

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Social Reform and the Church

THE "pathetic fallacy" that runs right through Mr. Dark's book is the vulgar one that a desirable social reconstruction of society can be achieved only through the Church, or Churches. While this is not said in so many words, it is everywhere implied, and without any apparent recognition of the fact that it is this that is challenged by the whole of modern sociology, not merely by Marxian Communism. And unless modern sociology is sheer delusion, religion may be counted as a by-product to be set aside as useless—if not mischievous—so soon as the nature of human development is understood. Mr. Dark's prepossession is, I think, responsible for such statements as: "The final proof of the Nazi's fundamental opposition to Christianity is furnished by the forcible closing of churches as well as universities in Poland." One must be fair even to Nazis, and while the Germans have pursued their ends with a ruthless brutality such as the world has seldom seen, the policy of closing or prohibiting institutions is not "fundamentally" different from that pursued by historical Christianity. Where Christian rule has been strong enough the closing of rival institutions has always been part of Christian policy. One may here remind Mr. Dark that London University was founded to provide an institution where Christian tests were not existent, and between the demand of a profession of specific Christian beliefs as a condition of entering a national institution and closing institutions that are opposed to the Church, the difference is one of degree, not of kind. Moreover, Hitler has never declared war on the Christian Church. He has demanded that the Churches shall not set themselves in antagonism to the Nazi State. In principle, he has many Christian examples for his conduct.

### Moral Leadership and the Church

This obsession that the Church must take the leadership in any satisfactory reorganisation of social life is found in the lament that "the Church has to a great extent lost the power of moral leadership." Now I deny emphatically that the Church has lost "moral leadership." One cannot lose what one has never possessed, and Mr. Dark is striving to create a commanding future for the Church by appealing to a glorious past that has never existed. When did the Church exercise (not claim) a moral leadership? It

could not have been earlier than the fourth century A.D. because before that date the Church was not in power, and until it did achieve political power all that we see of Christianity is a number of quarrelsome Christian sects fighting over theological differences, each sect struggling for leadership with a ferocity and an intolerance that disgusted the pagan world.

Did the Church exercise moral leadership between the time of Constantine and the Reformation? Hardly. Making full allowance for exceptional individuals—who owed their greatness more to the poverty of their surroundings than to aught else, no one can claim honestly that from the time of Constantine to the Reformation the Church occupied a position of what we understand as moral leadership. Recognition of normal moral activities had to be made by the Church, as is the case with all institutions, but the specific qualities which the Christian Church stressed were not fundamentally different from that which Nazism stresses today. A substitution of the State for the Church offers no difference in kind, so far as morality is concerned. Readers of ecclesiastical history will bear me out here, and those who wish for further evidence may find it in plenty in Dr. Coulton's "Five Centuries of Religion," and for the special development of Roman Catholic lying, to Coulton's smaller works on "Romanism and Truth," always bearing in mind that, other things equal, Protestants have never been far behind their Roman Catholic brethren in the practice of lying for the greater glory of God.

And after the Reformation! What then? Can we say that at any time during the history of the English Church it has truly possessed moral leadership? When did the people really look to the Church for moral guidance? It may be conceded that there was much talk about the duty of Christians to love one another—advice that did not mean and was not intended to mean decency of treatment of non-Christians—but one has only to take the secular writers of the Reformation period to find that the morality of Christians shows little, if any, improvement in the character of the Church—so far as moral leadership existed—over that of Roman Catholic times.

Nor must it be forgotten that the Protestant reformation was mainly a by-product of the Renaissance, and the Renaissance brought back the humanism of the ancient Greek world. Protestantism itself was an offshoot of this revival of antiquity, plus the development of science and art in the more civilised Mohammedan world. This inevitably made for a restriction of clerical power, and invited greater attention to secular affairs—much against the desire of Protestant Churches.

Or let Mr. Dark consider another line of study. Let him take a list of those writers who from the Restoration until to-day have contributed towards the creation of a science of ethics. I do not mean by a science of ethics the mere mouthing of moral platitudes of the "love ye one another" order, nor the ethical vapourings of the hired assassins of a genuine morality such as appear before the B.B.C. microphone. But if Mr. Dark will make out a list of those who may be counted as creators of a theory of ethics he will probably be surprised to find how little Christians have

contributed to this line of development. And here again, as in so many other instances, it is to the men of Pagan Greece that we must go for the beginning of a science of ethics. With them morality was a natural outcome of social life. To the New Testament it is something arbitrarily imposed upon man, an irksome infliction backed up by threats of damnation for disobedience. The common Christian expression "moral restraints" gives in a sentence the Christian idea of morality.

Quite plainly this talk of the benefits the Church either has or can confer on humanity is just cant. The moral leadership of the Church has never existed, it does not exist, it never will exist until Hitler conquers the world and reinstates a Christian Church for the same reasons that Constantine established the Christian Church many centuries ago.

Meanwhile we should be obliged if Mr. Dark would tell us what specific benefits, moral or other, the Church could possibly confer upon us that would not be achieved by men and women without Christianity or any other form of religious belief. These columns are open if he wishes to avail himself of the opportunity. But I offer this in no sanguine spirit. As editor of the "Church Times" Mr. Dark would not probably have been permitted to accept such an invitation, but now the conditions are different. Yet quite candidly I see no evidence in Mr. Dark's book that he has really liberated himself from the bondage of an unscientific religion. He has made a change of pulpits. He has got rid of an "unintelligent employer." I should, for one, be delighted to discover that Mr. Dark had shaken off the shackles of an essentially uncivilised creed.

### A Poisonous Residuum

The fact that Mr. Dark is still in bondage is, I think, shown by his curious criticism of "otherworldliness" and at the same time its acceptance. He repudiates the idea of "otherworldliness" as set forth by Mgr. Knox, although this is what lies at the heart of Christianity. He says he has "no means of estimating the value of the men and women who live out of the world, spending days of strenuous self-denial in meditation and prayer." On the other hand he is a great admirer of St. Francis "the most lovable . . . of the saints who rejoiced in poverty, but only because it enabled him the better to serve the harassed and the hopeless." Granting all the fancy tales that are told about St. Francis (which I for one do not accept), the difference between St. Francis and the nuns is one of form, not of substance. Both were consciously aiming at the same thing—the salvation of their own souls, and the influence of both on the abolition of undeserved poverty and ill-treatment was just nil. In any case, to work with the conscious aim of doing good here to be paid back hereafter is not a very lofty motive. I agree with Mr. Dark that "so long as the Church is unworldly so long will it fail to help the improvement of the world, and will justify the Marxian charge that religion is the opium of the people." But I must insist that when the Church ceases to be "unworldly"—in theory—it will cease to be Christian.

An unconscious admission of his own bias, and of the fact that he is still under the influence of the anti-social theory that society can be saved only by the Church acting as no Christian Church could act so long as it based itself on the Christian motive, is contained in the following concerning the youth of to-day. He says:—

"I am fearful of the younger generation, men and women in their twenties who have lost the English tradition that derives from the Bible."

First of all, what is the English tradition derived from the Bible? The only tradition derived from the Bible that I can think of is the belief in the natural

badness of mankind, codified in the Christian doctrine of the innate sinfulness of human nature, Bible reading and Church going. The last two are of great interest to the parsonry. Without it they are verily a shepherd without sheep. That, however, is a matter of no vital concern to anyone but the clergy. I do not know whether the young people read the Bible less than did their forbears, but I am quite certain they understand it better. The picture of the average household gathering round the fireside while they read or listened to others reading the Bible is sheer fantasy. It never existed save as an incident here and there. The innate sinfulness of man is, nowadays, an insult to our intelligence and has nothing better to rest on than the mythology of the Bible and the New Testament. If these things represent those which the youth of to-day are without, the better for them, and the better for the country at large.

But I do protest very strongly against Mr. Dark slandering the younger generation because their interest in the Church has diminished. For it is a slander, and a vile one, to write of the youth of to-day complaining that they have:—

"no appreciation of moral values, or of any sort of moral inhibitions. They are unaffected by social considerations, and not only do they see nothing reprehensible in a man sleeping with his neighbour's wife, but they see nothing wrong in their employer making huge profits and paying sweated wages. They are moral nihilists."

Mr. Dark hardly needed to leave the "Church Times" to say this much. It would have delighted all the crusted tory parsons that are still living, for the untruthfulness and slanderous nature of it is in the true line of Christian tradition. His previous employer, under whom he groaned for 17 years, would certainly have welcomed the larger part of the passage cited, although he might have objected to the statement about sweated labour. For the growth of our factory system, with its slaughter of children, its degradation of young men and women, and the sweating of half-starved workmen to build up the wealth of the commercial and landed aristocracy met with but small opposition from the Church which we are told has *lost its moral leadership!* Its moral leadership consisted in teaching the people to obey their masters and to be content in the condition in which God had placed them.

But it is a sheer slander on the young men and women of to-day to say that they have no appreciation of moral values. Although this, again, is in line of the true Christian tradition.

Old age has its compensations and one of them is that if one is not jaundiced in judgment by Christian prejudice one is able to contrast to-day with yesterday. And I have no hesitation in saying that the young men and women of to-day are cleaner in mind and body than were the young men of, say, two generations ago, when girls were assumed to be without lower limbs and boys ignorant of human procreation. They have not the religious and moral mixture of humbug and dishonesty where sex is concerned that was rife in the early 'eighties. No one is to-day shocked when he discovers that a woman has legs, and if one compares present-day marital cleanliness and dignity with that of, say, the early days of Victorianism, the change is all for the good.

Let me take here also a topical illustration that all may confirm or dispute. I have a clear recollection of a series of our wars dating back to 1880—put aside for the moment the popular superstition that Germany alone is responsible for war. In some of the later wars soldiers were prominent in our streets and in public vehicles, and in the last two wars

prominently so. What has struck me in the present war is that in travels by road, by train, by bus, by meeting soldiers at all times and places, I have in the past two years been struck by the almost complete absence of misbehaviour of any kind. And this concerns those young men whom Mr. Dark, in the intoxication of his newly acquired liberty, says are without an appreciation of moral values or social considerations. And as to their seeing nothing wrong in some men making huge profits and paying sweated wages, I suggest that Mr. Dark forgets for a time his religious beliefs and attends meetings of young workmen. It is they, more than the older men, who are insistent upon having better conditions, and a more equitable share of the country's wealth, and *not* for the supply of meat and drink only.

Mr. Dark has yet to go a long way before he has any justification to be considered a social reformer. His chief anxiety is to see the Church—his Church—holding the post of leadership. But society now is wider in its outlook and opinions than any Church can be. A Church—any Church—low or high or in the middle, is bound to be fundamentally an institution for the perpetuation of superstitions that only a decreasing number can entertain. Like many others Mr. Dark believes that the Church may be reformed until it becomes a useful agent for benefiting society. But once more one may ask, What has the Christian Church to offer that cannot be offered by men and women outside the Church? The only specific thing it has to offer in this direction is the remnants of a decaying superstition—the origin of which is known and its retrogressive tendencies widely appreciated. It is a pity Mr. Dark does not make a complete, a courageous break and have done with it.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE HELLENIC EMPIRE OF THE EAST

WITH the strivings for supremacy among the Greek generals that followed the death of Alexander the Great, the conquests of the Macedonian ruler were absorbed by several claimants. While the Ptolemies established and sustained their rulership of Egypt and its adjacent territories, the Seleneids became the acknowledged kings of Alexander's Asiatic dominions.

In 281 B.C., Seleneus I., already ruler of Iran, Mesopotamia and Syria (lands now of outstanding interest as centres of martial conflict) added to his crown the greater part of Asia Minor, with its Grecian cities dotted on its western shores. Still, like its earlier Persian rulers and the later Alexander and Antigonos, he was seriously incommoded by complex problems practically insoluble.

The possessions of Seleneus and his successors were a medley of many peoples and cultures. Several Iranian and pre-Iranian stocks inhabited the high Iranian plateau. These comprised nomads dwelling in the steppe, shepherds in the highlands, husbandmen, horticulturists and vine-dressers. Also, there were the important urban areas and centres of government; and these formed the eastern region of the Seleneid State which, in the time of the Persian kings, was the centre of their administration over the outlying parts of their dominions. This great province contained a high culture, partly inherited by the Persian monarchs, priesthood and aristocracy; from ancient Elam and Sumera, as well as from Assyrian, Babylonian and Hittite sources. Still, the basis of social and religious life was that of the Iranian communities who stood pre-eminent in the State.

To the south-east of this territory stretched the valleys of the Indus and Ganges Rivers, with their remarkably fine civilisation. In the north-west

appeared the Armenian uplands and the hills and vales of the Caucasus. The central region of the State comprised the departed empires of Babylonia and Assyria; the Syrian cities devoted to caravan commerce; Phœnicia, with its industrial and trading towns situated on the coasts; Palestine, whose shores were an extension of Phœnician activities, while its interior, with its Jewish inhabitants, preserved its primitive callings of shepherding, agriculture and gardening under the blessing of their deity, Yaheveh, and his Jerusalem temple. As Dr. Rostontzeff notes in his fine essay, "The Empire of the Seleneids," "In these dependent regions there was the strangest mixture of old-fashioned Semitic life with the high civilisation of Babylonia and Assyria, Egypt and the Hittites."

Alexander's name and fame fascinated his contemporaries, but his successor, Seleneus I., found it impossible to unite Alexander's Macedonia with his Asiatic possessions. But he persistently pursued the policy of settling Greeks and Macedonians within his State, especially in its central areas. Seleneus's successor, Antiochus I., continued this system of settlement, and by these means greatly strengthened the authority of the Crown. In the view of Rostontzeff, the sagacity of these sovereigns enabled the Graeco-Macedonian administrators to ensure the permanence of the dynasty and its possessions for over 200 years. "They had predecessors in Alexander and Antigonos, but their purpose and the speed with which they carried it were new."

The doctrine of the divine descent of the Seleneids from Apollo was soon promulgated and was made a royal privilege. The divine ancestry of their kings enabled the Greek citizens to voluntarily establish a royal cult. Apparently, Seleneus was honoured as a deity after his death in the cities he had created, and this custom was continued by succeeding kings. At least, in the reign of Antiochus III. there was evidently no Grecian settlement in the Empire in which a divine cult of a departed ruler or the reigning monarch was not celebrated. The forms of adoration and worship seemingly varied from city to city until uniformity was established under Antiochus II., when the divine kingship became a State institution.

So far, the creation of a royal cult led to little interference with the native religions, and the peoples of the Orient were so accustomed to divine rulers that no exception would be taken to an additional deity, with his special priests who celebrated his ritual. Dr. Rostontzeff reminds us that "in Babylonia and throughout Babylonia masses of business documents, almost all concerned with affairs of the temples, show that at this time the temples were living their old life with all its peculiarities, worshipping the ancient gods after the ancient forms and using the offerings of the faithful to support their priests and servants."

At a later stage, however, several cases are recorded in the time of Antiochus III. and his successors when the spoliation of Oriental temples occurred. There was also the plundering and desecration of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. It is suggested that these trespasses may indicate the desire of later Seleneid rulers to vindicate their divine right to the temple treasures: a right descending to them as the anointed guardians of the State. But these stern measures encountered strong opposition, and Antiochus III. was assassinated after his spoliation of Bel's temple at Elam. The Jews also suffered religious persecution.

The realms of the Seleneids had but a brief existence. As the generations passed away, their Empire was steadily driven inwards towards its centre. While the Greek and Macedonian population was steadfastly loyal to its rulers, the various peoples that constituted

the composite State displayed scarcely a modicum of enthusiasm for their Selencid sovereigns. Mere acquiescence to their authority became the customary attitude. This explains the easy manner in which the Empire was gradually disintegrated, and why the central regions of Selencid supremacy, Mesopotamia and Syria, deserted to Aramaean and feudal principles as soon as the central authority and the Selencid army collapsed. Nevertheless, amid this disaster, the Grecian and Macedonian inhabitants unwaveringly adhered to their Selencid sovereigns in their deepest distress.

The political history of Parthia commences about 249 B.C., and the Parthians rapidly wrested a considerable slice of Selencian territory from its former rulers. Bactria then proclaimed its independence, while Cappadocia threw off its allegiance to the Selencids and Armenia broke away. A Syrian conflict then raging prevented the Selencids from asserting their authority, while dynastic troubles intensified the weakness of the State. Warfare was almost ubiquitous for generations throughout the whole Hellenistic world, and this chronic disunion was one of the main causes of the transient life of the three outstanding Hellenistic monarchies, Macedon, Egypt and the Selencid State, which had painfully emerged from the turmoil that succeeded the death of Alexander. But the final overthrow of the Selencid Empire was not due to the Maccabees or even the Parthians, but to the machinations of the risen Roman power which was destined to engulf the remains of the once majestic Greek world. T. F. PALMER

### ON SUPERSTITION

If a reader of this journal were asked to give an example of gross superstition, it is fairly certain that he would cite the Roman Catholic Church. He would point to the folly of any man calling himself the Vicar of Christ, to the institution of the Mass, to the veneration of relics, to the belief in prayer or in miracles, or in such a huge fraud as Lourdes, and to many more examples which this hoary old religion can furnish us with. Devils and angels appear in other religions as well as in Christianity, and the mere belief in such is proof of a sheer superstition which ought to put the most primitive savage to shame.

Thoughts somewhat on these lines came to me when a friend lent me the late Fr. H. Thurston's little work entitled "Superstition." What could a believing Catholic, and a Jesuit at that, say about something which one can fairly claim permeates his religion almost at every point?

Of course, Fr. Thurston was not exactly an ordinary Catholic. He was, indeed, one of the Church's foremost scholars, and any book from his hand would, I knew, be worth reading even if one disagreed with it. I disagree with almost everything the late Mr. Chesterton wrote on religion, but—though he bored me sometimes—he was always worth reading; and that goes for many of the brilliant men and women who, for reasons which I cannot fully understand, threw in their lot as champions of the Church.

Well, I have an idea that the Roman Church will not like Fr. Thurston's book. Make no mistake, of course, he does not plainly attack his Church as such. He is far too clever. "Superstition" has never caused—as far as I know—the controversy raised by Mr. Noyes' book on Voltaire. Yet I doubt whether, even in our most bitter moods, we have published in these columns anything quite as scornful of superstition in general, and of many Roman Catholic ones in particular, as we get from the pen of this member of the Society of Jesus.

His careful analysis of the meaning of the term in the first chapter is excellently done, and the author is never afraid of calling to aid a Freethinker like Edward Clodd, or semi-Freethinkers like Andrew Lang and F. C. Conybeare. There is a wealth of historical information in the chapter describing superstition under the Roman Empire, showing the writer's wide reading; and he certainly makes a point when he claims that Christianity had the most superstitious material to work upon in its early days of conversion, and that even the clergy had to be recruited from this same unpromising material. As Fr. Thurston says:—

"We must, then, be prepared to find that in this soil the superstitions which had long flourished unchecked could not easily be eradicated. Rather, they often grew and multiplied. Some, clearly enough, had their origin in the pagan practices traditional with the race. . . . Others came in the wake of Christianity itself, owing their existence in large measure to the prevalence of extreme credulity and to the lack among the clergy of any critical sense or scientific knowledge."

Blaming the clergy for their lack of critical sense or scientific knowledge proves, I think, that the good Father had little belief in "apostolic succession" or the efficacy of the laying on of the hands of a Christian bishop.

After showing in detail some of the difficulties Christianity had in eradicating "pagan" superstitions, Fr. Thurston finds himself well astride the superstitions that mostly matter—those in his own Church. He commences a chapter on "The Mischief of Credulity" thus:—

"Although a great part of the superstitious beliefs and practices of the Middle Ages had their origin in paganism, it cannot be disputed that much which the reader is disposed to condemn under that head grew up within the Church itself. . . . The ready acceptance of spurious and often preposterous relics, the multiplication of miracles and the disposition to attribute everything unwonted, whether good or bad, to the direct intervention either of God or the devil; the efficacious virtue attached to pilgrimages, extravagant devotions and extreme forms of ascetism; the credit given to what purported to be the revelations made to holy people, whether by our Saviour, His blessed Mother or any of the Saints; the substitution of trial by ordeal for a legal judgment based on evidence—all these things and more . . . have contributed to the impression that the medieval world was ignorant, gullible and foolish to a degree which fully justified the later denunciations of the reformers."

Fr. Thurston then goes on to show how utterly worthless are some of the Holy Relics, and sadly confesses that "there can be no question that a study of medieval relics leaves a deplorable impression of the credulity which prevailed universally even amongst the most eminent and learned of ecclesiastics." This burst of courage in the interest of truth must have made him a little frightened, for in his preface to the volume he felt obliged to add—perhaps his superiors made him—the following little apology:—

"It may be well to add that, when speaking in Chapter IV. of 'the mischief of credulity,' I have no intention of denouncing the veneration of spurious relics as necessarily superstitious. Such relics may be, and in most cases are, exposed and venerated in perfect good faith. God is not offended by a material error inculpably committed."

But, after getting that off his chest, he was forced to add: "But credulity, if unchecked, produces a habit of mind which leads imperceptibly to such gross abuses as illustrated in the chapter referred to." It is easy to see where the hand of the Society of Jesus admonished the writer, and how, directly that hand was withdrawn, truth once again came to the front with the "but." Fr. Thurston, in fact, felt very much what the present writer feels about relics; and even with an eye on the Church he was unable to resist putting down coldly and clearly what he thought about them. I doubt if ever in this journal a more devastating exposure of the whole sorry business has been given.

Of course, Fr. Thurston can poke fun at some of the Reformers who, disbelieving entirely in the superstitions of "buyers and sellers of popish trash," yet would subscribe whole-heartedly to such a particularly stupid one as astrology—and he gives details of the way in which the predictions of Dr. John Dee, for instance, influenced the court of Queen Elizabeth. He also instances the "witch-mania," common to both Catholics and Protestants, as an instance of gross superstition, and gives particulars of many minor ones—such as the spilling of salt—which persist to this day. And it must cause some of us to despair of our moderns when we find that some of them believe that "you must not leave a pair of bellows or a pair of new boots upon the table; otherwise, there will be a fight in the house. You must not make your friend a present of a knife if you do not wish to lose his friendship," and so on. I am quite sure that Fr. Thurston's little book will not be willingly recommended to all and sundry in the Roman faith. It appears to me far too dangerous; indeed, I doubt if he would have got away with less than a boiling in oil in more pious times. But we must be thankful for small mercies; it is a measure at least of some progress that such an exposure of religious superstition could have come at all from one brought up in the Society of Jesus.

H. CUTNER

## ACID DROPS

THE Bishop of Gloucester is to be asked to apologise to the workers in a West Country aircraft factory for statements concerning them made during a service on the Day of National Prayer. How will he do it? The message presumably reached God during the course of the service and went with the rest of the proceedings. Will the Bishop ask God or the recording angel to cancel that particular passage, and, if he does, may it not make the heavenly recording office doubtful of future messages? And if God begins to doubt the veracity of the reports given him by those whom he "called" to his service, who may he trust with confidence? Very humbly we suggest that the angelic recording office should pay some attention to "The Freethinker." It would then realise how very frequently he is fooled by the tales told him by his appointed officials.

The "Universe" is not pleased with our comment that the Roman Catholic person calling himself Bishop of Liverpool has no legal right to do so. It is no more valid than would be the title of Bishop of the Universe. So the "Universe" says, "The Freethinker" foams at the mouth" over the matter. But none foams at the mouth over a joke or a piece of amusing impudence. We merely pointed out a fact. All the "Universe" adds is that there was a Catholic Bishop of Liverpool before there was a Protestant one. That is quite true, and as figures of fun they may both be on the same level. But the distinction is that to-day the Protestant Bishop has a legal claim to his title; the Roman Catholic has none—in this country.

The Pope has sent his blessing to a memorial erected in honour of the Italian soldiers who fell in Spain during

the civil war. There is nothing out of place in this. Mussolini engineered the war (a fact of which the Baldwin Government was well aware) and the Pope gave it his blessing. And the civil war gave Germany an influence in Spain which it still retains.

It was Cardinal Hinsley who said that with regard to God, Russia was as guilty as Mussolini or Hitler, and what she has done should not make Catholics forget "that the ideas on which their (Russia's) State is built are rotten to the core. We can only hope that the pressure of events and war difficulties will cause them to amend." We can only comment by saying that if Russia has done what she has without God, what would she have done with him? Probably have "mucked" the whole thing up. At any rate, the Russian achievements do not compare badly with the religious States that have fallen under Hitler's rule.

Here is the latest war miracle, via the "Daily Express," as told by William Hickey. Two Catholic airmen with another man were adrift in a boat. One, the pilot, was praying all the time. They rowed day after day for nine days, wet, cold, half-starved. At last, when near death's door, they were, after burning all the flares they possessed, rescued by an Iceland ship and taken to land. A story of suffering such as we have often read of late.

Why the ninth day? Well, being a good Catholic, he had offered a nine-day Novena, which involves the saying of a prayer for nine days to some particular saint—usually, we believe, accompanied by the burning of candles or an offering of money to the Church in the name of the saint. The result is striking. The saint was prayed to, she heard, and she acted—but only on the ninth day, when the Novena to "Our Lady" ran out. The arrangement was for nine days, the contract was plain and precise, and "Our Lady" was not to be robbed of the sweet savour of the prayers by saving the men at an earlier date. Nine days was the contract, and for nine days the men were tossed about on the sea, hungry, wet, expecting death at any moment. But Our Lady heard, and the Catholic was saved. So were the others, who prayed not and paid not. And "Our Lady" would have committed a breach of contract had she permitted the men to drown. So the Catholic pilot got what he paid for; the other two were saved for nothing. There is really a moral to this story. And one may find it with a little search.

From the "Daily Mirror" of August 30 from the pen of "Cassandra":—

"We thunder and cry out in indignant rage at religious persecution in Hitler Europe, and we proclaim with all the vehemence we possess that the peoples of the world should be free to worship as their conscience dictates. Now read this: 'All ratings are to attend divine service in Royal Naval Barracks; they will fall in at gangway when piped at 9-45. No one is excused. Any rating not obeying will be taken before the officer of the day.'"

And these men who are driven like sheep to "divine service," whether they wish to be there or not, are the men we never leave off praising! Might not the Government well show their appreciation of the courage and devotion to duty by treating them as grown-up men where religion is concerned? Compulsory attendance, or what at best is semi-compulsory attendance at "divine service," is not more justifiable in the Forces than it is in civil life. And open compulsion is never so destructive of character as compulsion in the name of freedom. Freedom in religion will be the last liberty we shall achieve.

"The Times," by the way, keeps up the pretence that the memorial presented to the Minister of Education has been signed by a "large number" of members of Parliament. The number is 17 per cent. That can hardly be called "large," except by those responsible for a completely dishonest propaganda.

The commander of a village contingent of the Home Guard in Lincolnshire has ordered Lamport Church to be closed and the doors locked when no service is going on. The "Church Times" thinks this a very odd decision, and complains that it deprives parishioners of the opportunity for private devotion. The reason given for closing the church between services is that someone might create panic by ringing the bells, or prevent their being rung in case of an invasion. The "Church Times" thinks this order a very curious one, and hopes it may be cancelled. To us, if precautions must be taken, it is a very sensible one. But to some people anything that interferes with their religion is wrong. Besides, if people wish to have private prayers why cannot they pray at home? Or God might resort to some of the old methods, when by an act of sacrilege one would be struck dead, or paralysed.

By the way, it may be noted that the Pope never denounces Italy—save in very general terms. There must be some kind of an understanding between the Pope and Hinsley.

When the Pope excommunicates Hitler we shall have some evidence that the Papacy is really opposed to Nazism. We have nothing reliable up to the present.

The organising secretary of the Roman Catholic "League for God" says that many are Atheists "because of their ignorance of God." But that seems to be a quite good and sufficient reason. If a man does not know a thing, then he is quite justified in not believing in it. It is only the ardent Christian who begins with "I believe," and then pauses to make enquiries what it is he is supposed to believe and, having found out that God passes all understanding, straightway sets to work explaining what God does and why he does it. But we admit that an organisation run on these lines is justified in calling itself a League for God. And yet when God observes all the intelligent, independent minds going to the Devil, and all the "pudden-headed Wilsons" marching into heaven, he must long for the days before Satan was cast into hell. God who knoweth all things cannot have forgotten the better company he had a long, long time ago.

The Prime Minister has written a formal letter—let us hope it is no more than that—on the "collar the kids" conspiracy that has been organised to give the parsonry control of the schools. The letter was in reply to one from Lord Wolmer. Mr. Churchill expresses the hope that the "unanimity" of the movement will provide a means of ending the religious controversy. The Prime Minister is too sanguine. The conspiracy among the parsons and their backers is a very sectional move, and there are those outside who will keep up the controversy. We hope that the teachers will awaken to the threat to themselves, and that whatever real democratic principle there is in the country may be roused in putting the future of the children in the hands of the clergy and those whom the clergy serve.

We have in our possession a sacred cord of St. Joseph that has been blessed by the Pope. We wonder whether it would be worth while carrying it instead of a gas mask? The only snag in it is that one has to pay for a "Novena" to make it completely effective.

We like a Christian when he is in a gracious state of mind; he is so patronisingly idiotic. A fine sample of this occurs in a letter to the Editor of the "Catholic World" in which the writer says the bitterest type of Atheist does not hate God. We do not know how bitter Atheists are distinguished from sweet ones, but why should an Atheist be expected to hate God? How can a man hate something which he does not believe exists? What he hates is the sight of his fellow humans spending so much energy on a sheer myth. Besides, a level-headed Atheist hates qualities, not individuals. Of course, we decline all responsibility for those who only imagine they are Atheists—that is, who have rejected the belief in a particular kind of God but adopt another God for his general view of life.

With regard to the "Day of Prayer," the Moderator of the Church of Scotland published the information that there is "no endeavour to persuade God to take our side or to change his purposes." Then what the devil are we praying for? If God will do as he intended doing, whether we pray or not, the only reason left for praying is to let God know that the praying ones are with him. That may cheer him up. It is a kind of vote of confidence.

It is apparently impossible for a religious paper to represent anything fairly when it is in the interests of the Churches to distort it. For example, the "Church Times" had occasion to say, "Just as the ancient Athenians welcomed the arrival of any new religious philosopher." The proper expression should have been minus "religious." It was the new philosopher they welcomed, but presumably the writer wished to add the common misstatement that the Athenians were hungering for a new religion, which is a decided misrepresentation of the truth. The last thing that will be moralised with man will be his religion.

Archbishop McDonald (R.C.) is reported in the "Universe" for September 5 as saying unseen companies of angels are battling with our soldiers. That's nothing! In the last war the angels were actually seen fighting—on our side, of course. No self-respecting angel would fight against us. The important thing is: Are they calling for more aeroplanes or will they form an aerial brigade under the order of our General Commanding? These things should be properly arranged.

The French Bishops have issued an appeal to French men and women to be loyal to Petain, which in effect means being loyal to German dictation. In England, Cardinal Hinsley is asking his followers to fight against Hitler. In Italy, the papacy plays the game of keeping on good terms with Mussolini, who is now under the control of Hitler. It looks as though the Roman Church will be on the winning side. The papacy is like a man who backs every horse in the race. He is certain to get the winner.

We have never felt quite so hard against Marshal Petain as some have done. He was a different type of man from the fortune-hunting Laval, who has been without honesty all his life. Neither are we surprised to find Mr. Michael de la Bedoyere writing in the "Catholic Herald," of which paper he is editor, a defence of Petain and describing him as having a sound and traditional French patriotism because, presumably, he contemplated restoring the Roman Catholic religion to the schools, and in other ways re-establishing the Roman Church in France. Anything is good that helps the Roman Church, and everything bad that tends to curtail its power.

The Glasgow Presbytery has protested against the playing of a Sunday cricket match, the proceeds from which was to go to the Central Relief War Fund. What a delicate thing is the Christian conscience. It raises no objection to battles being fought on Sunday, money being earned on Sunday by the profits shown by undertakings that go on seven days each week, but when it comes to a healthy game played to benefit those in need, then the gorges of the ministers rise in protest. Why does not the Presbytery revolt against hiring preachers to work hard on Sunday, and protest to the Lord that he might set an example by preventing the crops growing on Sunday?

Another protest has been made in Glasgow concerning interference with the parsonic industry. This time the protesters consisted of a number of unspecified clergymen, who objected to a review of Glasgow's Civil Defence on the Day of Prayer. The Lord Provost told the deputation that some must work while others pray, which on the face of it looks convincing—to a layman. But the Lord Provost should have remembered that Sunday is the day on which the parsonry meets its supporters; it is also the day on which it makes the collections. And, clearly, if Sunday is the day on which those who pray (officially) depend upon being able to prey on the ones who pay, then to entice the public who pray to stay away, the opportunity of those who prey upon the people who pray have lost their opportunity. Sir Patrick Dolan should reconsider the situation.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

**ENQUIRER.**—The author of "Sin and Society," from which a quotation was recently given in these columns, is E. A. Ross. It was published by Houghton, Mifflin and Co., New York, price one dollar. We do not know of any English edition, but it could be procured through an English publisher.

**E. EMBERSON.**—We have had a number of requests for a reprinting of the articles on Sir James Frazer which appeared in these columns. We may act on the suggestion, but the articles would be rewritten and, if properly done, would serve as a useful guide to the work and the opinions of one of our greatest anthropologists.

**J. H. HUMPHREY.**—There is no immediate fear of "The Freethinker" ceasing to appear as a weekly, although we may presently have to adopt plans that will compel us to restrict the size of the issue. But we are hoping to avoid even this. We are glad to count among those to whom the loss of "The Freethinker" would be felt. The address you require is "The Truth Seeker," 49, Vesey Street, New York, U.S.A.

**H. MURPHY.**—Sorry to hear of the accident to your hand. Hope it will soon be better. Leaflet has been filed for future use. The date would be useful.

**A. YATES.**—Received and shall appear.

**G. N. LEATE.**—No oath is required in a Registry Office marriage. Even the putting on of a ring is a matter of personal taste. There is a simple declaration that the man and woman take each other as husband and wife.

**J. LEA.**—We are not a hard-shell behaviourist, but, like so many other theories, it does emphasise a certain aspect of conduct that deserves notice. We cannot say more here in an answer to your question. It would only lead to misunderstanding. We agree with you as to the contents of the enclosed cutting. Will be noted next week.

**F. J. CORINA.**—Shall appear next week.

**W. E. LEWIS.**—Thanks. We have acted on your suggestion.

**E. POOMBY.**—Mr. Cohen regrets that he really has not the time, at present, to take part in a newspaper correspondence, particularly as the letter might not be inserted. If the editor really wishes to hear the other side he need only ask.

**J. HAWKS.**—It is almost impossible to exaggerate the depths of superstition in which a large number of people in this country are plunged. The circular you send is a good illustration. Also, you may get what you require in "Jesus of Nazareth," by Dr. J. Klausner. The translation, from the Hebrew, is said to be a good one. The book was published in 1925.

**WAR DAMAGE FUND.**—J. O'Connor, £2; W. Distin, £2.

*Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival 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, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.*

## SUGAR PLUMS

THE latest book received from the binders is Mr. Cohen's "Theism and Atheism." This is a careful examination of Theism in all its phases, with an exposition of Atheism. It goes over the whole ground in a concise and decisive manner. The chapter headings will make this quite clear—What is God? The origin of the idea of God. Have we a religious sense? The argument from Causation. The argument from Design. The Disharmonies of Nature. God and Evolution. The Problem of Pain. A question of Prejudice. What is Atheism? Spencer and the Unknowable. Agnosticism. Atheism and Morals. Atheism Inevitable. The work covers over 200 pages. Price 3s. 6d.; by post 3d. extra.

Turning out some old newspaper cuttings the other day we came across some that read rather interestingly now. One, from the "Scotsman" (1938), contains an account of a mass demonstration recalling the people to religion. No overcrowded churches have been reported. "The People" (1938) reports another movement aiming at bringing 250,000 back to the Glasgow churches. All the Churches were co-operating, but the Glasgow churches show no increase of worshippers. It is astonishing how frequently this manoeuvre is tried, and the situation is even worse now than in 1938. The "Tablet"—same year—publishes an account of a great meeting in Budapest addressed by the Cardinal Archbishop, in which he says that "irreligion is not an additional incentive to increased production, and godlessness will not swell profits or increase dividends"—therefore, away with it, says the Archbishop. The "Daily Mail" publishes a protest from the "Roman Catholics in Scotland" against the International Freethought Congress in London. This was the occasion on which Cardinal Hinsley lied so ferociously concerning the Congress, and he and Captain Ramsay were promising terrible things if the Congress was held.

One of the most amusing of these old cuttings is one from the Roman Catholic "Universe" for November 22, 1935. It occurs in the course of a lecture by Lieut.-Colonel O'Gorman, M.D., on a miracle cure in Belgium in 1867. A man had been for years suffering from a "badly broken leg." The medical profession was unable to give him help. So the sufferer went to the Shrine of Our Lady at Oostacker, bathed in the water and "was instantaneously cured." But there was left a big bump. Why? Well, that is where God comes in, for "the bump may be regarded as the signature of God stamping it as his own work." Now that is what ordinary folk would call a real "bumper."

It is quite a pleasant thing to meet with a parson who talks like an ordinary human being. As, for example, the Vicar of Mill End, Rickmansworth, Herts., in a letter to his parishioners:—

"The essence of democracy is that you live and let live, but there is in my mind a suspicion that people with particular bees in their bonnets see glorious opportunities in war time to act as very tricky dictators of how other people must live as they (the dictators) wish. Let us see to it that in our struggle against dictators abroad we do not allow dictators to flourish in our midst.

'C'est la guerre (it's the war): you can do a lot in war time that you can't do in the peace,' was a French excuse in the last war; and so to-day, because we are at war, some people imagine it is a glorious opportunity to slip through reforms, ideas or stunts, which in quieter days would not stand an 'earthly.' If you have a particular axe to grind, now is the time to grind it!

It is all very pretty and some of it very mean. Take this business of racing and beer. The outcry against face meetings is in danger of being made a stunt under the cover of 'wasted petrol.' Throughout it one feels that it is the people who loathe racing who wish to place the embargo on the sport as a war-time necessity.

Now, I am not interested in betting, which is decidedly a mug's game, in which the one who bets doesn't really win in the long run, but you have only to go to a meeting in peace or war to realise that the

majority of those who attend go for a day's outing and honest recreation. They like it and enjoy it, whereas the critic hates and abhors it. Each, then, to his taste, but in all honesty don't attack it for any other reason but the real one," writes the vicar.

"The same is true of beer. The mere mention of a public-house or beer makes some people lose all their maidenly modesty, and the way in which attempts are being made in war time to bring about earlier closing and even shortage of what most people find useful and invigorating, have distinct signs of seeing in the bustle of war time a lovely cover under which to get their own axes ground."

Quite a healthy kind of a note.

We want for reprinting the following pamphlets: "The Mistakes of Moses," by Ingersoll (must be the edition issued by the Pioneer Press); Ingersoll's "What is it worth?"; Chapman Cohen's "Foundations of Religion"; "The Mother of God," by G. W. Foote; "Christianity and Civilisation," by J. W. Draper (Pioneer Press edition); Gerald Massey's "Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ"; Ingersoll's "What is Religion?" and C. Cohen's "God and Evolution." These were destroyed in the raid of May 10. There are many others we shall want later. Perhaps some of our readers can oblige.

We are pleased to announce that week by week we continue to make new subscribers to this journal. Of course, there is no avalanche occurring, but we are making progress in spite of the war—or is it partly because of the war? Anyway, we have written the above to remind our friends that there is always a new reader round the corner. Get him!

Encouraging reports come from Mr. J. T. Brighton of successful meetings in which interest and a readiness to acquire our literature are marked features. Perhaps the best testimony to Mr. Brighton's success is the banding together of a number of clerics for opposition efforts. That is good news indeed and will help us considerably, as the clerics concerned will soon realise. He also manages to put into circulation a quantity of literature which will and must have a permanent influence on those who read it.

A correspondent suggests that whether the doctrines of religion be true or not they do, in fact, act as inspirations to some and as deterrents to those whose propensities must be held in check. With regard to the first point, we need only say that "inspirations," when they come, are based on non-religious grounds, consciously or unconsciously. Man's social propensities for good must, on the whole, overbalance his propensities for evil or society would cease to exist. That some people express these promptings in a religious form is no more than an illustration of the strength of established modes of expression.

## SALVATION FROM SCIENCE

C. H. Waddington: "The Scientific Attitude" (Pelican Books, 1941; 6d.).

DR. WADDINGTON belongs to that younger school of Cambridge biologists who have done so much to enliven enquiry in recent years. This fact alone should secure him a large audience, while many who feel the need of an attitude in these uncertain days will surely spend sixpence to see if he can give them one that is truly scientific.

They will not be disappointed. His writing is fresh and his knowledge wide. He has the equipment to "argue that science can not only solve special technical problems, such as the correct amount of vitamins to have in our bread, but that it has also developed an attitude to the world which makes some things seem valuable and others not; and that these standards of the scientific world cannot be overlooked when the general problem of values is being discussed."

How this has happened, how scientific achievements have permeated every phase of human activity and culture, he shows in some detail. Not only has technological progress changed the daily lives of the bulk of mankind, but basic

research (particularly in biology and physics) has challenged our most cherished beliefs, converting the intelligent few to a more rational way of thought, if not of action, and spreading uneasiness amongst all but the most phlegmatic morons of the many.

Indeed, we are helped to realise fully that "a movement as powerful as science has been in our civilisation is bound to affect, even if unconsciously and at second-hand, the outlook of all those concerned with any aspect of the society's culture. We shall find, in fact, that an examination of recent artistic movements reveals a number of close connections with the scientific attitude of mind. The most constructive artistic outlook of recent times is one which shares very many of the characteristics of the scientific mentality. . . . The best of modern art is compatible only with true science, and a bogus science requires a fake art to keep it company."

This examination is the best part of the book. It reveals the many ways in which science and art have kept company and affected the general culture. For example, the controlled geometrical precision of abstract painting, which suburbanites laugh at, has influenced everyday design much more than they know, though it is most obvious in familiar objects, such as posters, coins and postage stamps. Again, in poetry, scientific imagery, offset by attacks on scientific notions, can be found in an abundance correlated with the scientific knowledge of its time. In the seventeenth century, for instance, when anatomy and physiology were growing up as sciences, we find the reflection of the interest they created in the work (particularly Donne's) of many poets, while in this century the output of the younger poets is almost an index to the advance of mathematics, biology, psychology and the social sciences. Auden is impossible without Freud.

In architecture, itself half science and half art, new materials and new social problems have already created the beginnings of a revolution. "At every turn," as Dr. Waddington says, "the materials he handles and the purposes he handles them for, force the architect into contact with scientific knowledge and scientific ways of thinking." And the influence of new ways of thinking are even more profound than that of new technical possibilities. "Precision, economy, exact finish," as the architect, J. L. Martin, puts it, "are not merely the results of technical limitation. They are the product of artistic selection." The reason for this selection, adds Waddington, is that it fits in "with the scientific spirit, the adoption of which is the basic revolution which has taken place in the world of architecture."

This is true but not true enough. For the adoption of the new attitude has not arisen out of an abstraction called "the scientific spirit," but is essentially linked with new economic needs associated with the rapid advance of industry. In fact, it is one of the major defects of the book that the loose and repeated use of words like "science," "the scientific spirit" and "the scientific attitude" conveys the impression of science as an entity; and the reader keeps wondering if the scientific attitude is that endowed by Science, adopted by the majority of scientists, or merely the wishful thinking of a sensitive minority of scientists unable to face up to the fact that a quantitatively measurable scientific attitude is a function of influencing economic factors. Science is made by scientists, and its attitude can be scientific when it has the consent of the large majority of scientists—a condition only possible in a uniformly socialist society, in which case it would lose its specialised character and become no more than the rational attitude of the population at large.

So, in spite of its achievements, science in our time has failed to be a positive, constructive force. It has not, like all the other cultural activities of our time, gone beyond "wholehearted destruction and tentative reconstruction." And Dr. Waddington feels that "its failure to realise and fulfil its social function is probably the most unfortunate of them all." But how can "science" be accused of failing in its function when science is the collective output of scientists, and scientists are conditioned by the society in which they live? They must react to the various moods, ideas, frustrations and desires of their time. Scientists, therefore, will succeed in their proper function, not only when the immediate limitations of finance and social



opinion are removed, but when the whole structure of society is changed.

Dr. Waddington, of course, appreciated this fact, but he cannot face it without putting his tinted glasses on. Perhaps he thought his readers would respond better to a coloured picture than a stark one, but personally I felt faintly irritated by the spells of confused thinking and symbolic writing to which hedging has led him. He keeps insisting that "science could fill the gap . . . it is only science which has the vigour and the authority of achievement (twelve pages earlier he insisted that it had failed) which is necessary to give that fresh, vivacious *joie de vivre* which captivates men's hearts and minds." But he does not tell us how—at least, not clearly and convincingly.

One agrees that scientists (Dr. Waddington says science) should be full of passion, but what will make middle-class scientists passionate, and how will they disperse the fruits of their passion I could not discover. True, "the task is primarily one of propaganda," but how can they undertake it, even if they wanted to, when scientists—especially those with the scientific attitude—do not control the instruments of propaganda? This thought apparently disturbs Dr. Waddington, for a few pages later on he says bravely that "the economically strongest forces must be challenged and tamed," but he does "not propose" to elaborate the methods of taming or the resulting consequences. He is content to leave us with a somewhat discursive account of the scientific society, a rational (and rationalised) Utopia with a majusculed Science presiding over it as an interfering but benevolent deity.

It is all very understandable. For, as Dr. Waddington confesses, "we have to reckon with a tendency of men to make themselves a super-ego which they can, from time to time when it suits them, believe in with an unreasoning devotion." But men can have "an unreasonable belief in the value of reason." Dr. Waddington undoubtedly has it. Fortunately it has made him write an extremely interesting book that is even more informative than he intended. I recommend it heartily. For Freethinkers it is imperative.

CEDRIC DOVER

## AN IMPROMPTU FEAST OF REASON! (An Experience)

THE men from the engine repair shop were at dinner, when the messroom door opened and the Christian Missionary walked in, carrying a case containing religious papers and tracts.

With a "Let brotherly love continue" attitude, he distributed his "Sunlight on the Hearths" and his "Gospel Messengers," etc., to the assembled workmen.

Most of the men took the papers with indifference, but several accepted them somewhat reluctantly, with half-concealed contempt. It is not surprising that a few of these men did not conceal their contempt for this puerile reading, because some of them read the works of Paine, of the Hammonds, of Perry and of Marx and Engels, while two or three are regular readers of "The Freethinker." Men who often read such books as Dr. Perry's "Children of the Sun" would naturally treat such literary pap with the contempt it deserves.

These papers and tracts are meant mainly for working class consumption. To their intended victims they always assume an air of moral and intellectual superiority. Why the contributors of these papers should adopt this attitude can only be explained—at least, in my opinion—by their colossal conceit. The contents of these papers are, for example, such silly stories as, "The stubborn, ignorant Freethinker becomes converted to Christianity through the moral sweetness of the intellectual, superior Christian maiden."

Other stories take the line of the drunken loafer becoming miraculously changed to the beer-hating, tract-dispensing, text-placard-displaying, Bethel-attending exhibitionist. While the wife-beater is always transformed into the proverbial dove.

The missionary speaks; the men remain silent for a while, until he produced a rare gem from his treasure store. Then several men began speaking at the same time. The gem was, "All Atheists should be put on desert islands to live, to prove how they could survive without divine aid." Of course, the inference was, that some supreme power is responsible for supplying man with all the means of life. The missionary was promptly told that it was quite apparent that the fate of Atheists, or Christians, placed on desert islands could have no possible relationship to their religious belief or disbelief.

It was then suggested by a wit that if the missionary would go to a desert island he would be able, like Owen Glendower, "To call the spirits from the vasty deep"! to his aid. Hotspur's rejoinder quickly came: "But will they come when he does call?"

The missionary, unlike Mr. Micawber, refusing "to leave his country for his country's good" by going to a nice desert island, wriggles quickly away from this unfortunate subject, and turns on the "Freewill tap," and so the old trite phrases stream forth once again into the sink of verbiage.

The conversation and cross-questioning often became quite heated, several workmen joining in the arguments: some asking him to define almost every word he used, others firing very difficult questions at him. But soon his whole army of outworn arguments was annihilated by the charge of an old war horse of the "Clarion" days, whose devastating statements were based on Robert Owen's formula: "The character of Man is formed for him, not by him!"

Someone, at this stage of the repast, recommended, for the mutual improvement of everyone present, Mr. Chapman Cohen's "Determinism and Freewill."

The dinner-time was now almost ended, but before we streamed out of the messroom to resume work, some of us expressed our admiration and gratitude for the Pioneers of Freedom, the fearless champions of the liberty of hand and brain, who defiantly diffused the knowledge of Freethought and manfully declared the necessity of social reform.

THOMAS WILLIAMS

## BRITAIN AND THE SOVIET UNION

SOME "right-wing" sympathisers, as well as some of the more bigoted of the religious critics of Bolshevism, have tried to embitter Anglo-Soviet relations, and even the fact that Britain and Russia are now fighting side by side against Hitlerism is not held to be sufficient to justify a general friendly feeling and a development of fruitful collaboration and co-operation between the two countries. Mr. Victor Gollancz, who has long specialised in the publication of books generally "left" in their tendencies, has now come out with a small book which is of exceeding value at this stage of the war. He is not, as far as I am aware, well known as an author, though he has written one or two political pamphlets previously. Now, in "Russia and Ourselves" (Gollancz; 2s. 6d.), he proves himself to be a journalist of no mean ability. His style is forthright and solid, and he can express his ideas in a manner which is easily followed.

Most striking, perhaps, of all that he has to say is a plea for Christians and non-Christians to co-operate in the advancement of those general aims of freedom and liberty which most of us hold dear. "The Church," he says, "has been responsible for many appalling evils during the course of its history," but he goes on to point out that, whatever the leaders of the Church may do, the rank and file are as solidly on the side of general and economic freedom as anyone outside. As Freethinkers, we know all about the evils which belong to the past, but we must admit that the stand which was made in the early days of Hitlerism by such men as Niemöller is to be admired even by those who cannot share his theological ideas—in other words, we can belong to a "United Front" for certain limited aims with those whose ideas in other spheres are opposed to our own.

This, however, must be mutual. While we reserve the right to criticise theological preconceptions, we must demand that the Churches have no right to condemn the Soviet unheard. Religion and the successful prosecution of the war must be kept entirely separate, and those who combine to support the fight for freedom which now is convulsing the world must realise that they cannot pretend that they are merely fighting for the continuance of their own ideas.

Mr. Gollancz has seen that some kind of economic amelioration must come from the war, no matter whether we call that Socialism or not; and the British Empire, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. will have it in their power at the end of the war to make a happier and a more peaceful world in the future.

One last point deserves mention. Mr. Gollancz emphasises the folly of certain people's talk about punishing Germany as a whole. Those largely responsible for the present war, as he points out, are the Nazi leaders, who deceived the German people into accepting a monstrous tyranny. To punish them would be no more sensible than to punish the people of Britain because they accepted the absurd inanities of the Chamberlain Government.

To sum up, then, Mr. Gollancz has produced a most readable piece of journalism which deserves to be widely read by all who are interested in the trends of modern history—and who is not?

S. H.

## PERFECTION!

A CHRISTIAN friend, in thanking me for my remarks on "Democracy," which appeared recently in this journal, informs me that "human perfection is attainable in this world," and in proof of his assertion quotes Paul's reference "to them that are perfect" (1 Cor. ii. 6).

Whether human perfection be attainable in this life or not, it can, it seems, be overrated theologically, e.g., "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?" (Job xxii. 3).

He also draws my attention, for reasons which he considers justifiable, to Paul's advice—"not to think too highly of yourself than you ought to think; but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to you the measure of faith" (Romans xii. 3).

On picking up my cards when the Lord had finished dealing to me, I found he had omitted to give me Faith—the Joker! So the apostle's advice does not apply to me.

"Be ye perfect, even as your father who is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. v. 41).

Poor advice, my friend! I am a poor sleeper. Due, say thoughtless friends, to a bad conscience. Not exactly! I can be wick without being wicked; and being wick renders deep sleep impossible. But apart from perfection, is deep sleep possible?

As we gradually enter into harmonious relationship with our surroundings, intelligence ceases. In other words, action becomes instinctive when correspondence with the environment becomes perfect, and we become unconscious automatons. God, therefore, a perfect being in perfect correspondence with his environment, must be an unconscious automaton.

And as, like Dogberry, I cannot see why sleeping should offend, why should we, by our bickering, disturb his everlasting rest?

"That man in a state of grace may realise a sinless way of living" has, for many centuries (say, 1141-1941) been believed by many—the Perfecti; the Perfectionists; the Perfectibilists; the Antinomians; the Bible Communists and Free Lovers; the Molinists; the Jansenists; the German Mystics; the English Methodists (see John Wesley's sermons, particularly "Let us go on to perfection"—Heb. vi. 1); even the Presbyterians; all of whom were influenced by this idea. And I am not aware that any of these sects profited by this contact except "the Bible Communists and Free Lovers," of Onneida Creek, U.S.A., who ultimately became "The Onneida Community Limited." O what a falling off was there, my countrymen!

When one becomes a "child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," deadly sin can no longer be indulged in. Venial sin only may be committed. That God's children, and the Elect, can only commit venial sins, is the belief of many yet living.

The noblest dead or a heretic is not pleasing to God. And because it is not done as he willed and commanded partakes of the nature of sin (Art. XIII.).

According to this article, it is admitted that a finite, feeble, little heretic can play the devil with the will and the commands of an infinite, omnipotent God—or is it only the legal god of the Prayer Book?

In Art. XIV. Supererogation is explained. We must do only what duty requires, or is necessary for salvation. Only that and nothing more. Less or more than what is commanded being alike offensive to the High Command.

Whatever sort of liberty we may fight for, and hope with a big stroke of luck to enjoy, here, we must look devoutly forward to a divine theocratic rule hereafter! No freedom in Heaven!

"The consciousness of a possible perfection is the guarantee that perfection will be gained in this world. And the consciousness of an immortal life is proof that an after life will be enjoyed by us in the next world."

But why "enjoyed," my friend? If your God saw fit to make a hell-of-a-world like this for us, don't be too certain that the next world will be all "cakes and ale."

And if all the hereafters man has been conscious of meet with realisation, what a queer, quarrel-fraught future we must look forward to!

So, the above actors, who spent century upon century worrying over the baseless fabric of their visions, whilst selfishly building clock-capped towers, gorgeous palaces and solemn temples—leaving the great globe and all that it inherits to wallow in misery—now think that by sympathising with the only "rack" left behind of this insubstantial pageant faded—the Almighty—that they themselves—his sometime pals!—will be preserved to keep him company:

"All who joy would win  
Must share it—Happiness was born a twin."

—Byron.

"If you suppose that God exists; then you must suppose, he, we believed to care so much for us; if God is such as we believe; or if; Thus it seems clear that if God will exist as eternal spirit after the globe perishes, the human spirits with whom he has entered into communion will also live as undying spirits after the globe has perished."—"Christians in a World at War" (1940); pp. 11-188. Bevan.

To save himself from an eternity of loneliness, therefore God must find happiness in entertaining us—treating us like his returning prodigal sons by killing the four beasts and stuffing them with the four-and-twenty Elders, and otherwise entertaining us; and after supper by taking us into his heavenly canteen, introducing us to Sir John Falstaff and the boys, and finally brewing for all of us pottles of neck-tar! "finely," with which to celebrate the glorious ending of this heavenly drama. FINIS CORONAT OPUS.

GEORGE WALLACE

## A POPULAR FALLACY

IT is a popular fallacy that people in big positions are brainy (else how could they have got where they are? it is asked), that they are possessed of big, broad minds and thus able to detect right from wrong at a glance, and are filled with a desire—or the majority of them are filled with a desire—to see that justice is done to the community at large. But the fact that a man is in an eminent position does not necessarily imply that he is an intellectual giant, and the truth is that from one end of the social scale to the other, men and women are often enough animated by an entirely different spirit—in many cases by an entirely selfish spirit; in some instances self comes first and others later; in a few cases altruism prevails, it is true—and we have to take the world as we find it: very imperfect and therefore capable of vast improvement.

The second fact that we all have to face is that, from the very nature of things, life on this planet could not be different from what it is at the moment. We are what we are, every man jack of us, by virtue of our origin and history—that is to say, by reason of our having come out of the primordial slime and having had to blunder and grope and fight our way all the while—and unless and until we understand man's place in nature we cannot get the affairs of the world—in particular: those things with which we are individually and collectively concerned—in their proper perspective. Our bodies, may in the meantime, have become somewhat purified, though they still retain many evidences of our animal ancestry, but, comparatively speaking, our "minds" have only just evolved, and until there is some sort of agreement among us as to the importance of our mental life, and the necessity for its full and proper cultivation—and that is going to take some time to accomplish!—we shall not make much further headway.

Let us try to get the right angle. Instead of the world being made in six days and we humans—not to mention the non-humans for the moment—having been specially created and planted in a ready-made world, this planet—one of a countless number of planets in the Universe, incidentally—and everything upon it, from maggot to man, has "evolved," has been the subject of slow growth in other words. Very many millions of years ago the sun threw off a piece of its gaseous envelope—or it was torn off by another passing planet—it has gradually cooled, until life became possible upon it. There is general agreement among scientists that natural evolution could—and did—produce the first living things, or as Joseph McCabe puts it: "Inorganic matter slowly developed into organic and this slowly shaped into living things." Books abound on the origin of life and the evolution of mankind, and these may be consulted, if necessary, in proof of what has just been said, but we will assume that the foregoing thumbnail sketch is accepted, for the time being, at any rate.

Taking it for granted, then, that the human race came into being in the manner described—and there is very little doubt about it, really—it is not very difficult to understand, with such a background, how and why the history of mankind has been a history of trial and error, and continual groping in the dark: prehistoric man knew only the law of the jungle, and he followed it; the barbarians were little better, mentally, so there was little improvement in their outlook and procedure; the days of the Patriarchs were days of cruelty and oppression—they treated their slaves like cattle; the Feudal lords, who came next, were one up, so to speak, on the Patriarchs, but only one; and so on all along the line. The onward march has been a slow and halting one. Various economic, political and religious philosophies have been invented and adopted, served their purpose and passed away. In short, the process has been a hard and cruel one, resulting in wholesale slaughter and the survival of the most cunning—those whose wits became sharpened by battle and the struggle for existence.

In the meanwhile, man's mental development has been exceedingly slow—it has obviously lagged far behind his bodily development—and his sense of justice and fair play is much slower still. Indeed, his sense of social justice is something which manifested itself only yesterday, as it were, and his standard of ethical values—the yardstick whereby he will unflinchingly measure himself and his fellow men—has yet to be born. That is why we are in the position we are to-day. We are creatures of a long and painful and blundering past, with the laws of the jungle still embedded in us and our institutions, pulling us earthward, down . . . down . . . down.

During the last few decades we have paid a good deal of attention to our bodily comforts—and met with considerable success in this connection, but we have paid little heed to our mental well-being. Many diseases of the body have been eradicated, but diseases of the mind remain to befog and torment us—in fact, we are only just now beginning to ask ourselves, seriously and scientifically, what "mind" really is! In the past it has been known and described, as "soul," "spirit" and what not, but we are gradually getting nearer the mark. . . .

So, to come back to our starting-point and to sum up: it does not follow that because a man gets to the top of

his profession or the social scale he is exceptionally brainy and full of wisdom of the world. By no means. On the contrary, in respect of everything else but one subject he may be—and often is—profoundly ignorant. He may have got into the position he occupies on his own initiative, and—merely because he knows that one subject thoroughly well; or, alternatively, he may have been jockeyed into the position—where it is secretly hoped and believed that he will be "useful"—because of some family, religious or political ties and influence. The ethics of the matter seldom count. He is what he is and where he is by virtue of his birth and upbringing—using that term in its very widest possible sense: to embrace his age-long evolution and his peculiar physical and mental make-up. That is the long and short of it.

All of which is not to say that nothing can be done about it. On the contrary: there are many gallant, unselfish souls who are doing their utmost, day in and day out, to improve "man's place in nature"—again to quote Huxley—or to put it in another way: to lighten man's burden and make it more congenial. And that in turn—and here's the rub—that makes it obligatory upon we lesser lights to play the game of life as best we can, according to our light and understanding.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN

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## CORRESPONDENCE

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### THE DAY OF PRAYER

SIR,—On the occasion of the recent National Day of Prayer, the old trick of compelling Service men to attend church was tried out again, this time in the A.R.P. At a depot in Middlesex, members of the Ambulance Service were ordered to attend church service and, when one or two objected, were told by the superintendent that "If they were in the Army they would either have to go or do fatigues." The three men who declined in this case, one of whom was an N.C.O., were set to cleaning out cupboards during the time of the service.

Since the A.R.P. is composed of civilian volunteers, this seemed to me a particularly reprehensible piece of dictatorship and quite illegal, particularly in view of the present Army ruling on the subject.—Yours, etc.,

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

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#### Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11-0, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3-30, Mr. L. EBURY.

West London N.S.S. (Hyde Park), Sunday: 6-0, a Lecture.

### COUNTRY

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Blackburn (Market), Sunday: 6-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

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

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. W. BALDIE, "Demonism."

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