiar formula, the popular title and the old, old story. But if he were rich and no longer searching everlastingly for "commissions," what would his title be?

Not the dramatic *The Descent from the Cross*, but only the sober *A Christian Myth*.

The artist smiled and chuckled softly. Such a clamour would arise if the priest and his flock were to read that below his composition!

But the artistic mind was picture-weaving again, employing a different concept, a fresh title.

First, the background. The Son of God on Calvary with the multitude on their knees around the Cross, a heretic bound to the stake in the midst of burning faggots, praying priests with high-held hands, surging armies led by cassocked servants of God, and overhead a pall of smoke, merging the browns, blue-greys and spurts of orange flame into dull shadow.

Now comes into view an endless procession of struggling humanity, moving by tortuous pathways from the gloomy background towards the brighter middle distance, and priests, though less in number, are still observed clutching crucifix or bulky Bible and striving strenuously to stem the forward flowing tide of Man.

Then barren, hilly country, but with more varied hues, dark green and yellow and pale blue, whilst in the valley flowers star the grass, and the sky, rosy with the dawn, sheds a more kindly gleam on the now slender ribbons of Life still moving on and upwards.

The foreground a grassy mountain-top bathed in golden light, holds a group of four, Man, Woman and two Children; the stooping boy thrusting tiny bright flowers into the girl's outstretched hands, the Woman leaning on the girl's shoulder glances back at the doleful drama on the distant hill, but by her side the Man with upflung arms hails with smiling face the unconquered Sun.

And the painter sitting dreaming of his creation *The Ascent from the Cross*, scarcely heard the priest's persistent knocking.

IAN YULE

Acid Drops

The ghost of Lord Reith still haunts our Broadcasting service, and the narrow-minded intolerance he exhibited while in charge of the B.B.C. still obtains. From a careful censoring of the opinions of those who were ready to permit themselves to be censored, and guarding against anything in the shape of a real criticism of religion, providing for religious services that only a small minority wanted, and deluging the people with talks on subjects that were used as a mere cover for more religious propaganda, the B.B.C. has advanced to penalizing people with whose opinions the rulers of the B.B.C. do not agree. First we had the case of a musical artist who was turned out because he was a pacifist, and who happened to believe in the New Testament. "If thine enemy smite thee on the one cheek turn to him the other." Now it is the case of entertainers who belong to "The People's Convention." The entertainers do not introduce their politics into their performance, but they hold those opinions, and so far as the B.B.C. is concerned they may starve by the roadside.

We are fighting a war for freedom—so it is said. We detest the German practice of preventing musicians and writers getting a livelihood because their opinions on religion or politics do not agree with the Nazis. The Prime Minister has poured his deepest denunciations and his bitterest sarcasms on these Hitlerian practices. It is no use asking him what he thinks of this action of the Reith-made intolerance of the B.B.C., but is there any essential difference between depriving a man of a position, or of his occupation, not because of anything he has said during the discharge of that occupation, but because he has been followed into private life and his employers find he holds opinions with which they do not agree? And when is this process to stop? Reith used to ask applicants for a job whether they believed in Jesus Christ. The present leaders do not do this, so far as we know, but "God help" the man or woman who is known to harbour an opinion with which the B.B.C. is in strong, or official, disagreement.

Now the B.B.C. is substantially a Government institution, and it is for the Government to put a stop to this Hitlerism, which is growing at home while we are fighting it abroad. If the opinions of certain entertainers are to be suppressed let them be openly prosecuted for it at law. If the organizations to which these men belong are of a "treasonable" nature, let them be brought to book in a legal way. But let us be done with the cowardly, sneaking, Fascist methods of the religion drenched B.B.C. And above all let those well known writers and speakers, including Mr. Priestley, make a public protest against the intolerance of the B.B.C. by refusing to take part in their work. The people would be little the worse for it if none of these speakers graced the microphone for a little while. But it is indeed idle to prate about our passion for liberty of thought and speech if the B.B.C. is to be permitted to act as it does.

Speaking of the B.B.C., the most impudent fraud that it has yet foisted on the public was the discussion between Canon Cockin and three questioners. The discussion was announced with the usual lie that their point of view was the "man in the street," but it was clearly as "faked" as are so many of these things. Nearly all the talking was done by the parson, and he appeared to satisfy most of the questioners with the most delightful ease. We did not listen to all the so-called discussions, but they may be gauged by the answer to the question, "How do you know there is a God." The answer was that the Canon knew there was a God because he believed in Jesus. But he also believed in Jesus because there was a God. Whichever way one started the Canon was bound to win. Naturally the selected questioners were "appointed." So one more fake has gone its way, and the spirit of Lord Reith must have rejoiced. What on earth would happen to a man like Canon Cockin if he ever dared to cross swords with a real Atheist? But that is never likely to occur. His canonry at St. Paul's is a quite comfortable one.

Cannot some of the friends of Miss Dorothy Sayers persuade her not to continue to give lectures on religion,

and above all on historic religion? She has written some successful detective novels, but her skill in discovering a murderer after she has herself hidden him, hardly qualifies her for the task of broadcasting on the historic significance of Christianity. We listened, the other evening, to a broadcast by this lady, and it was pitifully childish in its non-understanding of the nature of Roman and Greek civilization. It could all be found in some of the cheap Anglo-Catholic pamphlets, but it was very pitiful. Of course it suited the religious committee of the B.B.C., but anything will suit them that is sufficiently careful to avoid the truth. Still, her friends might try and persuade her not to do it.

Canon Peter Green (Manchester) writing in the *Manchester Guardian* of February 25, replies to a letter asserting that more juvenile delinquents come from Church schools than from the Council schools by admitting this is so. But he says this is because most of the schools in the poorer districts are Church schools—either Roman Catholic or Protestant. He explains that the Council is content for these schools to remain "unsuitable and out of date" while spending large sums of money on their own schools.

This strikes us as one of those specious statements that suggest more falsities than they state truths. First, it is claimed by the Churches that the better character comes from the Church schools, where definite and dogmatic religious teaching is given. If so this ought to make up for secular short-comings. And, if Canon Green and the others of the Manchester clergy wish to force the Council to build more schools in these poor districts, the Churches can compel them to do so by simply closing their own schools. They are under no compulsion to open them. But the Churches not only open schools, mainly for religious purposes, but they are a constant force working against improvements in Council schools, because with every improvement in the State schools there arises a danger of the Church schools being compelled to improve.

Canon Green also says that during the years in which he was visitor and chaplain to a Police Remand Home, he never met "one delinquent boy who was attending any Sunday school or ragged school." We are afraid we cannot accept that statement without further information, and candidly, we do not believe that an examination of juvenile delinquency figures would endorse the Canon's testimony. In fact in the *Manchester Guardian* for February 22, "A.B.C.," who writes that it was his duty to conduct an enquiry into juvenile delinquency, says flatly that one third of the delinquents in Manchester came from these areas from which Canon Green does not appear to have met one. And, in the same issue of the paper, Miss Dora Taylor writes (*Guardian*, February 22), that from records "submitted to the Manchester Education Committee . . . a very large proportion of cases came from denominational schools."

The *Church Times* for March 7 leads off, on its opening page, with what Cobbett would have called a "thumping lie." It says "The King is the Christian head of a Christian nation. . . . As such he has called all his Christian subjects" to a day of prayer. Well, the King is a Christian. That much is true. He must be a Christian. This is not due to his own choice, it was settled for him before he was born. And his particular form of Christianity is what it is because it is substantially a declaration that another form of Christianity, Roman Catholicism, was held to be dangerous to the well-being of the State. For that reason the King was barred from either being a Roman Catholic or marrying anyone belonging to the largest body of Christian believers.

Of course the King is the official head of the *British* people, but the minority only of these profess to believe in Christianity. His Kingship is wider than Christians and Christianity. England is not a Christian country, save in the sense that the majority would make a profession of Christianity, but there are so many Christians that cancel out other Christians that it may be questioned whether there is even a majority of the inhabitants of this country who are Christian in any genuine or agreed sense of the word.

Next, the King does not call only upon his Christian subjects to pray to God on March 23, to remind him that there is a war on, and will he please do something to bring it to our desired end. The King calls upon *all* his subjects to join in a grand praying corroboree—upon Christians and Jews, upon Mohammedans and Parsees, upon the comparatively uncivilized in Africa, and upon the comparatively civilized in Britain. He asks the High Church and the Low Church, the Anglo-Catholic and the Roman Catholic, he calls upon the worshippers of Mumbo-Jumbo, and the mathematical symbol of the modern semi-religious scientists—and no objection would be made if bands of Atheists joined in, just for the fun of the thing. God looking down might not recognize what a jumble of contradictions was represented in this praying crowd, and might recall the fact that God has always been on the side of the big battalions.

The *Church Times* closes its paragraph with the solemn forecast, "Let England be for God and God will assuredly accept and guard the soul of England." There we have it, straight from the horse's mouth. If we are for God, God will be for us. We have issued much the same warning to Bulgaria. She has been told that those countries who voluntarily throw in their lot with Germany cannot expect the favourable treatment that will be measured out to those small nations that have had to submit to Germanic force. Look after God and God will look after us. Why not the same rule in another way—Let God look after us and we will look after God? That our existence depends upon him, is a mere theory. That the existence of any God depends upon man is an established fact.

Everybody can recall reading instances of the way in which a Bible, carefully kept in a coat pocket, has saved a soldier's life—though a pack of cards has also in many cases performed the same useful function. However, a Canadian pilot who recently had to bale out when his machine was damaged, declared that his life actually was saved because he always carried with him "a statuette of Our Lady of Perpetual Help"—the gift of a nun. We shudder to think what his fate would have been if he had never carried the statuette, and we wonder how he explains the number of deaths of unlucky Catholic pilots who have been killed in spite of carrying similar mascots. If anybody wants one reason out of thousands why we oppose religion, surely the perpetuation of this kind of primitive rubbish is a sufficient answer. Yet it is deliberately fostered by the Roman Church, and smiled upon by others.

This, at all events, with regard to religion in the State schools, is the stage that the Churches have reached. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York and Wales, who have issued an appeal for parents to ask for what the Archbishops want, say that "in the end it is the desire and the purpose of the people that prevail." And so they ask parents to "rally to this great cause." But the Archbishops know that the question of religion in the schools is not a parent's question at all. The parents did not ask the Archbishops to agitate for more religion; it was the Archbishops, like any other tradesmen, who begged the parents to "demand our goods, make sure you get them, and refuse to accept any other." And having beaten up, by means of a nation-wide agitation, a number of people to back them, they are trusting to the Government to give them what they want. *And unless people are alert, they will get it.* The Churches are well represented in this Government.

No one talks more about freedom than the average Scotsman, and truth to tell there is a greater sense of individual freedom in the average Scot than there is in the average Englishman—particularly if one takes the southern Englishman. But when it comes to religion we are in a different sphere, and perhaps because of there not being so strongly an Established Church in Scotland as in England, the Scot is probably more under the domination of his Minister than the Englishman is under his parson. This would make a very interesting study, but this is not the place for it.

At any rate Scotland is not to have the benefit of Sunday cinemas. The Englishman will, under conditions

that will remind him that he can do as he likes—so long as he does what he's told—go to a cinema on Sunday. And the only thing we see is for the Church to enter into competition with the Cinema and run a few films of their own. But it would be rather risky for them to run gangster films. It might remind the audience of things. They might make comparisons, and comparisons are proverbially of the boomerang character.

We do not know anything of Mr. J. V. Langmead Casserley, but his mental calibre may be gauged by the following sentence in a lengthy review of a book dealing with Thomas Aquinas—"For the materialist there is no mind, for the idealist there is no matter." The quotation occurs in the *New English Weekly*, and we just venture the comment that neither Materialist nor Idealist questions the existence of "matter" or "mind." Probably this will be rather too much for the writer of the review and the editor of the *New English Weekly*, but we leave it where it is. All we add is that differences as to what Mind and Matter signify do not involve the denial of either. Pope suggested that a little learning was a dangerous thing, but he did assume *some* knowledge on the part of the critic.

Why will religious newspapers not make up their mind to tell the same lie, instead of telling two lies about the same thing, each contradicting the other? For example, one week such Roman Catholic papers as the *Universe* make their readers shiver with accounts of the way in which the Soviet Russian Government stamp out Christian worship, prohibit the reading of the Bible, and punish people for worshipping God. The next week the faithful readers of the same paper are cheered with the information that the anti-religious museums have so little influence that they are regarded as "places in which to pass away a few idle moments," and "it is not uncommon to see people saying their prayers in front of the icons exhibited." (February 28.) That looks as though the persecution can hardly be as thorough as was pointed out before, and will be pointed out again, when occasion serves. Some of these very religious papers ought to set up a lie bureau where the lies could be co-ordinated and told in the same way, and consistently observed. But we suppose the *Universe* knows the quality of its followers.

There is agreement among Christian leaders that we must turn to God if we wish to win the war, although there is profound disagreement concerning which God we shall turn to. But we have the authority of Archbishop Williams and Bishop Downey, that it is the Roman Catholic God to whom we must turn. It seems from what the lastnamed gentleman has to say, that owing to our "refusal to accept the Church's teaching," God has punished us with "the horrors and barbarities of pagan totalitarianism." What a delightful kind of a God, to be sure. Some of us, obviously not all, have offended God, and he permits bombs to fall on children and old people, on the sick in hospitals and to wreck even Churches in order to "get his own back." The man who is anxious to get back to such a God deserves all he gets.

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

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Previously received £637 16s. 11d.; P. O'Dea, 5s.; J. Jetman, 20s.; A New Reader, 5s.; H. G. Newlove, 10s.; Gnr. A. Edwards, £4; H. J. Hewer, 2s. 6d.; G. Hooker, 5s.; R. Stevenson (Canada), 5s.; W. J. Bennett, 5s.; H. J. Barrand, £2 2s.; R. Lewis, £1; "Two E.W.s," £2 2s.; E. Hughes, 15s.; Mary L. Rupp, 10s.; F. C. Green, 5s.; "No Name," 2s. 6d.; W. E. Hopper, 5s.; "Blue Black," £1; R. Croner, £1; Miss L. F. Brown, 11s.; J. Walton, D. and R. Straughan, £1; W. Barrett, 5s.; J. F. Davies, 10s. Total £656 1s. 11d.

C.B.—Sorry we cannot use communication.

S. COHEN.—Shall appear, but we are terribly crowded at the moment.

To Advertising and Distributing the *Freethinker*.—R. E. Croner, 10s.

J. YETMAN.—No apology is necessary. Delay does not always mean forgetfulness.

J. KILPATRICK.—We share your feelings, but without further details one has to be cautious.

H. G. NEWLOVE expresses surprise that we have closed the War Damage Fund so soon, but thinks the result shows that "there is no division in the ranks."

C. CARTWRIGHT.—Pleased to have your high appreciation. There are more troubles ahead connected with this paper, but they are not of a financial order, and so are more difficult to overcome. We may make a statement later.

W.L.N.—Your legal rights as a member of the armed forces are as stated, and if you insist upon them your rights will be respected. But in the army, as in life generally, if you expose yourself to a kick, you may usually count upon getting it. There are always plenty of people in the world who can only appreciate their own value when they are able to kick someone.

MR. H. BEDFORD writes thanking us for *Almost an Autobiography*. He says "There is one thing the book has not done for me. It does not satisfy my thirst for more. I must keep on drinking at the fountain of common sense and intelligence which you have sculptured for us, and you have put me on the track of other books, to ensure that the fountain shall not run dry."

J. ALMOND.—Our concern here with the *Daily Worker* went only as far as the method of its suppression was concerned. We hold that whenever the administration of the law is finally determined by a Minister of the State, we are not far removed from State tyranny. If conditions are such as to make this procedure inevitable, then we ought at least to drop all pretence of being democratic. Your criticism is therefore carrying the question further than we are warranted in going.

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.

(Continued from page 123)

mud containing the reference) and that he simply does not know what he is talking about. "A reference to a Jesus" is really funny in this connexion.

There is one final point for the moment, and that is, that as far as we Freethinkers are concerned it really does not matter whether a Jesus existed or not. We do not believe in a God or a Man. It does matter to Christians. Take away the God Jesus idea from Christianity and that religion simply collapses. Nothing can save it. And no one knows this better than the astute leaders of the Churches. Therefore they are always ready to applaud the Agnostic or Rationalist who is willing to concede that there was a "Great Man." Just a little more, and he will believe in a Great God.

H. CUTNER

Sugar Plums

On Sunday next (March 23) Mr. Cohen will visit Glasgow. The meeting will be an afternoon one, and will be at the Caxton Hall, Bath Street. His subject will be "Churches, the War and After." Chair will be taken at 3 o'clock. On Saturday evening, March 22, the Society's Annual Dinner will be held at the Grand Hotel, Charing Cross. Mr. Cohen will be the guest of the evening. There will be a reception at 6.30, dinner will be served at 7.0 Tickets 6s. 6d., may be obtained from the Secretary at 351 Castlemilk Road, S.4.

The last issue of the *Freethinker* was prepared for the press in something of a hurry, and we did not write a formal "Finis" to the War Damage Fund. So we take this opportunity of again thanking all those who contributed, and also those who would have contributed had they been able to. But very many have lost what business they had, and others find themselves in tight corners from other circumstances connected with the war. As it is, we have, we think, every cause to feel pleased with the results, and contributions are still coming to hand. It is the loyalty of *Freethinker* readers that gives us complete confidence in what we are doing; and our experience has been too lengthy for us ever to have doubted that help would be forthcoming whenever it was needed.

All our readers will regret to learn that our much esteemed contributor "Mimnermus" will be absent from these columns for some weeks. He is suffering from an affection of the eyes, but, although he writes in a rather melancholy tone, we hope to have better news from him soon. His articles have appeared in the *Freethinker* for so long a period that he has become almost an institution. In the name of all our readers we wish him a speedy recovery.

We have given many illustrations of the unscrupulous manner in which highly-placed ecclesiastics are exploiting the war in their own interests. The following account of how it is being done in the Army reaches us from a reliable correspondent. To say that Christians stand up for their creed, if by standing up is meant honest propaganda, is just a deliberate lie. They do not stand up. They crawl, they cant, they prevaricate, they lie, they bully. They out-Hitler Hitler in the mean tricks they play for the greater glory of God. The following account from a religious source will illustrate what is being done.

On four consecutive evenings last week there was given a series of talks, entitled "Towards a Christian Britain." They were given in the City Hall, Hull, and were directed mainly at "the forces and their friends." A number of well-known churchmen were speaking, the best-known being, perhaps, the Archbishop of York.

The series was well advertised with poster and handbills, and conspicuous across the bottom of these was—"Attendance at these lectures is entirely voluntary." This, however, did not appear to satisfy the Army authorities, maybe they had not much confidence in the drawing power of the speakers, so a few days before the lectures, we were told that though the meetings were voluntary, we must go to one of them. Where this order came from it is hard to say, but it was quite definite, and all the men in my particular group were made to attend on threat of punishment. Bad as this is, it is not half as bad as some cases. Many groups of men were actually marched down. Our group was spared this. You will be glad to know that I had no difficulty in getting released from this obligation on stating my views, but a number of Jews were made to go. I do not think further comment is necessary, but I have no doubt that this despicable farce will be enacted in many other towns and cities all over the country, and newspapers will presumably give glowing accounts of the large attendance by men of the forces.

Really, though, the order was quite understandable, judging by the remarks that were made by those who attended, on the quality of the speeches. Had attendance not been compulsory the poor Archbishop would have probably had to talk to himself, and I cannot think of anything more boring than that for him.

I heard of one amusing incident. The N.C.O. in

charge of our group was stopped by a parson at the end of one of the lectures, and after remarking on the large number of soldiers in attendance, the minister asked whether they had come voluntarily. Taking him by the arm the N.C.O. turned him round, and, pointing to some men coming down the stairs said, "Look at these men over there. Look at their faces. Would you say they had come voluntarily." The parson disappeared without replying.

I must apologize for encroaching on your time to this extent, but the thing made my blood boil and I felt compelled to expose it.

We are, of course, fighting for freedom.

Incidentally, you will be pleased to know that I had no difficulty in getting myself registered as an Atheist when I first joined the forces. There was no argument whatever.

In the face of these facts we appeal to the large number of Freethinkers in the Army to do what they can to counter the policy of priests without scruple, and petty officers who misuse their position. All Freethinkers in the Army, who have been registered as C. of E., or any other denomination, should apply to have the name changed to Atheist, Agnostic, Rationalist, or Freethinker, whichever term describes them honestly. They have that right and they should exercise it. And we are always ready to send literature free to those who are inclined to lend or give it. This offer includes copies of the *Freethinker*, and all will be sent without charge of any kind.

Many of our readers will remember the series of articles written by Mr. Cohen on the occasion of the Westminster Abbey Coronation Service of our present King. The ceremony as a survival of sheer primitive barbarism was more pronounced than it had been for generations. Those articles attracted much attention both here and abroad. We are the more pleased to see in Messrs. Watts and Co.'s excellent *Thinker's Series* a reprint, even in an abridged form, of A. M. Hocart's fine work *Kingship*. A reading of this book will give a real significance to such a phrase as "God Save the King," for it carries the mind back to a stage at which the King was King because he was an incarnation of the tribal god, and it was this feature that was so strongly represented at Westminster Abbey. We hope the reading of this work will lead students to the more elaborate work on *Kings and Councillors*, published by the University of Cairo, and of which there has been no English edition, although it may be obtained of Messrs. Luzac and Co., London.

Other works in the same series are announced. One is a series of selected articles by Bertrand Russell. Russell's work hardly requires commending. He is a fearless thinker and imparts some of his own fearlessness to others. The third volume is an abridged version of Professor Julian Huxley's *Religion without Revelation*, with a new preface in which the author protests against those who profess to believe—for we doubt whether that belief is real with many—that religion and science are no longer at loggerheads. He says that even though the idea of God "is in fact tending to fade away, like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice*, yet this question is fundamental. Until it is settled, and the idea of God relegated to the past with the idea of ritual magic and other products of primitive and unscientific human thought we shall never get the new religion we need." It is rather a pity that Professor Huxley does not drop the word "religion" with its misleading reference to "primitive and unscientific thought," but these terms stick. But for three shillings and ninepence any one can get three books that are full of suggestiveness.

We note a very useful letter written by the President of the Blackburn Branch, N.S.S., and published in the *Darwen News*. The subject of the letter is, "Fascism, Christianity and Liberty," and the Freethought position is well stated. We congratulate the editor on his liberality, which is in striking contrast with that of the London press.

Will any Freethinkers in North Staffordshire willing to help form a local Branch of the National Secular Society please communicate with Mr. J. H. Charles, 41 Clare Avenue, Porthill, Staffs?

The Scepticism of a Private Citizen

[The following article was one of the many sent in to the *News-Chronicle* on "God and the War." The policy of the *News-Chronicle* was contemptible. Professing to have a world-wide discussion, it opened its arms to all sorts of clergymen and Christians, and carefully avoided inviting any representatives of Freethought to speak. More, it returned all such essays as were sent in by those who thought that some degree of intellectual fair-play might be found in the *News-Chronicle* office. Where religion is concerned these people ought to have known better.—ED. *Freethinker*.]

I AM sure we of the Freethinking fraternity read the *News-Chronicle* more than any other paper. Radicalism in politics has often gone with radicalism in religion. I suspect that, before my time, when Bradlaugh was a centre of controversy, the organ most favoured by Nonconformists attracted those who looked for a fair deal in their inability to conform even to the theology of nonconformity. Therefore we are justified in asking for something like proportional representation in the columns of the paper when this question of "God and the War" is raised.

You recently gave figures relating to church attendance since the outbreak of war. Fifty-two per cent had not increased their church-going, and 36 per cent did not go to church at all. Probably the last figure should have been considerably higher. Those who had not been for years could truthfully answer that they had not gone more since September, 1939. At least half of your readers, I suggest, are not interested enough in the God to wait on the shrine; they have no urge to worship. Yet up to the present your contributions would imply that convinced theists number at least 95 per cent of our countrymen. This does not fulfil that standard of freedom and candour which this discussion promised.

I have a number of religious friends and highly esteem them, but it puzzles me exceedingly that they still assume that to all of us the existence of God is as self-evident as that of Hitler. We have now a second Great War waging 22 years after the cessation of one that cost ten million lives, and still they plead for faith in a benevolent deity. May we not be forgiven when we regard their attitude as nothing more than an amiable eccentricity, and when we ask whether there are limits to their credulity. How much worse a world would they want before they revised their view of its Government? The poet Burns once wrote: "I have often thought that the more out of the way and ridiculous the fancies are, if they are sanctified under the name of religion, the unhappy mistaken votaries are the more firmly glued to them."

The most laboured defence—it might be taken as written in such contributions as you have published—is that God granted man free will and cannot be made responsible for the use made of the gift. Leaving aside the obvious fact that even the orthodox must admit that the freedom is very circumscribed, is a parent not to be held responsible for the misuse of a dangerous weapon entrusted to his child. Am I to hand out carving knives for the benefit of educating in wise discrimination and self-control? "A child knows that fire will burn his fingers if he ignores the warning to keep them away," writes Rev. Ephraim Levine. Certainly, and does he, if he is a father, decline to restrain baby fingers from straying towards the bars because he assumes the child knows this? The way in which some apologists for deity seek to excuse their God constrains me to ask if they do not count themselves of the human race, they are so anxious to exonerate him and to blame us. They resemble those ultra-humble pacifists who blame their

countrymen and not Hitler for the present state of Europe. "Let the Churches cut out from their repertoire those protestations of men's unworthiness. Let them rebuild man's confidence in man." So your "private Soldier" admirably writes. How though is this to be reconciled with the clerical contributions? The parson wants us to blame ourselves.

We have faith, say the orthodox. Faith we are asked to regard as a most edifying virtue of which Freethinkers are deprived. Why, we may ask, did not the orthodox, in faith, go on believing in special creation against evolution, in flat earth against round earth, in witchcraft as an explanation of epilepsy. Apparently even for them facts are sometimes too strong. What is called faith may be no better than blind obstinacy. It requires courage to confront disturbing facts. Intellectual honesty demands that you yield when the conscientious mind can hold out no more.

Some of us years ago saw the burden of God roll into a pit as Christian saw the burden of sin disappear in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. We have not the problems that beset our religious friends; we have only the War. We have no desire whatever to carry about the burden of a god any more.

As sure as the free will argument can be predicted to appear, the tag about "The fool hath said" will be resurrected. Are we to assume that this method of insulting those who differ from you is the apotheosis of Christian courtesy and charity in the year 1941? It is regrettable that many such fools have been in the past allowed to contribute to the *News-Chronicle*. Here are a few of the names. Bertrand Russell, Prof. Gilbert Murray, Julian Huxley, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, C. E. M. Joad, Sir Arthur Keith, Lord Snell. Surely some of these might contribute now, or are we to suppose that still our religious friends would shiver at their pronouncements?

It would have been better, I venture to suggest, to confine this discussion to the laity. "You cannot argue with a person when his livelihood depends upon his not letting you convert him," says Bernard Shaw. By the same token such a person cannot carry conviction to convert you. Clergymen, arguing on this subject, are too much like a series of solicitors discussing the question: "Is it advisable for every man to be his own lawyer?"

Schopenhauer well wrote: "Religions are like glow-worms: before they can shine it must be dark. . . . Perhaps the time which has been so often predicted is not far distant when religion will depart from European humanity like a nurse whose care the child has outgrown." Dr. Levy and others should remember that at the beginning of the present year Hitler and his generals proclaimed God as leader of the German people.

W. KENT

Libraries

The following random remarks may, I hope, interest readers of this journal.

A library is a collection of books, whenever found, whether it be in the interesting, old Italian town of Ferrara, or in the dirty slums of one of our great, modern, democratic cities.

In my early days, close contact with many people who could neither read nor write, and, since then, a considerable acquaintance with the reading public, tempt me to believe—Job's wish so well fulfilled (Job xxxi. 38)—that only man's enemies, have written books.

Books can be dangerous things. They, often, make the holy, holier still, and the filthy, filthier still. To learn to read them is an easy task. To learn to understand them is not only difficult, but, very often, impossible; and their professional interpreters who

try to guide our steps, are very often hopelessly mistaken in their interpretations. The written word is supposed to cheer the fallen, to fortify the faint, to lead the blind, to be, in fact, a blessing to all, but instead, it seems to act only as a stumbling-block. Now, why were we not each inspired to understand it?

We rarely encounter either originality, individuality, or sincerity. Few of the men we meet are worth listening to. And the real set of the majority is covered over, hidden by a borrowed self.

When books and education play their proper part in the world, a change may be looked for. Books and education will cease trying to instil the questionable, and will begin to educe—draw out—the real capabilities of each individual—enabling each to attain his maximum, physical, mental, and moral stature. That done, man will formulate for himself all his requirements. 'Tis no concern of ours to say what man in future should, or should not do, or for us to direct his steps.

It is stated that there was a library at Thebes in the fourteenth century B.C.

As early as 3800 B.C. (Rev. A. A. Sayce, *Trans. Bri. Archol. Soc.*, Vol. III, Pt. ii (1874), pp. 465-6) Sargon I, the Semitic ruler of Accad (Gen. x, 10), founded a library in that city.

And libraries were founded in all sorts of places in every age, before Andrew Carnegie popularized them.

So, let us say, from savagery to civilized barbarism—Sargon I to Andrew Carnegie, a period, say, of 6,000 years—libraries benefitted the few at the expense of the many.

In any period of world history books were valued by (1) the sane because of the wisdom found in them; (2) a priestly class, who made idols of them; and by (3) a commercial class who traded in them. (1) The sane (and there be few that be sane, in any age) prized them for their wisdom. (2) The priestly class invented sacred books, e.g.: The book of life; of the wars of the Lord; of curses; of laws; of Records; of Remembrance, etc., all of which are described in the Bible. (3) Commercially: Books, cattle, jewels, etc., were all estimated wealth, before coinage displaced them.

For instance, take Russia, which previous to the revolution was one of the most benighted countries in the world. All the great libraries of Russia originated in the plunder of Courland (Kurland, Latvia) and Poland. In 1704 Peter I carried off 2,500 Vols. In 1722 Catherine II seized 17,000 Vols. In 1795, 260,000 printed Vols., and 11,000 MSS., and in 1831, some 300,000 Vols. were taken. The Russians, in all, stole from Poland and Courland some 700,000 Volumes, increasing their wealth, considerably, thereby, without being made one whit the wiser. Other countries might be dealt with similarly.

And not only were books stolen, but they were infamously treated, by interested parties, interpolations, etc., being made.

So, we are left to judge of the part played by books in the past, and the part being played to-day by the millions of books circulating in the world, and we are bound to conclude that, so far, they seem to have acted as evil things. And one feels that Wordsworth had reasons for making his outlaw exclaim:—

Said generous Rob, what need of books?
Burn all . . . (Rob Roy's Grave)

The "bitterness of soul" engendered by our absurd way of living becoming a luxury of civilization!

The beauty of a fine view taken from a mountain top is magnified by the strenuous climb which precedes it, while the same view, gained by a mountain railway, is lessened by it.

Religious books lead men astray by preventing him from working out his own salvation, and so developing the intelligence needed to make sensible use of

scientific knowledge, that he may have life and have it more abundantly. The rejection "of the Superstition of ages" would have been an easy task but for books. In our mountain climb, the growing view becomes pleasantly interesting and enjoyable as we move upwards. Not being artificially rushed past beautiful views, by climbing we develop our muscles, keep our blood circulating, and reach the top with a clarified vision. Whereat we reap a richer reward than any mountain railway could give us. Revelations are the friends, only, of the worker!

Good often becomes a temporary evil. The ancients conscious of this, surmised that Satan often became an angel of light. So books, wrongly treated, give evil results.

The Vatican possesses one of the finest libraries in the world, but it is only made use of by book-worms!

In the Middle Ages, every large church had its library. And, even to-day, in some of our little chapels may be found remarkable collections of books. And no collection of books should be ignored, whether found in village institutes, second-hand bookstalls, or in the windows of old furniture shops. And if living in the country, you become entitled to free books, if your county is up-to-date, and boasts "a County Library."

On the edge of a Lancashire Moor here, the Lancashire County Library meets my requirements, free. It has a stock of 350,000 Vols., and it has facilities for borrowing from most of the important libraries of the country.

Quiet thought, *assisted* by good books, is the little leaven that will eventually leaven the whole social lump.

GEORGE WALLACE

The Makings of a Ministry

ON a recent visit to a North Eastern Town a friend handed me a small parcel of papers with the remark, "I think these will interest you." I must confess that I had almost forgotten the parcel until a day or two ago. The articles contained in the papers had not been written last week, nor even last year. They had been written when I was fighting in the last war, and at the date of them I would have been resting in a tiny, muddy French village. At that time I had never heard of the writer, nor do I think that I would have cared to have made his acquaintance. I would add that I have since been proud to call him a personal friend.

Reading the events described in the articles, and the comments thereon, they reminded me of the similarity between 1915 and what is now taking place. The people at home were indulging in days of prayer, and God was being called upon to bring us victory and to end the war. As I read I discovered that those days of special pleading to God had no better results than have the prayers of to-day. Indeed then and now things would have taken the same course whether there had or had not been prayers. It is probable that at the date of these papers I might have been taking part in some prayer parades, although at that time I would not have dared to say or think they were of no avail. To have been branded as an unbeliever would have worried me terribly.

But the papers I began to read contained an idea that seems to have been almost forgotten, and I pray the forgiveness of the writer for reviving that idea to-day. The writer suggested that while we had appointed Ministers of this and that, no Minister of prayer and worship had been appointed. Yet an appointment of such a Minister would have the effect of co-ordinating the irregular and even contradictory prayers that are offered in a time of war. And, I

fancy that while the idea has not been generally adopted, it would be welcomed by many to-day.

So I have ventured on a sort of try-out of the idea. It is true the B.B.C. has in a surreptitious kind of way been trying to organize massed prayers. It has been done quietly, and almost without notice, by outsiders. It has given us early morning services and late at night epilogues, and it refuses to give us an alternative programme. Yet if the suggestion of twenty-five years ago had been acted on we might have had to-day a properly established Minister of Prayer, with a seat in the House of Commons—and an appropriate salary.

Let me explain. During this war we have had special prayers for Belgium, and France. Most of us have been quite unable to see any benefit these prayers have brought, indeed in most case the results were quite the opposite of what had been hoped for. True, the B.B.C. divulged the secret, and gave valuable information to the enemy, that the answer to prayer was the escape of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk. But that was not genuinely official information; it was at best second-hand, and the Government might easily have disclaimed it. Indeed it was actually disclaimed by Mr. Churchill and others, who said in plain language that we could only win if America supplied aeroplanes and munitions.

Now if twenty-five years ago the advice given had been taken, and a proper Ministry of Prayer formed, with, say, the Duke of Norfolk at its head, assisted by a suitably numerous and well-paid staff, we should by now have had the whole thing on a working basis, and questions could have been asked in Parliament as to whether the Ministry had properly directed its prayers in this or that direction, and would the results be laid before the House, if only in secret session? Imagine the interest that would have been aroused if someone had asked "Would the Minister of Prayer inform the House if the proper prayers had been offered for the protection of our home population, and if so had he any information why, in the face of prayers being asked for the protection of this country from air-raids, not only had very considerable damage been done, but about a thousand churches had been destroyed or damaged?" In the case of prayer as in other things the motto should be, not merely "Go to it," but go to it in the proper way. After all, God has his feelings, and the Government does not appear to have treated him with the proper degree of respect. Properly organized, we should have had the right kind of prayer given in the right kind of way and at the right time. Circulars would have been delivered, similar to those telling us what to do in the case of a gas-raid or invasion, and the results would be staggering. We have treated God with scant respect. We have thrown overboard some of his clearest commands, such as stoning Atheists and burning witches. And now we have actually come to the point of opening theatres on Sunday.

The articles I have been reading, written twenty-five years ago, dwelt on all these things, and had the advice there given been followed the present world-war might have been avoided. The writer of these articles is still alive and still active. He is the present editor of the *Freethinker*, and the articles were written immediately after the outbreak of war. Had our full praying force been properly organized, and the full praying power of the British Empire been mobilized we might not be now facing a world-war. Even God could not have ignored the praying power of over four hundred millions of British subjects, to say nothing of a hundred and thirty millions of Americans. We could outpray any force that Germany could put in the field.

Let us, by all means, have a Ministry of Prayer, say, with Lord Reith in command and Mr. Duff Cooper as his chief lieutenant.

JOHN BRIGHTON

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

NURTURE AND NATURE

SIR,—In your issue of February 23, the writer of Acid Drops gives an ideological explanation of the collapse of the Italian Armies. I venture to say that the explanation is mainly material. The Italians cannot fight, because they are a starving people, and they have run before the Australians because the Australians are, with one exception, the best fed people in the world. According to recent League of Nations figures, the Australians eat on the average 202 pounds of meat per year, while the Italians eat only 35. The Australians eat 107 pounds of fruit, while the Italians eat only 40. The Australians consume 102 gallons of milk and its products, while the Italians consume only 23. The only thing of which the Italians consume more is wheat, and even there they only consume 351 pounds as against the Australians 297.

No doubt the Italian soldiers are better fed than the civilians, but people who have been starved from infancy cannot be turned into good soldiers.

I predict that if Japan enters the war, she will have the same fate. Her peoples are as badly fed as the Italians, and will go to pieces before Americans and Australians.

Karl Marx was often wrong, but he was right in insisting on the material basis of life. A large beefsteak eaten by the vilest of mankind, will beat a small plate of macaroni and tomato sauce, coupled with the noblest sentiments.

R. B. KERR

SUPPRESSION OF THE "DAILY WORKER"

SIR,—I should like to endorse your comment on the letter of Mr. John Hope.

The most foolish remark made by Mr. Herbert Morrison on this matter was that to deal with it in the courts would mean weeks—I fancy he said months—of delay. Mr. Morrison knows very well that it is as easy for the Government, particularly in a time of War, to take precedence in a Law Court as it is in Parliament. If anything, it is easier, for, whereas in Parliament a few will be found friendly even to Communists, who can imagine a legal gentleman, exalted to the Bench, who has cast a kindly eye upon their activities? The *Daily Worker* could have been indicted and disposed of in a week.

Moreover the witness box in a court is a good platform to honour good cases and express bad ones. The Communists, in their press and on their platforms, can choose their course and evade awkward questions. This cannot be done in cross-examination; you are compelled to take all hurdles somehow or other. Mr. G. W. Foote's magnificent defence of Freethought, at his blasphemy trial, had a far larger public than if it had been published in Freethought journals only, solely as the result of suppression of this paper. Conversely, a bad case in a court can be made to appear still worse. Imagine the Editor of the *Daily Worker* being cross-examined as to whether he and his staff wanted Hitler or Britain and the Allies to win. The answer would probably be that, they want neither to win, only the workers. In the columns of the paper or on a platform they need go no farther. A skilled cross-examiner would make them go on as follows:—

Supposing for the moment the workers cannot yet win (it is rather difficult for you to suggest, I imagine, how their victory is to come in Germany) which of the two so-called Imperialistic powers, Germany or Britain, would you prefer to see victorious? If a reply was refused to this question (I do not advocate any thumb-screws to extract it), it would be as effectual in exposing the real defeatism of the Communist Party as if one was given. It would be a more damaging blow than Mr. Morrison has given them. He has missed his chance.

W. KENT

RELIGION AND THE PRESS

[The following is the substance of a letter sent to the *Manchester Guardian*—and refused publication.]
SIR,—To introduce unofficial religious tests for teachers is an attempt to drive the Atheist teachers out of a profession where character is of such importance, and forces those who remain to a life of hypocrisy. I consider it an exaggeration to say that there are very many teachers

who are Atheists. I never ranked the intellectual capabilities of teachers as so high. I cannot vouch for the Agnostic teacher. I always think of him as an Atheist with a top hat on.

Does anyone seriously think that lessons on gods, angels, heaven and hell, the miracles of Jesus or the plagues of Egypt, have in those days, any real bearing on the cultivation of conduct? To identify religion and morals is a curious miscalculation of values. Man is moral in practice before he is able to frame theories why certain actions persist. To think of a child being taught the need for moral action is only a little less ridiculous than to think of him as having to understand physiology before he can breathe. There are certain moral sayings attributed to Jesus, but there is not a single one that is not to be found in the old Bible or, in a better form among the Jewish Rabbinical writings. I do not doubt the agility of Christian apologists to trot out trite phrases from the "sacred" book, four-fifths of which is given over to murders, persecutions, and other abominations, together with all its accompanying contradictions. I sometimes wonder why no cookery recipes have yet been culled from this rag of "philosophies" in these days of war-time economy.

The final and fatal criticism of religion is that it is not education at all. It never rises higher than mere instruction, and that of a very vicious kind.

I do not know whether this letter will be published in your very liberal newspaper. It is generally recognized, among opponents of religion, that most newspapers prefer to leave criticisms of religion silently alone.

J. H. CHARLES

MALAPROPISM?

SIR,—The following conversation transpired in an interchange of opinion on the character, outlook, and aspect of the Gospel Jesus:—

"Yes, no doubt, Jesus was a well-meaning man, but circumeized in outlook and aspect."

"In aspect, of course, but surely you mean circumscribed in regard to outlook?"

"Did I say 'circumeized'?"

"You certainly did."

"Well, I said what I meant. Jesus was a Jew!"

A. HANSON

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LONDON

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LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 3.0, Mr. H. A. Silverman, B.A., of the University College, Leicester—"Paying for the War."

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