

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Heretic at Large

I AM not quite sure whether, in giving these notes the heading of "A Heretic at Large," I am quite justified in using the term. But heresy has all sorts of implications: from the man who rejects belief in a God to one who is attacked for not believing in the power of "Holy Water." I am dealing with a book just issued, "The Church Impotent or Triumphant," by Mr. Sidney Dark; and, like all Christians, he means by his title that the Church will be triumphant if it follows his counsel and impotent if it does not. But Mr. Dark was for 17 years Editor of the "Church Times," and that meant, as he says, knowing how irksome it is to write in "subjection to an un-intelligent employer." He has my sympathy. I can think of nothing more demoralising than writing, as the vast majority of our newspaper men do, with one eye on the man who employs them, or in fear of offending the public that reads them. Where censorship is open and avowed, a writer may work with the minimum of self-depreciation. He is aware that, even though he may write something with which he is not wholly in agreement—or, what is more common, not saying much of what he would like to say and which it is important to his subject it should be said—his readers will not be misled. They know he is at least partly muzzled, and so there is a minimum of damage done to both writer and reader. But the British censorship is evil partly because it is not avowed; and, thanks to certain circumstances, the censorship is distributed over a large section of the population. Many men act as watchdogs over the beliefs, or unbeliefs, of those around them. The punishment comes by loss of business or of the better jobs; of promotion and, above all, of social prestige. That Mr. Dark felt the irksomeness of his position one may easily believe. Often enough in these columns I have called attention to the liberality of his notes in the "Church Times," and have wondered why he did not take a further step. Now he has done so; but the step is not a great one. The virus of Christianity is too firmly planted for it to be destroyed by the mere rejection of an editorship and a denunciation of persons; or a renunciation of things that was not permissible heretofore. Chains may be thrown over in a moment; but that is only a preparatory step towards achieving complete freedom. I am afraid Mr. Dark is still in bondage. He has lengthened his chain rather than achieved complete freedom of movement.

### A Boomerang Assault

Mr. Dark's criticisms of the Church and of a certain type of Christian leader and preacher is fully justifiable, but they are based on assumptions with which no scientific sociologist could agree. With regard to the Spanish revolution, and again with regard to the treatment of Jews in Germany, he complains of the behaviour of both the Roman and the English Church, and in this we agree with him. Our behaviour towards Spain was simply scandalous. But the persecution of the Jews did not begin with Hitler. It began with the Christian Church; although it took a wit of Jewish descent, Heine, to remark that the Jews began this game of persecution by giving the Christians their God. Mr. Dark complains that the Churches made no demand for action against Germany for the persecution of the Jews (the full beastliness of this particular crime has never been revealed in this country; nor did it stop English Society making social pets of German representatives in high society); but he quotes a prominent Roman Catholic author, Christopher Hollis, as saying: "We may like Jews or dislike them. We may think with St. Thomas that they merit toleration or with Hitler that they merit persecution, but at least we must avoid the ultimate blasphemy of saying that they should be treated just like other people." That is the authentic Christian note.

Mr. Dark might have taken occasion to point out that this persecution of the Jews began with the Church. It was not present in Roman practice or law. Anti-Semitism (a foolish term, since all Semites are not Jews and all Jews are not Semites) is Christian in origin, even though the Christians turned to the Jewish Bible for their sanction. But he is right in saying that, whatever be the non-religious forces at work, "the Church shares the responsibility. It was," he says, "so terrified by Moscow that it was blind to the menace of Berlin." I do not think that term "blind" is justified. The Church, with regard to Berlin, acted as it had been acting for many years with regard to Czarist Russia. It was not, in the case of Germany, a question of choosing between the better and the worse, but of supporting religion, however bad, against non-religion, whatever promise of good it might hold. Mr. Dark will not have any great difficulty in finding historical instances of this policy. If he has, I suggest for study the whole of the English Freethought Movement.

On the matter of Spain and its revolution, Mr. Dark is on firmer ground. He makes a protest against Professor Peers, who denied that the Spanish Churches were "swollen with riches," and points out the great wealth held and financial control exercised by the religious orders. There is a contemptuous rejection of the "partisan rubbish" written by such men as the late Henry Lunn, Father Woodlock and Lord Phillimore. But High Church and Roman Catholic influences have during recent years played a very active part, both before and behind the curtain, in conduct that has led up to the present world-disaster.

Of the influence of the Roman Church on politics Mr. Dark has a much more intimate knowledge than I have, and what he says is worth noting. I have pointed out many times of late the fact that a Fifth

Column is not original with Hitler. One was formed by the Roman Church in this country, and for many years its members have been placed in "key" positions on the Press and in political circles. The number of Roman Catholics and High Churchmen—who are often sighing for a closer union with Rome—given by Mr. Dark is very striking. During the Spanish War the Roman Catholic Church became a staunch supporter of General Franco—responsible for some of the brutalities during the revolution, an avowed Fascist and a supporter of Hitlerism. Mr. Dark cites Douglas Jerrold as calling Franco "a Catholic General Gordon," and says: "It is not unfair to suggest that our futile policy of non-intervention was due in part to the considerable Roman Catholic influence in the Foreign Office." He also says that Lord Halifax was particularly susceptible to its influence. And with regard to the Papal treatment of Germany after its destruction of Poland, he suggests—as we have done on several occasions—that the Pope ought to have used his "spiritual" weapon of excommunication. But the Papacy, with the "Italian jackal," to use Churchill's phrase—a phrase that has been used by others of late—did all it could to keep the "jackal" in power, particularly with regard to both Abyssinia and Spain. There is also a reminder of the great power of the Catholic Church in France, and those who have done so much to sell their country to Germany as they helped to sell the revolutionary Spaniards. Laval is a very strong Roman Catholic; and it will be remembered that there was a private plan—or plot—between Laval and Sir Samuel Hoare to hand over Abyssinia to Mussolini: a plan of which our honest Baldwin knew or professed to know nothing. As Mr. Dark reminds us, the Church in France is the Roman Church. The French "Right" is avowedly Catholic; and the Church is well served by the French Press. Altogether, whatever may be the quality and strength of other "dark forces," the manœuvring of the Roman Church against a better world that must of necessity rob the Church of much of its power and wealth is very observable.

But it will not do to assume that it was only the High Church group and the Roman Catholics whose vision was—we will be gracious and call it "distorted"—by the influence of their religion. Mr. Dark does not suggest this. He points out that we had the Buchman Group Movement, the founder of which publicly thanked God for Hitler, and which has been accused in America of Fifth Column activity; and Mr. Dark deals with the "subtle" propaganda which has been carried on by many American religious newspapers and "certain American priests." Of course, there have been Christians on the other side, both here and elsewhere. That is what a Freethinker would expect; but it is very puzzling to men like Mr. Dark, who take their religion very seriously—so seriously that they can never really hope to understand it. For religion never ought to be taken seriously: except in the sense that a psychologist takes mental phenomena seriously, whatever the character of those phenomena may be; or the way in which an anthropologist takes the vagaries of the human mind as exhibited in connection with religion; or as the student of social or political history studies the reaction of religious belief on social life. But when a man takes his religion as seriously as does Mr. Dark he is almost certain to come to wrong conclusions; the more regrettable when there is an obviously earnest attempt to convert religion into what it never was and never will be. Then we get misunderstood premises, wasted effort and wrong conclusions.

One cannot get far away from Russia in these days, and I refer to it here merely to point a moral—even if it does not, to a Christian, adorn a tale. For over 20 years we have been deafened with the accounts

of Russian brutality, of the discontent of the Russian people with their Government, of the iron hand necessary to keep them down, of their incapacity as mechanics, and of their utter worthlessness as soldiers. Above all, there was a very general—not quite unanimous—cry of "no friendly alliance with Atheist Russia."

But war has done what facts could not do so long as we continued at peace. Russia has complied with the test of national greatness that centuries of social life, mainly Christian, have evolved. Russia has not only shown itself able to conduct a war, but to fight with a determination, a skill, an intelligence, a devotion to their leaders, who, curiously, stand in their estimation as symbols of all they value most; to make machinery which has actually improved on that made by Christian countries.

Mr. Dark makes many appeals to the Christian Churches and to the Christian communities in this country; and he still appears to believe that if we wish for a better world it is a case of the Churches or nothing. He appears to be under the delusion that unless we can reform the Christian Churches, while still keeping them Christian, and change the outlook of individual Christians, a desirable state of society cannot exist.

That is, of course, a very common belief. It is the theme of all parsons—High Church, Low Church, or the in-between Churches—as it is also the sole theme of the curious collection of preachers that the B.B.C. has fathered. But it is radically untrue; it is demonstrably false. If we are so short of water that we must somehow or other get the moisture out of mud, we don't swallow the grit. What we do is to boil it and condense it, or put it through some process by which we get pure water from the undrinkable mixture with which we started.

Now, if Mr. Dark had not spent so much of his life with religion, and wasted many years on a High Church newspaper, he would have seen that this really is the problem now before the world. It is not that of cultivating dependence upon a Christian Church, or any other Church, so far as any Church stands for the belief in supernaturalism. It is rather to perform something that is akin to our extracting pure water from liquid mud. The task before us all is to make clear that whatever good has been done by men and women *through* the Churches has been a very costly proceeding. It is the method of burning down a house every time one feels inclined to have some roast pig. What must be done is to retrieve the energy and intelligence wasted on religion and apply them to the task of making human society better than it is—better, perhaps, than the majority deem possible.

But Mr. Dark, liberated as he is from "subjection to an unintelligent employer, is yet in bondage to that unintelligent person's main mental outlook. I will deal with this next week. CHAPMAN COHEN

## THE CHURCH AND THE CHILD

CHILDLIKE simplicity is not merely a supposedly spiritual value. It springs, like most values, from a material basis. For Christianity is essentially a religion for simple folk (and sharp ones capitalising on simplicity), and the simpler they are the more successful Christianity is likely to be. But war, with its glaring contradictions, sharpens the senses of all but the most dull-witted, and it is almost pathetic to see an alarmed clergy, fearful of the loss of their livings, trying to meet the situation by clamouring for a return to simplicity and the "Christian tradition."

According to them, all modern wars have resulted from the loss of the beautiful simplicity of childhood and the acceptance of a sensuality untaxed, and therefore not sanctioned, by the Churches. It is a singular confession of futility, since the whole Christian era has been marked by

warfare and ferocious bloodshed, while even "modern wars" have been frequent for several generations—but simple Christians are not expected to think logically. They are expected to become fearful, to try to save their skins and appease a wrathful deity by scurrying back to the Churches. And those who are not fearful enough, or in whom a few seeds of criticism have been sown, must be lassoed and whipped back to the fold, with the aid of every force that vested interests can command.

So this war is naively presented as the result of godlessness in general and of the Nazis in particular. Fascism is not an inevitable development of the philosophy of expansion at the other fellow's expense, but punishment for the retreat from God. And as Nazi paganism is greater than ours, they will, in God's good time, succumb to those who are fighting for a Christian democracy. It is a little unfortunate that the Soviets, who acknowledge no gods at all, should be standing up so well to their aggressors. But the ways of Providence are inscrutable, and it would seem, after all, that the Russians have "God in their hearts."

The road to victory and lasting peace is accordingly clear. We must make sure that we are more godful than the Germans on a scale that will be impressive in heaven. At the moment God is on our side, but only because we have not strayed so far from him as the Germans. We should remember that he does not regard us with an altogether approving eye, and it is just possible that he might use the Nazis to punish us, in accordance with a technique of which he has had very long experience. Prayer and faith, then, will bring victory. Of course, this does not mean that we must throw down our arms and pray, for God, being a practical person, helps those who help themselves. We must fight on, but we must fight with the light of Christian faith in our eyes.

And everything which interferes with this tactic must be eliminated. We must keep our heads about Russia. They appear to have God in their hearts, but we must refuse to be intimate with them until they also have God on their lips. We will play their national anthem, but only when they change it to a hymn of hate. We will let our soldiers fraternise with theirs, but only when they can all kneel down together and pray to God and Big Business for victory. We will declare ourselves their unqualified allies, but only when the bishops are satisfied that they will declare their faith in Christ and Democracy instead of Stalin and the people's will. Meanwhile, we shall watch their efforts with active sympathy, for even heathens can on occasions be on the right side, and Christians are friendly towards all who help their cause.

Nearer home we must tighten up the machinery for obedience to the Lord. Perhaps the Churches have not, they modestly admit, kept pace with progress. They might not have done all they should have done to bring the bright fruits of piety to all. They have even quarrelled among themselves. But all that is changed now. Adversity has united them. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself notes a remarkable "new measure of agreement between Christian Communions in this country." And this united front is going to take the dullness and petty sectarianism out of religion. The Churches are going to keep pace with the times. They are going gay. They will give us brighter services and compete with the cinemas in providing entertainment. They will tackle social problems. They will feed the hungry and clothe the naked and allow the bombed-out to rest awhile in the houses of the Father. They will lay the true foundations for a New Britain—at a price.

Unfortunately activities among adults are not enough. The "canker" of materialism and freethinking has eaten too deeply into the souls of an errant flock. Salvation can only be assured through their children. They will be won over by the charming piety of their little ones. Besides the New Britain of to-morrow will be built by the young Britain of to-day. Let us make sure that they will build aright on sound Christian principles. It is a problem, but it can be solved, according to the Bishop of Portsmouth. By the "development of the religious instincts of the young." There has been too much shilly-shallying about this in the past.

The Portsmouth "Evening News," taking its cue from its bishop, enlarges the point with forceful rhetoric. "The Duke of Wellington—the Iron Duke of Wellington—once said: 'Educate men without religion and you make them

but clever devils,' and there is a terrible significance in these words to-day, when we can see so many results from eating of a tree of knowledge that gives no sense of right or wrong, but only increases power to do evil. . . . In the last few years a pagan England has been growing up around us, indifferent parents letting children start life without any idea of the soul and its duty towards God and its neighbour, with a total lack of reverence and respect, and with no anchorage in life's stormy seas of trial and trouble. The war is making a good many people realise how far we have drifted, and there is an increasing recognition of the fact that one of the big, first-class reforms that must be undertaken as soon as the winning of the war permits is the reform of our national system of education and the reinfusion into it of that religious element which alone can build personal character."

In fact, it would be Christian folly to wait till the winning of the war. "The true V for Victory campaign," according to the Vicar of Basford, "is surely the bringing back of the world to its Creator and the substitution of true and eternal values for those that are false." Let the Churches get on with their biggest reform while other enthusiasts are chalking V's on the shutters of the world. After all, the most serious choice before Britain to-day, we are assured by a pamphlet on Christian Education recently issued by the Council of the Christian Education Movement, with the approval of the Archbishops and the Free Church Federal Council, is "a choice between two conflicting and contradictory estimates of human nature—one regarding man as a creature of this world, finding the satisfaction of his nature in obedience to state-loyalties and the enjoyment of state-rewards, the other regarding him as a child of God with spiritual endowments which demand both training and freedom of expression. For the Christian there is no choice. Education is from top to bottom religious, or it is not education."

The first choice might have been better stated, but that is not the object of the pamphlet. Freethinkers will see it as the choice to regard men as creatures of this world, capable of using their store of knowledge to build up the philosophy and practice of the good life, of substituting harmony and mutual respect for strife and hatred, and of finding satisfaction in obedience to human loyalties and enjoyment in the release of creative impulses which the making of a new world order offers. But for the Christian the fear of God is indeed the beginning of all wisdom. He, poor fellow, has no choice. The epic story of centuries of struggle to bring man to the full nobility of his stature must remain to him a hidden book. Science should, of course, be greeted by Church people as the Headmaster of Winchester put it in a recent address, because it "only shows the greatness of the Creator"—a Church-sanctioned science to which most scientists themselves are strangers.

So the Churches are waging an insidious war on the home front which will plunge this country further into the sewers of superstition for generations if it is successful. They have organised a great drive for compulsory religious education and observances in all the schools, accompanied by denial of the parental right to withdraw their children from religious instruction, religious training and tests for teachers and complete clerical supervision. The Archbishops have issued an appeal which has galvanised into action local education authorities, diocesan councils, mothers' unions, good works peddlers and pious newspapers in almost every borough. Their efforts form the background for a deputation on Christian teaching in elementary schools, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, which is being received by the President of the Board of Education as we write (August 15).

The possible effects of this propaganda are so grave that even liberal Christians, disturbed chiefly by the prospect of an extra burden on taxation, view them with alarm. Their case is well put by Mr. H. Garratt in a letter to the "Evening Sentinel," Hanley. "Elementary Council schools," he writes, "were never intended to be a source of religious instruction, and must not be allowed to assume such a duty. By its adoption the memorandum transfers, at the ratepayers' expense, to the day schools, a duty in regard to which the Church itself has no cause to be proud. Ratepayers have the right to expect that their money shall be used, and the whole time of teachers spent, in the teaching only of such subjects as are of material value to the child in his post-school days, and that religious

instruction shall be the sole duty of the body concerned—namely, the Church.”

Such dissenting voices are encouraging, but they have not prevented local educational authorities from passing their memoranda on religious education. They are staging a “blitzkrieg” which will overwhelm us if the opposition is not led and stiffened by Freethinkers. We should state our views in general, and the case for secular education in particular, wherever it might do some good. We should talk wherever we can get a hearing. Our speakers should range up and down the country giving lectures and holding debates. We should get the question taken up in the House of Commons and reopened in our local boroughs. We should write letters, and keep on writing letters, not only in the metropolitan and provincial Press, but to our local newspapers as well. We should meet and expose this new attack on liberty of thought with determination, as it would have been met and exposed in the days of Bradlaugh and Ingersoll. And, naturally, we should organise a fund to defray the cost of the campaign. All these things form an urgent duty for Freethinkers throughout Britain. It would be a tragedy if we neglect it.

CEDRIC DOVER

### A TOTALITARIAN NURSERY

BEFORE the last war, Sir Thomas Beecham was instrumental in bringing to London a Russian company for the performance, at Drury Lane Theatre, of Russian National Opera, little known to the opera world here. It was also, I believe, the occasion of the London debut of Chaliapin in the title rôle of “Boris Godounov.” Incidents from his career as Tsar (1598-1605) are the subject of a work of great dramatic force and interest.

Fedor, son of Ivan the Terrible, was feeble-minded and the *duma* of Boyars (nobles) had elected Boris, his brother-in-law, as Regent. He had Fedor banished, and on his death, in 1598, was elected Tsar. He does not figure as a popular ruler, and is charged with the death of the younger son, Dmitri. A Pretender to the throne gave himself out in Poland as this Dmitri, still alive, and gathered enough support and force to make a bid for power. In advancing to meet him, Boris died, and his rival was successful in gaining the vacant throne. But he did not hold it for long; and went the way that other pretenders have trodden.

Recently I came across, in translation, an account of Muscovy at this time by a Persian traveller. He was on an embassy to Europe to solicit aid for his Government against the formidable Ottoman power, then threatening Europe. After reaching Spain he became a convert to Catholicism, which precluded his return, and there published an account of his journey and experiences. He is careful to asseverate his probity and truthfulness, while his book contains also chapters on Persian history and affairs. This Russian presentation has a certain significance at the present juncture. He states\* :—

“Muscovy covers 3,000 miles from north to south, and in breadth extends to 1,500 miles. . . . The Grand Duke (or Tsar) is extremely rich, for he is lord of both the lives and goods of all his subjects, to do therewith at his will; and they all serve and worship him. He allows no schools or universities in his kingdom, in order—as he says—that no one may come to know all that he himself knows; and hence no one of his Presidents, Governors or Secretaries of State can know more than what the Grand Duke wishes him to know of his affairs. No one is allowed to call in any physician who is a foreigner to cure him; and no one, under pain of death, may leave Muscovy to go into any foreign country lest he should get into communication with other folk and learn better. There are neither paupers nor thieves in Muscovy—to the first, abundant food will always be given at any time, and to the last, imprisonment for life is adjudged. And no one is put to death for any crime, for he who would elsewhere be capitally condemned, here is given life imprisonment. Thus, the man who committed a crime has no chance of committing a second, for he is, so to speak, buried alive in his cell. In matters of religion these Muscovites are very attentive to their Church. There are no books other than the Gospels and Lives of the Saints,

and all the people go hung about with crosses. When a man enters a church he will first kiss the ground, and in his right hand he will carry an image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the palace, over the throne or chair of the Grand Duke, placed so as to appear above his head, there is always set the image of Our Lady, mitred and with a staff, and wearing vestments like those of a Bishop, and on her fingers are many rings.”

The embassy was received with military honours on entering the capital, and well treated by the Court. He is much impressed by the country's resources, military arsenals and the royal treasury. Of the capital and his reception by the Tsar, he relates :—

“The capital is called Moscow, and it is very populous. From its name comes that of the dukedom, Muscovy, and the name itself is derived from the River Moscova, which runs by and waters Moscow. . . . Its population I reckon to number 80,000 householders (or 360,000 souls) and more. These, too, live in detached dwellings, with storehouses and sheds, and hence the space of ground occupied by the people is more than otherwise would be needful. Indeed, the area of occupation appeared to me to embrace a circumference and circuit of at least three leagues and perhaps more. The city, however, is not walled and stands in an open country, and its defences are the marshes, streams and lagoons which intersect and surround it. The great Palace (of the Kremlin) alone is walled, and this is so extensive that it is itself in truth a fair-sized city. The Palace (and outer wall) is all built of stone and beautifully constructed, more especially the royal quarters, which are planned in the Italian fashion. The Kremlin is so large that all the nobles who personally serve the Duke live within its circuit. I do not, indeed, know the sum total of those who inhabit the precincts, but the houses seen within the walls are counted to be over 6,000 in number, built of wood. . . . There are a great number of churches within the Citadel circuit, and in the biggest church is an immense bell, which they struck that we might hear its wondrous sound.

“In the reception hall were 500 Gentlemen of the Court, all dressed in robes of brocade lined with marten fur, wearing caps set with many precious stones, and their garments were all sewn over with jewels of incredible value. These gentlemen received us very courteously and conducted us up to the further end of the hall, where the Duke was seated. The hall is so spacious that from the entrance door it is scarcely possible to distinguish what may be going on at the other end. The style of its building is that of the nave or aisle of a church, but much larger, as has been already said. The domes and cupolas forming the ceiling were supported on 40 wooden columns, all gilded over, and these were sculptured with a leaf ornament, and each column was so thick that two men could scarce have compassed it about with outstretched arms. When we reached the upper end of the hall we found here the Grand Duke, and he was seated on a chair raised up on many steps, and this chair was made of massive gold encrusted with precious stones. The Grand Duke was dressed in a robe of cloth of gold, lined with marten fur, clasped by many diamond buttons, and he wore a hat that was shaped like a mitre. In his hand was a sceptre like a pastoral staff, and behind the Duke stood 40 noblemen, each holding a silver staff in his hand, which is the insignia of their office. Further, the Grand Duke carries this sceptre with him when he goes to battle.

When now we had come before him, we all prostrated ourselves, and the special Ambassador from Persia, who was, as before said, accredited to Muscovy, came forward. He was a Persian nobleman of high rank. Then before presentation he kissed the Letter which he bore, and next put it into the hands of his Highness. On this, the Grand Duke rose from his seat and, receiving the letter, kissed it likewise, and then handed it to the interpreter, who forthwith read and translated it into the language of the Russian country. Next our Ambassador who was accredited to Spain advanced and presented his Letter, in which the Grand Duke was besought to give us his favour with fair passage and licence, and this he forthwith promised to do in our behalf.”

There followed a grand banquet; and the promise was duly honoured, the embassy continuing the journey by sea from Archangel.

AUSTEN VERNEY

\*“Relaciones of Don Juan of Persia,” 1604.

## MONTAIGNE AND PASCAL

CANNO MILL, an old English flour mill, on the banks of the river Bownmont, situated in the bottom of a deep basin, the English border of the surrounding Cheviot hills forming the sides of it, a sanctuary of the wild life of the neighbourhood, was hidden, some seventy years ago, by large, beautiful trees.

The approach to the mill led through an avenue of these trees; the deep, slow-flowing river being on one's left, while on one's right a wall of tall fox-gloves and many charming wild flowers covered the base of Kilham Hill. Then, at the last beat—to meet the jolly miller and his dog!—seemed the greatest bliss that tongue o' man could name.

Walking through this Paradise, one fine Sunday morning, I found my old friend Sandy o' that ilk seated under a rugged elm.

"The top of the morning tae ye," said he. "Come and sit doon aside me, man, and listen tae a symphony which Wagner couldna' ha' conducted. Its frequently recurrin' Accidentals wad hae fair scannered (disgusted) him. Yet name o' thim seem oot o' place, be it the plashing o' a trout in the stream, or the drappin' o' a wild duke, intae it. An' the cuckoo is a robust, clear-voiced English cuckoo, worth harkening tae, no like yon weak, meeserable creatur' in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony!"

On Sunday, as evidence that we boys had been in some place of worship, the preacher's text was accepted as a passport entitling us to share in a cold, Calvinistic collation.

Sandy knew of the above, offered to supply a suitable text, and also to preach a sermon "wad I only keep him company." I agreed. The text he tendered me—"What man is there among you, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone" (Matt. vii: 9)—accepted, he settled to deliver his sermon, which I have mostly translated and abbreviated; otherwise it, in form and substance, remains as uttered.

On a few kestrels breaking up our symphony, Sandy fished a well-thumbed volume of Montaigne's essays out of his capacious poacher's pocket and proceeded:—

Montaigne was as a bright star in the blackened firmament of his day. He was every inch a man. He was frank, honest, humble, gentle, a great lover of animals, and one of the wittiest of men. I like to carry this auld copy of his essays aboot wie me. In places like this, where all the air a solemn stillness holds, I take him out o' ma pooch, no to read, but to listen to him talking to me. He thinks his ain thochts and he encourages everyone to do likewise.

Like masel, he goes where he can read what has been written by nae man's hand, and disna need translatin'. He took nae tent o' the forged MSS. of a lot of bigoted, ignorant people that haed naething in their heeds tae write aboot.

Montaigne showed me that skepticism is an absolute necessity. It was the little leaven lying at the root of everything, all our institutions, which would eventually leaven them all. Without skepticism, progress would be impossible.

Pascal said, "Believe and be saved!" Montaigne said, "Doubt and be saved!"

What would have happened if Calvin and Luther had never doubted Roman Catholicism?

To contrast Montaigne and Pascal: Montaigne was born in 1533. He travelled Europe a good deal. He was a keen observer, one who looked quite through the deeds of men. He knew himself. "I had better," says he, "understand myself well in myself than in Cicero. Out of the expression of myself I find sufficient ground to make myself wise." Fully equipped, physically and mentally, for the battle of life, he retired from active labour when 38 years of age and

devoted himself to literary labour until he died, 22 years later, having reached his 60th year.

The precocity of Pascal was his chief characteristic. He was a genius. Born with a soul on fire, consuming itself, always burning artistically but seldom luminously, he was born 1623 and died 1652, in his 29th year.

Pascal died at an age when Montaigne started thinking strenuously, and kept it up for 22 years. Pascal never got time to think for himself.

Thought was Montaigne's concern. Pascal was more concerned with skilfully dressing other people's thoughts than in thinking his own. How he says a thing is always worth considering, but what he says rarely is. Contrast a few of their utterances, three of Pascal, and two of Montaigne:—

*Pascal*: (1) The history of the Church ought properly to be called the history of truth (857).

(2) All religions and sects in the world have had natural reason for a guide (902).

(3) Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction (894).

*Montaigne*: (1) As our birth brought us the birth of all things, so shall our death the end of all things.

(2) There is no road but hath an end; and, if company may solace you, doth not the world go the same way?

Enough has now been said, aw think, to make clear what an interesting study this is to pursue. An' aw hope what seed I hae sown this morning has fallen on good ground.

We will, therefore, conclude this service by singing "The Miller o' Drone," being hymn number 45 in the Knox collection, the first verse only, "appointed to be sung in choirs and places where the people sing":—

There was a miller stoot an' strang,

Fed up on beef an' brose,

Wie a sturdy leg an' shouthers strang,

As we'll ye may suppose.

Wie a whuzzy-buzzy saft an' easy,

As the mill gaed on,

Of a' the millers ere a' saw,

There's none like him in Drone.\*

And now may——" GEORGE WALLACE

## ACID DROPS

IT is a great pity that the feeling against the B.B.C. general policy cannot be organised and so make an effective protest in favour of something better than is now done. Referring to the farcical Brains Trust, "Picture Post" says:—

"People who find the Brains Trust colourless should remember that it works right under the eye of the B.B.C. programme controllers, whose hard-bitten axiom is, "Avoid controversy at all costs, even at the cost of dullness."

Of course, it does not avoid controversy in this matter any more than it does in others. What it does is to deal with controversial matters by tabooing anything that will throw real light on questions of importance. And its selection of the matters talked about are either quite one-sided or made up of subjects that will make educated outsiders conclude that the British people are among the poorest of the European peoples.

The Day of National Prayer has come and gone, and as the results are unrecognisable, why not try the method of the strike? Let all the churches close, and let the notice be plainly given that until such time as God shows himself more attentive to his duty and gives us material help towards winning the war, the churches will all be closed, there will be no religious lessons given to children, and not even private prayers will be said. The "strike" is not a pleasant weapon, but it is an effective one at the right time.

\* Occult reference to this "hymn" may be found in *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. (Work of John Knox, iv. 349.)

The new Minister of Education was very guarded to the deputation, introduced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, that visited him the other day. He said he had sympathy with the "five points"—which boils down to "give us the kids and we will guarantee the congregation." Probably, as British Minister, he dare not confess himself otherwise than he did. But he did point out that the law as it stands does not permit what the Archbishop wants, and new legislation would be necessary. Of course, the Archbishop knew that, and his aim is to get the Education Act amended while the war is attracting most attention. But we fancy the alliance with Russia may serve to put backbone into those who might before that event have been afraid openly to oppose the Churches. It would be monstrous if, under cover of the war, we sold the independence of mind of the young generation in order to further the machinations of the priesthood.

The "Daily Mail," of all papers, suggests that we could convince Russians that the Christian religion is a religion of brotherhood "by a full, frank, open alliance now, and giving every possible assistance in her hour of gallant and agonising heroism." We should have thought that the Russians had given good evidence that they are not the credulous fools the "Daily Mail" appears to think they are. They know quite well that it is only the fact that we are all in the same boat, and that Russia is at least as much help to us as we are to them, that the alliance exists. Up to the present we fancy the weight of benefits received is on our side. What we must do is to make the benefits at least level. And the test of the genuineness of Christian appreciation towards Russia will come when the war is over.

The "Christian World" says that the majority of people in this country are Christians without knowing it. Well, that may be a good excuse for being a Christian but it is a very poor apology. Still, there is always room for improvement.

Vichy is disturbed; not over its control by Germany, but by the result of a questionnaire addressed to French soldiers. It seems that among them there is a "weakening of belief in God and a growth of Materialism." The report says that "the soldiers with whom the priests mingle are almost totally ignorant on religious matters." We take it that this means they were not Roman Catholics, because the report goes on to say that the soldiers "considered Christ a most perfect type of humanity, but few believed in his divinity."

This illustrates what we have always said, namely, that the talk about Jesus the good man is just bunkum ladled out to gull the simple-minded. At bottom, preachers and most of the paid B.B.C. lecturers do not care a brass button for Jesus the ethical teacher. It is Jesus the God they are after, for it is from him that they derive their position and power and pay. No religion was ever founded merely on a good man, but most have made good men just a little less admirable than they would have been in the absence of religion.

"A pilgrim" announces a Roman Catholic visitor, found Lourdes "strangely silent, and yet in all essentials it remains alive." We do not believe it. There are few pilgrims now and the income must have fallen off enormously, and no purely Christian institution can really be alive in the absence of cash—particularly a Roman Catholic one.

There used to be a warning to visitors at the Grotto, "Watch your purses!" Who the visitors had to watch was not stated. In any case, British Christians have no ground for a sneer. There was once a notice to the same effect in St. Paul's Cathedral. We do not know if it is still there.

It is rather curious that not one of our religious preachers, or one of the B.B.C. Christian orators have thought of reminding Christians of the teaching of Jesus Christ to turn one cheek when the other is smitten, and its kindred advice to turn one cheek when the other is smitten. It is the kind of advice in which our Australian soldiers would revel in.

The "Yorkshire Post" says that in the past 40 years the population of York has risen by 40 per cent. But Church attendances have fallen by 15 per cent., and Nonconformists by 40 per cent. The Roman Church claims an increase of 26 per cent., but the basis on which the Roman Church works is very deceptive. But even that does not keep pace with the population.

Still, do the figures, even if reliable, explain the anxiety of the Churches to control the schools? Their hope is that by this means the younger generation may provide some compensation for the loss of adults. But even if the Churches succeeded in getting control of the schools, there is always the outside world to reckon with. The real fight of the Church is with national culture, and this war does not look as though genuine culture will be any more favourable to the Churches after the war than it was before.

Truth will out. The Rector of Barrowden, who is also a director of religious education for the diocese of Peterborough, says, "There is no popular demand for Christian education." We have said this many a time. The movement for religion in the schools is a purely clerical "ramp." It is the clergy who want religious education in the schools because they cannot convince adults of the sanity or the utility of their creed. But if the children can have their pliable minds twisted in the right (wrong) direction, then there is hope for the black army.

The Churches are making all the use they can over the "round robin" on education, signed by members of both Houses of Parliament in favour of placing the clergy in virtual control of the schools. When the numbers are considered, it will be noted that only 17 per cent. of the members signed the document. Bearing in mind the fact that all members were canvassed, and the timidity of members where probable offence may be given to religious organisations, 17 per cent. seems a very small number indeed. Put on one side the clergy, and there is really no spontaneous move for any alteration in the direction of more and stronger religion in the schools than already exists.

The carefulness, and comparative success, with which the Roman Catholic campaign for the conquest of England is conducted may be seen in many directions. On the stage, while we have stupid, or lackadaisical, even semi-criminal characters who are clergymen, they are never Roman Catholic clergymen. These do not appear on the stage, but they are as good, kindly individuals, full of good humour and ready to help anyone and everyone. This is a very telling form of propaganda, something in the nature of fifth column methods, except that the religious character is open and avowed.

Now we see there is to be placed before the public a full-length film dealing with the "Vatican and its story." That should be an interesting film, no doubt, but we are quite certain it will be a dishonest one. Not so much because of what it says, but because of what it will not say or not show. We shall probably get the Popes all pictured as wise, good men, bowed down with the cares of office, with elaborate displays of Roman Catholic Church theatricals, but certainly not a hint of the double-dealing of the Vatican, the real character of many of the Popes, and that, sooner or later, country after country has been, in self-defence, compelled to take steps to curtail the power and privileges of the Roman Church.

We have often been asked, why could we not have a Freethought film? The answer is that a definite attack on religious beliefs would not be tolerated. One of the sins committed by Russia was that it made an attack on the Churches and on religion on the stage. The same policy that shuts anti-religion off "the air," operates in connection with the stage and the cinema. How many theatres would dare to put on the stage a play in which an Atheist was the hero of the peace and a Christian as the villain? The censor would not permit it. We are a free people, provided we do not take our freedom too seriously.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn,  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

M. GOUGH.—Thanks. Shall appear.

T. RAWLINS.—We hope to get a new edition of Mr. Cohen's "Materialism Restated" as soon as possible. But there are great difficulties at present in getting printing done. We are pleased you found the work so helpful. If you had not found it so you probably would not have lost your copy by lending. We have suffered very much from the same habit, but when we have a good book we like to set other people reading it.

A. MOORE.—There is no question anywhere by anyone that the history of the Christian Churches is bespattered with lies and forgeries. We may be giving some illustrations soon.

J. H. TREES.—The lists of religious questions you enclose are very, very silly, and it is hard to say how to clear them out of the brain that has become infected by them. The catechism you send is not intended to be understood, only to be repeated. Most are too stupid for elaborate discussion. Is it really worth while wasting time on such hopeless cases? There are depths of stupidity to which one cannot sink. They may be taken pityingly, but not seriously.

C. R. BRIANCOURT.—We may deal with the situation when possible. What you say can hardly be answered in a line or two.

T. WILLIAMS.—We are pleased to have your appreciation of the articles on Frazer, and note your suggestion that they should be reprinted as a pamphlet. Others have made the same suggestion, but the paper shortage and the increased cost of printing make it inadvisable.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—E. Drabble, 3s.; E. Wright (N.Z.), 17s.; E. Swale, 10s.

*Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Farnival 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.*

*THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.*

*Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.*

### SUGAR PLUMS

COPIES of "Infidel Death-Beds," details of the last moments of famous and notable Freethinkers, by G. W. Boute and A. D. McLaren, pp. 180, cloth 2s. 6d., and "A Grammar of Freethought," by Chapman Cohen, pp. 238, cloth 3s. 6d., have now been received from the binders. It is no commercial push to say that they should be in the library of every Freethinker. The supply of each is running low.

The Bishop of Chelmsford says that with regard to education we have to consider (1) the rights of the parent, (2) the rights of the teacher, (3) the right of children to develop their "religious instinct." The first two do not exist with regard to the child, the second is a foolish and unscientific assumption.

First the parent. So far as the child goes, the parent has no rights. He has only responsibilities and duties. He has rights in the shape of demanding certain conditions for carrying out these duties and responsibilities. That is all. But the Bible has much to say about the duties of children to parents, and nothing as to the duties of parents to children. The rights of children are, in fact, quite a modern discovery. They were born of modern science and enforced by the development of the evolution hypothesis.

The teacher also has no rights against the child. His duty is to see that his job, that of *educating*—not merely instructing—the child, is properly carried out. What he has in the shape of rights is against those around him and "above" him. He has the right to demand that nothing shall be done to interfere with the proper discharge of his duties. The fault of the teacher is that he often mistakes duties for rights and rights for duties. If teachers were to place first their duties to the child, their status would be much higher than it is. But the parsonry has always kept a tight hand on the educational machinery.

The parson, as usual, mistakes status and the desire to perpetuate the control of the medicine man, acquired in those dim, far-away ages when human society was in its infancy, for duties. Hence the invention of a "religious instinct," something that is quite unknown to modern psychology. We may admit an instinct for food, because that is a universal characteristic of all living things. We may admit an instinct generally for self-preservation, for all life exhibits it. But that there is no instinct for religion is demonstrated by the fact that unless it is forced upon a child before it is able to resist the attack, it grows up without religion. The clergy admit this and, with their usual muddle-headedness, take up two contradictory positions at the same time. Their fight is one for parsonic status, parsonic privileges and the perpetuation of the medicine-man regime.

Finally, it is the rights of the child that are important. The child is in the position of a beneficiary to an entailed estate. It has the right to a proper share of the civilisation into which it is born. It has the social right to demand that it shall be permitted to absorb all that is intellectually best around it, just as it has the right to demand food for its physical sustenance. But there is no justification for it being considered a pawn in a game played by a discredited parsonry, where the aim is subservience to set teachings that are no longer believed in by the best brains in modern society, and the perpetuation of a priesthood whose influence for harm is written on every page of modern history.

We were pleased to see the "News-Chronicle" calling attention to what it properly calls the astonishing reticence of the Canadian Prime Minister's speech with regard to Russia. Everything and everyone was mentioned but Russia. Why? Well, the Roman Church is very, very strong in parts of Canada, and other Churches are well entrenched. And although these have had to swallow many of the lies that were in circulation about Russia and religion—or at least place these lies in cold storage until the war is over—they cannot be brought to the point of praising Russia for its efficiency, or against the fact of the devotion of the Russian people to their country and their leaders. And yet there is no question that there are thousands of people in this country who would have been blasted out of existence by now had not Germany had its hands full in Russia. Is there any doubt that if it had been any country other than Russia, Mr. Mackenzie King would not have ignored its existence? And the salient fact to remember is that whatever may be the other forces at work in this country that would treat Russia scurvily, it is religion that provides them with a screen.

Russia is on the carpet and we call attention to a broadcast on the evening of August 24 given by an English lady who had paid many visits to Russia since the revolution. She had nothing but praise for Russian family life, the hospitality displayed, the terms on which the members of the family met, and the kindness generally shown. But all this was of the Russia which Christian malignity but a few years ago filled Press and pulpit with accounts of the complete breakdown of family life under the "Bolsheviks," of the community of wives that was practised, the neglect of children, etc., etc. Why did not the B.B.C. give us this information earlier? It was in the possession of many people in this country who would willingly have corrected the slanders that were being uttered. The B.B.C. is rather late in the field, and it will find it hard to break down the ignorant prejudice which it helped to create.

## HAVELOCK ELLIS

I WAS asked by someone who was well aware of my weakness for bearded old gentlemen what exactly it was which had so long impressed me in the life and work of Havelock Ellis. I was unable at first to give any satisfactory reply. On contemplating the issue, and allowing for the partiality I have for many of the Victorian patriarchs, it seems to me that Ellis's claim to distinction lay mainly in the possession of certain outstanding though by no means obvious qualities. Readers of his "Life" must have been struck by the unique completeness and fulfilment embodied in the frank story he leaves us. And it seems an interesting sidelight on the inevitable necessity for some suffering, some irrevocable mistakes and some remorse, even for those with an understanding of human frailties and a deep appreciation of all that life and love involve as complete as that of Havelock Ellis.

What then, were the qualities which eventually brought Ellis to a serene and enviable old age and left him with as few regrets and complaints as any man who has accepted a resignation to the approach of death, rarely achieved by the most devout Christian.

Ellis's married life was unusual in its interpretation of loyalty and duty. From the days of his engagement to the highly-strung and somewhat unstable girl who became his wife there had been an understanding between them, that as many conventional people succeeded only in maintaining an appearance of felicity which concealed a conflict of personalities and temperaments in close association, come what may, this was not going to happen to them. An attempt was to be made to outlaw jealousy on both sides, and to avoid if possible the soul-killing bitterness which in his pathological studies he had so often deplored amongst conventional couples, and which he attributed to a bondage in association which was neither natural nor healthy. Any fair-minded reader can hardly deny that during the long period in which the couple remained in health, and allowing for the complications inherent in living unconventionally in a conventional world, Mr. and Mrs. Ellis can be said to have lived and loved with an intensity far exceeding the average. Both seemed to have achieved that most delicate art of being able to draw on outside affections and loyalties to the enhancement rather than the detriment of their relations with each other. Havelock's lifelong friendship for Olive Schreiner, unaltered by her marriage and long separation, and Mabel's strange, exotic love for "Lily," for instance, when seen in retrospect, cannot but be regarded as enrichments to the common happiness of both parties, where ordinarily such attachments might be expected to be its undoing? Why?

Because, I think, both Havelock and his wife, each according to their sex and age, possessed qualities which rendered this possible. Not only were these friendships mutually tolerated, but we find each at times interesting themselves in them in a form of vicarious devotion utterly opposed to general experience. Viewed biologically (the most profitable viewpoint in the study of any successful life) the couple seem to have been a happy union of "variants" which distinguished them from others of their species. And who, considering their lives in retrospect, can suggest that such a variation was other than progressive in Nature? though, sadly enough, lost to heredity in the absence of any issue. I have always felt that had Mrs. Ellis borne a child, the only remaining emotional frustrations she ever suffered would have been removed—and the last critic confounded in an effort to attribute some of her intermittent unhappiness to the nature of her married life.

Unlike most men, Ellis had that rare quality of retaining a deep affection indefinitely. Allowing the

vulgarest construction, for which there is no justification, how many men continue to love and honour two women over a period of something like 30 years, and yet retain that fine devotion to their own wives which rings out with such depths in Havelock's account of Mabel's last breakdown? When, for instance, he visited her in the convent hospital and lay for hours on the outside of her coverlet, "like a brother" whilst she drew from his hand the strength to quiet her fevered mind.

Someone recalls a visit to Ellis in his old age. He was at that time living in London alone in a small, plainly-furnished flat. On the wall were five pictures. Over the mantelpiece three portraits, one of his wife, and on either side a photograph of Olive Schreiner and a portrait of James Hinton. On another wall hung an enlarged study of a favourite trout stream somewhere in England. And we are told that this picture was never far from his bedside. In another corner was a picture of "Amy" in the garden of one of his previous homes. Such a collection in the case of many men of his age and circumstances might perchance have evoked comment. Is it an unconscious tribute to Ellis as above all a man who had truly learned the art of life, that few could have uttered it?

And since an estimate of any man must ever include his philosophy, Ellis's quiet acceptance of the beauty and richness of what James Hinton had showed him to be "Life in Nature," must always be regarded as one of the secrets of his success in living. As part of Nature, he found himself fulfilled. As part of Nature, using her courage he was able to survive a period of trial and calumny invoked by his devotion to an unpopular branch of physiology. As an enlightened, perhaps an advanced species of man, he was able in the end to resign himself to dissolution, and to await his recall amidst surroundings of "unutterable beauty" which all his life had constituted his religious background.

Although a great deal of Ellis's writing was in no way concerned with physiology, most people associate him principally with his longest scientific work, which dealt exclusively with sex. And it would not be unnatural to ask, in the circumstances, what lesson, what special finding in the realm of his exhaustive researches into human sexology was applied or appealed to in the orientation of his own life? The question is difficult to answer. But if there were any one special doctrine which might have contributed to the success of his own love life, I think it could be said to be his insistence that sexual love is only in a small part physical amongst enlightened men. That the baser emotions of greed and jealousy are generated principally in this (one only) aspect of relationships, and are only vestigial in the higher loves of higher men. Ellis's pathetic tenderness towards his wife in her last trying mental illness was enacted 20 years after all physical relations between them had ceased. His letters to Olive Schreiner continued with persistent affection long after she was married and was living at the other side of the world. And he tells us of a week-end with "Amy" in Norfolk. "Two free people, sharing rest and Nature," occupying separate rooms and going for long walks.

Is it possible that in the life of Havelock Ellis we have witnessed the working out in practice of something in the art of living, entirely new? Was he an advanced "variant" able with infinite skill to exemplify even with many slips and much self-discipline, a code of personal values as yet only possible in rare cases, but potentially already in the wind of Time?

J. R. STURGE-WHITING

If Italy is your enemy, you must send one or two divisions to hold her; if she is neutral, you must detail three divisions to watch her; if she is your ally, you must send ten divisions to rescue her.—NAPOLEON.



## RELIGION IN THE MELTING POT

"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."—EMERSON.

"The crime of inquiry is one which religion never has forgiven."—SHELLEY.

"Reason is a rebel unto faith."—THOMAS BROWNE.

THE Christian Religion, which is the only form of religion of any importance in this country, is undergoing an entire transformation. The alteration has been taking place so quietly that it appears to have been wrought with the complete unconsciousness of clergy and congregations alike.

The clergy have actually helped this revolution. The attacks of the Freethinkers on the theological balloon are beginning to tell heavily, and the priests are getting nervous, and are throwing out the sandbags in a frantic endeavour to escape. A number of priests have actually persuaded their congregations that "hell" is contrary to centuries of belief, is slightly less monotonous than "heaven," and that everlasting punishment means only an eternity of unpleasantness. So much is this the case that "blood" and "brimstone" are almost eliminated from the vocabulary of the educated clergy, and also of their congregations.

In certain circles undogmatic religionism is the order of the day, and modern Christianity is largely composed of sloppy sentiment in the place of dogma. This dilution of dogma has had its disintegrating effect on all the Churches save only the Roman Catholic. Painful Sabbaths have been replaced by pleasant Sunday afternoons. String bands and soloists have usurped the place of dirges and doleful hymns of yesteryear. Tame Labour Members of Parliament threaten to oust from Christian platforms the once-popular converted burglars and retired policemen. Notories of all kinds share the pulpits with the preachers. This can have but one meaning: it is the secularising of the Christian Religion. Some time since, at a leading London Nonconformist place of worship, a famous actor, and a contributor to "Punch," occupied the pulpit one after the other, to pronounce eulogiums upon a world-renowned Freethinker. The queue of women outside the chapel gave the finishing touch of high comedy. It was magnificent; but it was not Christianity as taught for nineteen centuries. It must have shocked some hard-boiled believers. It was too much like meeting one's pet Pekinese in the form of sausages.

Nor is this all of the horrible story. The Book of Common Prayer is being redecored and reupholstered. Great changes have been made in the hallowed volume. Barbarous and unseemly portions of "The Psalms" have been eliminated, to spare the blushes of young curates and maiden ladies. It has even been suggested that the strong language in the Marriage Service is to be toned down. If this sort of thing goes on, the Holy Bible and the "Sporting Times" will be the only publications in the country untouched by the dainty blue pencil of the censor.

Straws show which way the wind is blowing. The Rev. J. H. Ritson, speaking at the Wesleyan Conference at Liverpool, said the white races of the world and the Christian nations were now dominated by a growing secular view of life. The opposition to Christianity arose not in the non-Christian nations, but in our so-called Christian lands. The disintegration had even spread to certain Eastern religions.

It will be seen that the old orthodoxies of religion become daily of less importance. Nor, in the particular circumstances, is this so entirely surprising. The World War was an object lesson which should have impressed the staunchest defenders of supernaturalism. The war's avalanche of horrors should have shocked all thoughtful men and women, and made them pause whilst reciting the Christian shibboleths. Few, we imagine, would feel inclined to refer to an allegedly Heavenly Father at the moment when the conception implied that Moloch was devouring his own children by the million. Their hands would be less inclined than usual to go up to "that inverted bowl we call the sky."

And, mark you, at this world crisis, who heard the pathetic cry of humanity in anguish? Was it their thorn-crowned Messiah with his thousands of angels, or their Virgin Mary with cohorts of cherubim, who came to succour the unhappy victims of organised wholesale murder? Not at all! Mankind was left to its own resources, and it was to the ready sympathy of other men and women that war's victims had to turn in the bitterest hours of sorrow and disaster.

Such an upheaval brings home to everyone the impotence of Christianity, and the growth and change of ideas. Knowledge has widened in ways never dreamed of in the narrow ecclesiastical philosophy of the Christian religion. New tones have grown into human sentiment. All the lights and shadows of life have shifted, and its whole surface has been dyed in different colours. The Western world is progressing beyond the reach of Oriental ideals of 20 centuries since. They voice different views which men are outgrowing. They can make no direct response to these. At their note their minds and feelings rouse to little movement, except amazement. They come like "the horns of Elfland faintly blowing," and men are beginning to realise that they were meant for other ears than ours, and are but an echo from the far-off days of the Ages of Faith. The conscience of the race is rising about Supernaturalism. Educated people are daily being driven out of the churches.

The whole matter of the conflict between the Freethinkers and the Churches cannot be settled by trumpety revisions of the Bible. Secularism has invaded the Churches, and all the priests of Christendom cannot put the clock back. Priests may pretend that they are sacred persons; they may even threaten those who differ from them. But the younger generation is beginning to realise that a man may be ordained to the Christian ministry, and yet most certainly have never been converted to civilisation.

A story is told of a hard-shell episcopalian minister who resided in an obscure township in Oklahoma, U.S.A. Chatting with a Freethinker, he said: "Thank God! There isn't a solitary Freethinker in my home town—not even one." "Yes!" replied the other, "That's what's wrong with your town. That explains why it is a one-horse show."

MIMNERMUS

(Reprinted.)

## THE COLLAPSE OF FRANCE

SINCE France collapsed in such an unhappy manner last year, many books (some of them weighty tomes) have been written about the events leading up to the military calamity. All of them have stressed the political renegades whose miserable treachery was responsible for the suddenness of the Nazi success, but few have made the whole affair as crystal-clear as Mr. Ilya Ehrenburg, the well-known Soviet journalist, who was present in Paris throughout the period of the terrifying German advance. In his pamphlet, "The Fall of France" (Modern Books; 3d.), he paints a sober and sombre picture of the way in which the French people were misled and betrayed by the powers of the Right.

Now that Britain is officially allied with the Soviet Union, and the British people are filled with admiration for the way in which the Russians are meeting the full weight of Hitler's mechanised army, such a statement of the position of France from twelve to 18 months ago becomes of special topical interest. The feeble Petain, the treacherous Laval, and all the other supposed leaders who were only intent on saving the moneyed interests of the country, are shown in their correct light, and such high dignitaries of the Church as felt disposed to help Nazism rather than French democracy are held up for exhibition and shown forth in their true light.

Of course, in a mere 30-odd pages it is quite impossible for Mr. Ehrenburg to do more than outline the thesis in which he so fervently believes, but it is quite clear that he can give a detailed explanation of the whole affair which carries far more conviction than anything which has been put forward by experienced military and political commentators who have written about the matter in this country.

In all this there is a lesson which we here would do well to bear in mind. The suppression of Communist activity in France, for instance, was not unconnected with the later collapse. Fortunately the fact that the Soviet Union is now with us in the war against Hitlerism prevents the appearance of a similar policy here—but there are many in Britain who would welcome, even now, an anti-Communist line. We are fighting for freedom, we are told, and we must allow freedom to develop here. That is the lesson of France which Mr. Ehrenburg so well underlines. Everyone who can afford to spend 3d. on a pamphlet will find it well spent on "The Fall of France."

S. H.

## PROPAGANDA, HATE AND WAR

THE Litany runs, "From all hate, envy and uncharitableness Good Lord, deliver us." To which may be added, "propaganda and all its wiles."

Shakespeare's knowledge of human weaknesses was profound, and he knew how easily and disastrously these feelings could be exploited. In "Julius Cæsar," after Marullus had harangued the Roman mob, Flavius, another tribune, remarks: "See whether their basest metal be not moved." Moved to what? Later in the same tragedy, Marc Antony refers to the power of speech to "stir men's blood" so that "even the stones would rise and mutiny." Shylock, in the "Merchant of Venice," asks, "Hates any man the thing he would not kill?" In another play, King John, by instigating Hubert to murder Prince Arthur, demonstrates the power of suggestion borne of hate and, incidentally, answers Shylock's query. Hamlet, remarking on an actor's indifferent display, says, in effect, "What if he had the motive and cue for passion that I have?" The answer is supplied in yet another tragedy. King Lear's terrible denunciation and curses on his faithless daughter's actions show the extent of passion in a play which abounds with hate and revenge. Finally, it may be seen in "Othello" how terrible is the power of suggestion when used to arouse jealousy. Othello, the simple soldier, is no match for the wily Iago, and poor Desdemona pays the penalty.

The power of suggestion is a power to be wondered at in the propaganda departments of all the nations at present waging war. Listen to them playing on the passions of the people to "see whether their basest metal be not moved" so as to "rise and mutiny." A never-ending stream of vituperation, abuse and hate flows from dozens of transmitters throughout the world. Lies, "gross as a mountain, open, palpable," come so frequently that it is not possible to count, analyse or refute them. Listeners, overwhelmed by prejudice and swamped in credulity, become mentally submerged in a welter of "words, words, words."

The world is like a volcano in eruption. The lava stream of propaganda feeds the fires already burning, and destroys the innocent as well as the guilty in one vast holocaust.

Hate is the flywheel in the human machine of passion. It is the culminating power and force of a combination of smaller wheels and cogs which may be termed envy, greed, revenge, malice, jealousy, cupidity, among other operating factors. This pretty instrument in war time is continually running, and is admirably adapted to the needs of the war machine, that monster of iniquity, that vast complex iron monster, now engaged in crushing, tearing and pounding millions and millions of helpless individuals. As war continues, this horrible machine whirs more hideously, relentlessly, remorselessly and inexorably, and who shall escape from its path?

Victor Hugo said that there are occasions when night is not so black as man, and that hate can be as strong as love. Byron leans to this latter statement in the following poem:—

"But love itself could never pant  
For all that Beauty sighs to grant  
With half the fervour hate bestows  
Upon the last embrace of foes."

It has been said that it is easier to fight than to think. Is it easier to hate than to love? Perish the thought!

S. GORDON HOGG

## A BOOK OF THOMAS BURKE

MANY readers (even, on occasion, readers of these pages, I regret to say) have been heard to utter the opinion that fiction—all fiction, mark you—is pernicious stuff, brain-clogging matter which no one who respects his mind will have any truck with. Now I hold this to be a sadly mistaken attitude to take up, feeling that a man whose philosophy has no room for the works of Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and John Galsworthy—ay, and Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie—has selected an unsatisfactory and unsatisfying philosophy. Works of fiction should be made to play their part in the general cultural development of an individual or a nation. The fact that over a period of some years Edgar Wallace was the most popular writer in Great Britain (possibly in the world) is a fact of some social importance, which those unacquainted with that gentleman's work cannot fully appreciate.

Similarly, the work of Mr. Thomas Burke merits far more attention than it has hitherto received, though Mr. Burke is far more of an artist and far less of a social phenomenon than was Edgar Wallace. In "Limchouse Nights" Mr. Burke wrote one book which went home to the hearts of the more sentimental section of the British public—and yet he has written many better and more striking novels. Especially in his interpretation of the streets of London is Mr. Burke noteworthy, and in his newest novel, entitled "Victorian Grottesque" (Jenkins, 7s. 6d.), he exhibits his usual acute understanding of the Cockney. It is a study of the mid-Victorian music-hall, the leading characters being typical artists on the music-hall stage of some 50 to 60 years ago. Jimmy Rando, the nearest approach to a "hero" which the book possesses, is not a romantic character, but rather a man whose very success comes from his nervous disposition. The other characters are similarly true to life, even though they may not be delineated according to the "best" traditions of English fiction.

And this, I feel, is where Mr. Burke merits the close attention of every serious thinker. Those with a feeling for the niceties of English style can appreciate the perfection of his prose; but those who realise the falsity of the pseudo-romantic can enjoy a story which is well constructed, smooth and easy without being in any way facile or ordinary. In fact, "Victorian Grottesque" is highly unlikely to be "the novel of the season," as the cant phrase has it—it breaks away from too many of the accepted traditions of the novel which the libraries rejoice to lend. What those "break-aways" are I cannot say here without disclosing too much.

But Freethinkers should, I feel, learn to appreciate the work of one who has invariably struck out a line of his own, never being browbeaten into one classification as a writer. In other words, fellow readers, read Thomas Burke!

S. H.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### A QUESTION OF MORALS

(The following, while unusually lengthy for a letter, is published because it expresses in the main a point of view well expressed, and which is not usually so separated from other aspects of the subject with which it deals.—Ed.)

SIR.—In a conversation I was having recently with a young doctor I happened injudiciously to remark that I was contemplating joining the Anti-Vivisection Society. His whole manner underwent at once a startling transformation. Indeed, if I had said that I was about to join an organisation formed for the sole purpose of snatching new-born infants from their mothers' breasts and flogging them in the public square, he could not have evinced a greater moral disapprobation; and this attitude of his aroused by my innocent intention startled me, I confess, as much as my words had appeared to startle him. I looked at him with the same detachment and interest that I would have regarded someone deriving from a completely different species than myself—this unusually handsome, unusually intelligent young man—brave, honourable and humane (as our human standards go)—and impregnated to the very marrow-bone with the arrogant belief that, because man has raised him-

self from the ape, he is justified in using his power and his cunning to so unbenign an end. Since then I have made it a point to inquire of each person I have encountered his views on this tender subject, and I have found them, with but a few exceptions, in complete accord with those of my young friend—even people with the most compassionate hearts, even sincere officials of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This has puzzled me a great deal, especially as it is no longer considered either comic or altogether discreditable to confess oneself a vegetarian. And yet, though I am not an eater of flesh myself, I can better understand the killing of animals for food than this other more dainty traffic; yes, and even killing for sport, which, barbaric enough and shocking to any person of sensitive imagination, is yet more related to instinct than is this cold, intellectual, highly commended employment. And it is not because of the suffering inflicted on helpless animals, overwhelming as the proofs of this suffering undoubtedly are, that I base my attack on vivisection, but on the sinister and surprising implications which such an industry hints at. We know that man is not a wholly noble animal—that he grabs, steals, lies, betrays, revenges himself on his enemy without stint or remorse, is cunning, feeble in thought, indolent and timorous in all that requires independent judgment—his loquacity aimless, venomous, pompous and very wearisome—a member of a singular species which, unable to face the possibility of its own annihilation, yet employs all its brief sunlight hours on this fair globe, all its deft and gracious faculties, in devising methods more and more diabolic in circumstances, more and more appalling to bring about the complete extermination of its kind. Yet we have often consoled ourselves by the thought that there have always been in all countries, and even at all epochs, a few men and a few women who, unintimidated by the mob, have continued to use their minds fearlessly, humanely and with the native pride of a sovereign race that accepts the responsibility implied in its higher evolution from that of the other animals. Like a light that flashes in a dark forest, the knowledge that such people exist has fortified our spirits in moments of dismay. And it has not been of our religious leaders that we have thought at such times, but of our men of science. And it is these men who, with their clever brains, have thought out and put into practice this strangely infernal scheme of snatching living creatures from their accustomed environments, and often in a state of extreme terror, inoculating them with poisons, cutting into their blameless flesh, subjecting them to unnamed practices, and in the end, when they no longer serve any "noble" purpose, relegating them, we hope, to that eternal oblivion so distasteful to the clergy for themselves, but not, fortunately, to be denied to cats and dogs and monkeys—and certainly not to guinea-pigs.

I remember when my mind first became occupied with these matters, I was living near a medical laboratory where leeches were bred, this old remedy for certain illnesses being recently revived. I ventured to inquire what became of these little animals after they had sucked the blood of the patient, and the reply I received was, "Oh, we throw them into the fire!" It is, of course, carrying matters a little too far to let one's sympathies become involved in the fate of a leech, though as an old Neapolitan proverb has it, "Every cockroach is beautiful to its mother" (*cogni scaraface' è bel a mama sua*); and to say that life is sacred, wherever manifested, is a patent untruth. But to a person of fastidious nerves there is something peculiarly repugnant in the idea of living creatures, with sensory organs, being bred in glass bottles for the sole purpose of slattening in one short moment of dizzy freedom on polluted human blood, and then being tossed casually to sizzle to their death in a red-hot fire, or it is to be hoped it is red hot. At about this same time I happened to read in a popular magazine, a magazine going into many thousands of prosperous middle-class homes, an article on insomnia. In it the statement occurred that in experimenting with animals it was discovered that "healthy dogs" had died after 14 days of enforced wakefulness and rabbits after 21 days." Apparently this interesting experiment of such vital importance to the human race aroused no distress in the minds of the gentle readers of this highly-esteemed journal; but I could not help wondering what young man, or young woman, in immaculate white uniform, had, after nine good hours of

untroubled slumber, appeared each morning to take over again the task of continuing to prod these luckless animals to a wakefulness becoming more and more agonising to them. Or was there some efficient mechanical contrivance to do this dull routine labour so that these busy scientists could be released to pursue more complicated and important investigations elsewhere?

In reflecting on this refractory topic, I have come to the conclusion that the widespread insensibility surrounding it is due to the following causes. First, the habitual laziness of the human mind that draws back from anything distasteful to its illusions as instinctively as a cat avoids treading on a thistle. Secondly, a very natural desire in human beings to promote any practices accruing to their own advantage, however malefic these practices may be. And thirdly, and this is perhaps the most important reason of all, the childish and uncritical veneration felt by our Western civilisation for men of science. Because science has, with so much patient scrupulosity, so much disinterested zeal, created light where there was darkness, brought order out of chaos, dispersed superstition, advanced civilisation (I make no reference here to culture), human beings become mesmerised into believing that all is well where men of science are banded together. The public give over with child-like docility their individual thinking to these sober, prying, nimble-fingered, pale-visaged supermen, whose brains, in so short a period of time, have achieved the startling *tour de force* of combining the most insidious and degrading savagery with the most impressive proofs of magnanimous and disinterested sacrifice.—Yours, etc.,  
ALYSE GREGORY.

#### RUSSIA AND OURSELVES

SIR,—Apropos this week's "Acid Drops," wherein the "Tablet" is quoted as stating that earnest recommendations are going to Russia that "a change in the Soviet attitude to the Orthodox Church and religion generally would do much to smooth the path of military co-operation," calls to mind the Rev. Sydney Smith's remark. He says: "It is a melancholy thing to see Anglican bishops clothed in soft raiment, lodged in a public place, endowed with a rich portion of other men's industry, using their influence to deepen the ignorance and inflame the fury of their fellow creatures."

By the way, R.C. bishops would be immune, or not guilty of such a charge!—Yours, etc.,  
C. F. BUDGE.

#### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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Edinburgh N.S.S. Branch (The Mound), Sunday: 7-30, Mr. F. SMITHIES.

Enfield (Lanes.), Friday: 7-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Hapton, Thursday: 7-15, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Higham, Tuesday: 7-15, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Bigg Market), Sunday: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Newsham, Wednesday: 6-45, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston and District N.S.S. Branch (Market Place): 7-30, Mr. J. W. BARKER.

Bradford N.S.S. Branch (P.P.U. Rooms, 112, Morley Street): 7-0, Mr. H. L. Searle, "God and Evolution."

##### LONDON

###### Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, Rt. Hon. Lord Snell, "Problems of Post-War Construction."

###### Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11-0, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3-0, Mr. L. EBURY.

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