

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

Vol. LXI.—No. 39

Sunday, September 28, 1941

Price Threepence

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

THERE appears to be trouble brewing among the parties to the plot for placing the State schools under the practical control of Church and chapel. They are in perfect agreement as to the advisability, even the necessity of seeing to it that when children leave school they shall wear a Christian brand of some sort. But what sort? That is the question, also the danger point. The Roman Catholics will insist on conducting their own schools. All they want is that the State shall undertake the financial responsibility. That leaves us with the Protestant bodies as represented by the established Church and the various nonconformist organisations. And before they have collected the loot they are beginning to quarrel over the share-out. They both agree that the schools shall be saturated with a religious atmosphere, that there shall be an unofficial test for teachers in the shape of making religion a qualifying subject, and also in it being part of the duty of inspectors to see that the religious teaching is efficient. But what kind, or what form of religious instruction is it that must be given? Is it to be denominational or undenominational? That is, is it to be characteristic of the Church of England, or made up of teachings with which both the establishment and the nonconformists agree. There are some among the nonconformists who will stand out against the first, and the Church, for the most part, cannot be content with the second.

It may be noted that neither of these bodies pay much attention to non-Christians; and while these are not moved to be more active on the question of the State teaching any religion, they will always be brushed on one side as of no consequence.

I think we Freethinkers can agree that an "undenominational" Christianity is ridiculous. More than that, none of the Christian bodies agree with it. The Roman Church will not have it at any price. That Church has always held that Roman Catholicism is the only real Christian faith and it denies the validity of the "orders" of any other. Its standpoint is that when God gave his revelation to mankind he entrusted the Roman Church with its earthly control and its interpretation. This, of course, has always been warmly attacked by all brands of Protestants, and in the days when religious epithets were much more common in Christian circles than they are to-day, "The whore of Babylon" was a very favourite Protestant description of Romanism. But so far as denominationalism is in question, the Protestant bodies are as rabidly in favour of it as is

the Roman Church. If, for the moment, they are bound to work with the other Churches, it is only as a man like Lord Halifax consents to work with "Atheistic Russia." His own confessed belief was that praying circles might help win the war; but I think he would not dare publicly to say that it is more important than Russian tanks, Russian aeroplanes and Russian courage.

A Retrospect

Properly to understand the situation we must go back a bit. In the first place it must be noted that prior to the "Reformation" in England there were no secular schools or State Church. There was the Christian Church (Rome) and there was the secular State. The Roman Church would never permit itself to become a branch of the State. Its aim was, and is, to make the State a branch of the Church. One cannot imagine the Roman Church allowing the State to appoint its archbishops and bishops and dictate its creed. The Pope is selected by God—through the College of Cardinals—and afterwards God guides the Pope in selecting his subordinates. Christianity is a revelation from heaven, and with a degree of common-sense has appointed the Church to decide all religious questions. Ridiculous, agreed, but not quite so ridiculous as a bishop being appointed by the Prime Minister, and the bishop then declaring he was called by God to the job. Still, something strange must happen when an Archbishop is appointed, since it gives him the power to convert the king—even though he may be a very ordinary individual—into an incarnation of a god.

In pre-reformation days the Church took charge of morals, education and religion. The duty of the secular State was to raise taxes, to give the Church legal power to extort tithes and other forms of taxation for Church use, and to deal with crimes such as treason, assaults on the person and other mundane offences. In passing it is this division that enables Catholic contemporaries to plead that the Church never put a man to death for a religious offence. That is true, but it is a Christian truth, and that runs a lie very close. What the Church did was to find a man or woman guilty and then hand him, or her, over to the State for execution; and woe to the State that refused to carry out the sentence. The Church always had in reserve the terrible weapon of excommunication.

It is possible that not many of my readers have read the formula of excommunication. For their information we publish in another part of this issue of "The Freethinker" one of these forms—there are several of them—some more revolting than the one we give.

At the reformation, Church and State became one, and the State was on top. The Church was immensely wealthy; it was the greatest of landowners, and that, from the point of view of the State, made the amalgamation more attractive. There was not a great difference between the old Church and the new one so far as religion was concerned, but the break with the Roman Church did something towards naturalising heresy. In the main the religious obligations enforced by the Church were now enforced direct by the State. Education was under the con-

trol of the Church with the full authority of the State behind it, and the question of educating the poor hardly existed. It was not till the eighteenth century that the question of educating the people arose; the direct assertion of the right of the "people" to education did not arise until the French revolution of 1789.

But the schools were of a very poor type. Some schools for poor people had made their appearance during the reign of Queen Anne, but England remained behind Scotland and a large part of the Continent right up to the middle of the nineteenth century. Education was also given in the few Sunday schools that existed from about 1760. A genuine attempt was made about the end of the century, and Robert Owen, who said publicly that the religions of the world were so many forms of insanity, contributed largely to Lancaster's efforts. It is strange how few records of our educational history say anything concerning Robert Owen. He was never forgiven for his description of the religions of the world.

It would not be correct, however, to attribute the very small development that took place in educational zeal of either the establishment or Nonconformists. It was very largely a matter of competition between rival sects. The schools, then as now, so far as they could be dominated by Christian bodies, were little more than instruments of Christian propaganda. In all cases, as even to-day, the minimum of education, as such, was supplied with an eye to the securing of religious adherents.

In any case the education given was shockingly poor. In the middle of the nineteenth century English education was far below that of most of the Continental countries. The government had given a small educational grant—about £30,000 in all, but a commission just before the introduction of the Education Act of 1870 reported that the Government was not getting value for its money.

When it was known that the government intended it to be part of its business to make general provisions for the education of the children, the question of religion came to the front. The general feeling amongst Nonconformists was, naturally, that if any religion was taught in the State schools that were to be established, it would be the State religion. To the Nonconformists this was not a very pleasant prospect. In the first place the main position of the Nonconformists had been, theoretically, that the State should not intervene in religious matters. Secondly, Nonconformists revolted against the creation of a national system of education from which the established Church would profit so greatly.

In addition to this competition of religious sects there were new forces in operation. The influence of Freethinking propaganda for more than half a century had to be reckoned with. The Freethinking work of—to name a few of the principals—Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, the Carlyle group and their successors, to which one must add the scientific developments which were already beginning to exert an anti-religious influence, all combined to produce a demand that the new schools should be free from religious control. The cry taken up by Radicals, Freethinkers, and Nonconformists was for "Education, free, compulsory and Secular." There seemed no other way out. It was the State religion or none. Joseph Chamberlain—whose religion was of a doubtful quality—was one who strongly supported this programme.

Then came the surprise. A number of back-stair conferences were held between most of the leaders of nonconformity and representatives of the Church. The argument from the Church side was that if the new schools were secular the grip on the child would be abolished, and then, as now, it was recognised that

if the adult was to be held the child must be secured. Finally, a "compromise" was reached. It was one that did not give the Nonconformists anything they did not believe in, while not giving the Church what it really desired—a definitely Church of England education. Religion was to be taught in the schools, but it was not to be a form of religion that was characteristic of any sect. (The point that Christianity itself is a sect was ignored.) Non-Christians and anti-Christians were not considered, further than that they could withdraw their children from religious instruction if they so desired. As Sir William Harcourt said in the Common's discussion of the Bill, "it meant making a man pay for a dinner he didn't like by not forcing him to eat a dinner he would not have."

The Nonconformists agreed to the compromise. They sold the pass in 1870, as most of them are ready to sell the pass in 1941. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of Nonconformists never objected to State support, and the State dictation of religion, so long as it was a religion with which they agreed. They have no objection to religion being enforced by the State, to receiving subsidies from the State, release from taxes, Sunday laws and the maintenance of blasphemy laws. They have in recent years made demands that they should have representatives appointed by the Nonconformist bodies, in the House of Lords. None protested against the Sunday opening of Museums, or permission of Sunday entertainments more vigorously than the Nonconformists. Where real liberty is concerned the vast majority of Nonconformists have proven themselves a rotten reed on which to depend. They preach principle and practise plunder. With a cynicism that would shock many were it not exercised in the interests of religion, these upholders of justice say, "We will see that, so far as we can manage it, children shall be taught forms of religion which we do not wholly believe ourselves, and which we know are repudiated by probably the majority of intelligent men and women. We know that some of these teachings are not true, and that some doctrines in which we believe may be proven false in the future. But these things are part of our religion. We will force them upon our children, and, if possible, on the children of others; when they are old enough to think things out for themselves they may, probably will, reject them, but that is their concern."

This is not education at all. Education does not of necessity consist in giving things up, although it may lead that way; its essential feature is acquisition, and an acquisition that leads to as little discarding in the future as possible. And the chief count against religious teaching is that if it is not education, it is mere instruction in itself of no higher quality than teaching a dog tricks or a parrot to mimic human speech.

There is one other consideration which shows the present aim of the Churches and chapels, backed up by members of the government, as by far the deadliest attack that has been made on the nation's schools since the 1870 Act made religious teaching in schools optional. That is still the law. No Council is compelled to have religious instruction of any kind. It may keep all religion out. Teachers are not at present examined on religion, and school inspectors have no power to enquire concerning the quality of the religious instruction given. If the religious plotters have their way all this will be brushed aside. Teachers will have to "swat" up their religious answers, and, in fact, whatever the theory may be, the promotion of teachers, possibly their appointment, will depend upon the extent to which they bow down to the licenced hawkers of "God's word." The scheme of

the Church and chapel will, so far as it succeeds, mean a poorer type of teacher, a less efficient education than we have had for a couple of generations. Newman's saying, that if he were given control of the children until they are ten years of age, anyone might take them afterwards will receive a disastrous illustration of the Cardinal's insight.

One further point. When this war is over there will be urgent need for a drastic overhaul of our social structure. For the moment the very strong forces of reaction in this country are perforce lying low, but they are neither crushed nor completely demoralised. They will be on the alert and their motto will be: "As you were, only more so." Any really worthwhile steps towards genuine reorganisation of our lives will—must—cut across religious customs and privileges. It may reasonably be assumed that this move for the definite control of our schools by an official Christianity is the first move of the parties of reaction. If reactionists are preparing for after the war, reformers should not be behind-hand.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

NAMES

"WHAT's in a name? The rose by any other name would smell as sweet." True; we cannot alter the nature of a thing by changing its name. Call it what we will, it remains the same thing. But though, as a proposition, the fact is undeniable, very few of us accept it in practice.

All that is worthy and unworthy in Lord Tomnoddy and Mr. Jinks has no other source than their common humanity. "My Lord" and "Mister" are merely class labels affording no indication or assurance whatever of the individual merits of Tomnoddy or Jinks, yet, without knowing anything of either, we are at once swept by respect for "My Lord" and regard "Mister" with indifference.

In the performance of those mutual services without which human society could not exist, this synonymy is very observable. The largest and lowest class in the social scale is denominated the "working-class," the presumption being that it is the only class that does "work." The next in the ascending scale which is chiefly engaged in the various operations of commerce, is distinguished by the epithet "business." Third and last, established on an eminence above the other inhabitants of the communal hive, is the "professional" class, which maintains a highly respected and lucrative position on the follies and infirmities of the others. The immediate object of the exertions of all three is money which, in the case of the mechanic, is called "wages," in that of the business man "salary," while the third gives his professional services in consideration of a "fee," "stipend," or (sweetly humbugging term) "honorarium." But in Fluellin's words, "All is one reckoning save the phrase is a little variation."

Money paid for work done is surely the same thing no matter what the work or by whom performed, whether it be that of the scavenger, the salesman, the doctor, or the lawyer. Yet from the exclusive use of these terms, one might easily imagine—as many do—that the nature or identity of the thing had been changed in changing its name.

But this multiplying of names or terms is not always due to snobbery or class-conceit. Our official arbiters often display their taste and judgment in this way. Before the war, when we heard that a person or place was "evacuated," we were in no doubt as to what was meant. As a result of the "blitz," however, the word is now given an additional meaning which makes its use, when applied to persons, some-

what ambiguous, inasmuch as we are left to conjecture, unless specifically informed, whether they have been "transferred" to another place, or given a purgative dose. We have even the substantive monstrosity, "evacuee," whatever that may be thought to signify.

All the art of propaganda consists in ringing the changes on names, and its success is usually commensurate with the ability of the advocate to misrepresent by their means the real character of the thing propagated. The facility with which we are so often deceived is owing to the fact that all we know of many things are the names bestowed on them by other people—the things themselves being often beyond our physical or mental reach. It is not so long ago that Russia was being denounced as a country of atheists and bolshevists with whom no terms could be kept. The hierarchy and most of our politicians were unanimous on the point. The Press never missed an opportunity of publishing choice bits of "inside" information, the theme of which was the social degradation of the people under a communistic and godless tyranny. Since Russia's entry into the war, there has been a volte-face.

We have suddenly discovered that she possesses a host of virtues. Her people are courageous, patriotic, industrious and naturally religious. Some of our clerics have developed a surprising breadth of view. The Bishop of Chelmsford declared some time ago that he could "shake hands with a non-praying Stalin though he would beg to be excused from doing so with a Catholic Pétain, Darlan, Mussolini or Weygand." He furthermore delivered himself of the curious thesis that—"It is more religious to repudiate all religion than manipulate it in the fashion of these nominally Christian nations."

How the repudiation of all religion can be in any degree religious is a problem that must remain without a solution pending one from the Bishop himself. His lordship objects to the fashion in which religion is manipulated by these nominally Christian nations. But then, every Church has its own fashion of manipulating the holy commodity, and the Bishop is merely prejudiced in favour of the mode practised by his professional brethren in this country. It must be admitted however that, viewed as methods of upholding a system of belief which they themselves regard for the most part as false, their scheming for domination in the schools, their back-stairs control of the B.B.C., and their periodical efforts to organise the huge futility of national prayer, are fair examples of manipulative skill.

When one Christian wants to vilipend the religion of another, he usually calls him a "nominal" Christian. The name is so loosely bandied about between them that one is led to ask—what really constitutes a Christian? The only answer I can find is—one who believes Jesus Christ to be God. I am aware that most Christians would not agree with this definition, and that they would correct me by asserting that a Christian is one who believes and *practises* the teaching of Christ. The reply to this, however, is conclusive—there is none such. If by any possibility there could be a being of this description he would have to be restrained as a danger to himself and an intolerable nuisance to everybody about him. Notwithstanding the absurd claims of its advocates, Christianity is, above all, a religion of faith. Judged by the criterion of practice, all professing Christians are merely nominal Christians. It is *belief* that makes the Christian, and this accounts for the historic fact that among the most ardent votaries of the faith are to be found some of the worst types of human character. The Bishop would do well, therefore, to revise his judgment of Mussolini, Pétain, Darlan and Co., and allow them to be *real* Christians.

The plain truth is, the Bishop and his class care no more now for the policy and people of Russia than they ever did. But it is with them a choice between two evils. The success of Hitler, Mussolini and their quisling tools would probably have a disastrous effect on the present position and prospects of our clerical gentry. The rich livings and bloated stipends of the Establishment would hardly escape the spoiler. But the irony of circumstance is such that the success of a communistic and godless state happens to be favourable, or perhaps even necessary to the preservation of these gentlemen's worldly prosperity, and that consideration alone is sufficient to determine their choice. Self-interest is the true alchemist—the universal solvent that can reduce the most antagonistic and heterogeneous elements to harmonious consistence.

Unfortunately, the susceptibility to names is found where we should least expect it. Many who claim to have emancipated themselves from every kind of superstition are yet the bond slaves of mere sounds. Their attitude towards religion and all supernatural agency is that of absolute unbelief; yet they take refuge in any euphemism rather than use the only word that expresses their unbelief with clearness and precision. They will call themselves Rationalists, Secularists, Freethinkers or Agnostics, but they jib at the name of *Atheist*. They seem to forget that while Atheism connotes all these, none of them is synonymous with it. This timid shrinking from the use of the term is merely paying court to their theistic opponents, whose practice and policy it has ever been to associate the name with all that is hateful and approbrious. Why show such deference to those whose beliefs they profess to hold in contempt? It is only by resolutely using the name on all occasions that it can be vindicated from the obloquy with which the advocates of superstition try to invest it. We have it on record (Ps. 14, 1-53, 1) that "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God"; but from anything that the context implies to the contrary, his only folly seems to have been saying it "in his heart." Had he spoken it out, he would have shown he had some sense, and thereby escaped the censure.

A. YATES.

"THE HISTORY OF BUTTON HILL"

WHEN I published my autobiography, "The Testament of a Victorian Youth," an old and valued friend regretted that I had not cast it in fictitious form. I had to tell him that I felt I had no flair for fiction, and that what might have been essential to a testament would not have adorned a tale. Like Chapman Cohen, in his admirable "Almost an Autobiography," whilst I did not desire to bore, I had in view enlightenment more than entertainment.

I am grateful to my friend for one thing. He introduced me to a good novel as an example of what he thought I might have achieved. "The History of Button Hill," by Gordon Stowell, recounts, with a skill I could not have equalled, the story of a Nonconformist Chapel on the outskirts of Leeds for about four decades commencing with the arrival of the Reverend Arthur Samuel Knight to be its first Minister in 1889. I suspect he was the author's father.

The book deals admirably and artistically with the milieu of Nonconformists at successive periods, somewhat in the manner of Arnold Bennett's "Milestones" and Rose Macaulay's "Told by an Idiot." It moves—even "fossilised nonconformity," as it has been called. Here, for example, is a specimen of Sabbatarianism that could not be found to-day in any denomination so reputable as the Congregationalists—

such atavistic asses are now kept in hole-and-corner sectarian stables:—

"There was the case of Mr. Holman Hunt, the painter, who had recently spoken in favour of the Sunday opening of picture galleries. Mr. Mendip had been so disgusted and so angry that he had gone to the trouble of purchasing a reproduction of Mr. Hunt's picture 'The Light of the World' in order that he might hang it in his back room with its face to the wall. There it was to remain, as an example and a protest, until the artist recanted. 'In such a case,' said Mr. Mendip, 'one's actions cannot be too strong!'"

"And he showed Mr. Ellersby the cutting of a letter he had written about it to the 'Fleeced Argus,' calling on others to do the same.

"Mr. Ellersby was impressed. 'Dear me!' he exclaimed, opening his blue eyes very wide. 'Do you hear that, Nellie, my dear? I had no idea——! Why, we have that picture on the bedroom landing, haven't we? I shall make a point of turning it round as soon as we get home.'"

Equally delightful are the author's comments on a choir:—

"If you wish to make friends quickly in a church, it is no use renting a self-contained family pew. Join the choir. During the service there are so many more opportunities for social intercourse in the choir, even if it is only over a box of throat pastilles. . . . Mr. Ellersby, who sang a kind of humanitarian tenor, joined the choir. So did Mrs. Ellersby, once Eric had finished being born. In a bi-sexual choir, such as you find in Nonconformist places of worship, you will discover that many of the sopranos and contraltos are not the least bit musical. They are there because their husbands are tenors or basses and they don't like sitting by themselves."

Has anyone ever heard of a reject amongst the volunteers for vocal music? In Anglican Churches—yes. In Nonconformist—no. The choirmaster could not afford to give offence. Better tolerate Brother Bushell (whose support by song Mark Rutherford's Rev. John Broad felt to be indispensable), even if he could make nothing but a joyful noise, rather than cause an unholy row with all the Bushells. One noticed, too, that those who were attracted to the choir were the feeble in other fields. The man who could not preach in public thought he could, at any rate, sing in chorus. What would have been the effect of putting the choir behind some distant grill (as the ladies were once in the House of Commons) I hardly care to say. I fancy its glamour would have gone and possibly the choirmaster left to join his cheerful songs *only* "with angels round the throne." Sociability counted for much, as Gordon Stowell says, but publicity with a minimum of worry about the possibility of making a fool of yourself was also an attraction. Our author might have given a description of the glory of a cantata night. There was one glory for the choir and another for the audience. I am sure the former's was the greater. It was particularly a gala night for the girls. They were not behind footlights, but under strong incandescent burners. How much more like angels they appeared than the poor male! The latter's choice of garb is so limited. Somebody ought to have proposed a cantata in 18th century costume to make the sexes more equal. Ruffles, silk stockings and velvet knee breeches would, properly advertised, have improved the attendance. I fancy, on these occasions, the audience tired before the choir. However, in the case of our great cantata, "Under the Palms," the latter

succeeded so well that still, after the lapse of 35 years, I could give selections lasting some minutes.

Our author remembers the popular literature of Nonconformists. I am sorry he overlooked "In His Steps, or What Would Jesus Do?" I am sure this was easily the best-seller amongst religious books at the time of its publication about 1900. Then I sometimes served in my father's booksellers and stationer's shop in Wandsworth Road. Except at Christmas time, the only books we sold was the cheap sentimental religious stuff published by Partridge, the Religious Tract Society, etc., and suitable for a birthday present from a Sunday school teacher to a scholar. When, however, a pile of "In His Steps" (4½d. paper; 9d. cloth) appeared on the counter, a book for once did go off like hot cakes. The author was an American parson, Rev. C. M. Sheldon. The scene, I think, was mainly New York. This had its advantages. It was not necessary to discuss whether Jesus would stick bayonets into Boers. Drinking, gambling, sex licentiousness and, in general, nocturnal naughtiness were aimed at. The reverend gentleman wisely refrained from asking how Jesus would set about practising his Sermon on the Mount on either side of the Atlantic. The book's successors, "The Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," etc., flopped. This also applied to the successful author's visit to this country. Dr. Johnson said of Jonas Hanway that a reputation he gained travelling abroad he lost at home. With Rev. C. M. Sheldon it was the reverse. He was no orator but a man of average ability on the platform, and listeners like myself were disappointed. Mr. Stowell may not have read this book. It was popular in evangelical circles, and Congregationalism has always been the most lukewarm of the three leading sects in respect of the salvation of souls.

I was delighted by his reference to "Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch" as a book for which there was a long waiting list at the Button Hill Free Library in 1902. "An American saporific," he calls it.

"The story of some poor slut of a woman who lived in a slum and spent her days in being aggressively philosophical about it. This masterpiece of shallow falsity, and an equally insidious sequel called 'Lovey Mary,' gave easy lessons in comfort to the comfortable at the expense of the uncomfortable. They were considered fit to be read on the Sabbath without detriment to the strictest conscience, and chunks of them were often recited aloud at mothers' meetings. There was, you see, a vein of sticky religious sentiment of the count-your-blessings variety running through them both. The moral platitudes of Mrs. Wiggs were quoted over and over again on the pink and blue pages of autograph albums for the edification of the young. . . ."

(To be concluded) W. KENT

YOUTH'S PLEDGE

We who are young in years, yet scarcely dare
To plan ahead our individual lives,
Must, for the common good, watch how we fare
If, when peace comes, the lying Church still thrives.
Upheld by vested interest and greed
With shameful arrogance the Church pretends
That youth is fighting for the Christian creed—
Thus blessing slaughter for her own base ends.
But now at last youth learns to scorn this Church
That points to war as punishment for sin,
And who with lies endeavoured to besmirch
A land with which we would claim cultural kin;
Russia destroyed the Church in Freedom's name:
Let English youth make pledge to do the same.

MARTHA GOUGH

ACID DROPS

IN reply to a correspondent, Cardinal Hinsley has given the following account of the Roman Catholic position ("Catholic Times," August 15):—

"Catholics must, because of the very nature of truth, be religiously intolerant. This is not a failing or a weakness, though such it is described by our enemies. If truth is one or immutable, only one religion can ever be acceptable. All others are false and noxious. But because we are intolerant of false beliefs it does not mean that we are intolerant of sincere believers. . . . As much as anyone else we abhor persecution. . . . Because we are intellectually intolerant, intolerant that is, of untruth, we take precautions to safeguard our organisations, our schools and our societies."

That is a characteristic Roman Catholic utterance, adding a lie by intent to intolerance and providing justification for any brutality the Roman Church may sanction or practice. Our readers should make a note of it.

If this had been said by some people we should have called it sheer nonsense. It is that, true, but it is more than that—it is deliberate humbuggery. It states truths, but in such a way that it becomes a bundle of lies in the saying. If Cardinal Hinsley were of the foolish kind to which so many denizens of the pulpit belong, we might pass the statement with a smile, or deal with it as an exhibition of folly. But fools do not become Cardinals in the Roman Church. They are usually men of ability, which makes the tales they tell, and the falsehoods they father, the more objectionable.

Consider the statements one by one. Because of their devotion to truth, Catholics are intolerant. But truth is not intolerant—it displaces the lie in a fair combat. It does not say the lie shall not be heard; it invites publicity and does not fear the result. Catholics are intolerant of false beliefs only. But who decides what is false? The Catholic Church. It is judge and jury in one. Because of its love of truth the Church "safeguards" its organisations, its schools and societies. How does it do this? By preventing the other side being heard, by forcible suppression, when it can, by direct persecution when it could, by cunning and lying when it lacks the force to work openly. The Church abhors persecution. We do not believe that Hinsley would dare to make such a statement where he could be openly contradicted. He can say it to a Roman Catholic audience because there none dare contradict them. The "great lying Church" runs true to form.

Some of the London papers report that the inhabitants of Arundel are waiting with anxiety, and longing for an heir to be born to the Duke of Norfolk. It is very touching to think of the people living in a state of eager suspense for the Duchess to have a baby. No one can question the truthfulness of this item of news. England would not be what it is without its nobility.

Why doesn't God stop the war? The Rev. E. B. Storr, anxious about the number of bewildered Christians who are asking this question, attempts to answer it in the "Methodist Recorder." He struggles wordily with his task but finds it overwhelming. "No complete answer," he confesses, "can be given to this question. How can limited man enter into God's mind and know why he acts thus or refuses to act thus?" But surely men, whose limitations do not prevent them from knowing there is a God, should not find it difficult to know what he thinks, especially as he pervades their minds and bodies and all the universe.

Admitting failure, Mr. Storr still tries "to remove some doubts and settle some perplexities." He does that by asking a host of equally perplexing questions to prove that the original one "logically widens out into the question, 'Why is evil permitted in a world created and ruled by a wise, all-powerful and loving God?'" And in case anyone should think that mortal man can answer it, he points

out that the human mind has been grappling with the problem "ever since poor old Job sat on his dunghill and criticised the ways of God." All this kind of thing is neither "wise nor fair." Why "look only at the dark facts of life" when there is so much, and ever-increasing, good? The time is coming when "the Kingdom of God will be fully realised and evil will be swallowed up and forgotten."

In the advertisement columns of the "Daily Telegraph," Sir Charles Marston, F.S.A., has an article "Concerning Black-outs." The black-out it concerns is miracles, which was "brought upon us by an old-fashioned and superficial science." He calls upon us courageously "to lift the miracle black-out from secular knowledge and recognise the Deity as supreme in His own Universe." Then Christians will go to Church again and be able to pray without perplexity, and all will be well in a sick world. It is a simple solution to world problems which we commend to the attention of the Rev. E. B. Storr.

The well-known Catholic writer, the Rev. Dr. Arendzen, writes in the "Catholic Times" for September 5, that "when a man boasts that he can be good without religion and prayer, believe it not. He may make a show for a while, but if he remain long without prayer the end is inevitable, one of the sins in that ugly list will become his, and if he die in it he will be lost." In order to show that he is taking a wide view of the situation, this priest explains: "Outward respectability may, of course, be maintained. They may be praised after death as excellent citizens, humanitarians with many civic virtues, and the praise may be justified. But it needs more than civic virtue to go to heaven."

This is the authentic Christian note, and it exposes the anti-social quality of Christianity in a few words. To-day, this is being preached by both Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders. It is the teaching that will be imposed on children in our schools if the present plot against the schools succeeds—and the Prime Minister and some of his subordinates have expressed their sympathy with the religious attack on the schools. It discloses Christianity as being, what we have so often insisted on, a distinctly anti-social creed. It was that at the beginning, and to-day it is running to seed.

There is a weakly weekly called the "Patriot," which in its issue for September 11, says that the Moscow call for "all Christians, Protestants and Catholic, to unite in a Holy Crusade against the anti-Christ Hitler rather loses weight when we remember that the Soviet Government has done its best to make Russia an Atheist country." But the Russian Government has never concealed its aim in this direction, and that aim still remains. Personally, we do not believe in governments interfering in matters of religion, but as the "Patriot" has always done its best to poison British opinion on the question of Russia, and as it does believe in the Government here looking after Christianity, no principle appears to be involved. Meanwhile, Russia does what it can by urging men to resist Hitler by all and every means, and our own aristocracy develops a great pride in and fondness for the working man, and make every kind of appeal that is possible to induce all to play an active part in the war. If it had not been for such papers as the "Patriot" and numerous prominent people in this country, we could have had a working agreement with Russia long ago. We are paying a terrible price for not having done so.

Owing to a protest by the local clergy, a Morality play in which Jesus Christ was to appear on the stage has undergone alterations so that only a voice is heard from the wings. Of course, the character was not billed as Jesus Christ, but only as "The Master." So Christian susceptibilities are saved, and the mysterious voice coming from the wings will do little to disturb that slight mental disturbance which does duty for religious thinking.

And yet, think of what might be done by modern stagecraft. Jesus could be made to materialise out of nothing and to fade away to nothing. It would be child's play for "movie" technicians to provide that a handful of loaves and fishes should multiply itself, say, on Derby Day, so that the whole of the people there could be served with fish and chips. The Devil could appear and disappear and reappear, and angels could float about the flies. And if this were done, it may safely be said that many devout souls would take these things as evidence of the truth of Christianity. Of course, many of the clergy would wink at it all. But one need not doubt that many do this already.

The "Church Times" is not satisfied with people taking a benevolent view of Christianity. What really matters is "whether individuals or groups can be precisely persuaded of the truth and force of divine revelation, and attached to a definite body of practising members of Christ's Church." That is a parsonic view, of course, in even its widest interpretation, one for a particular organisation. But the really important social question is whether there is anything affecting society that a man can do while belonging to a Church that he cannot do by joining in one of the many non-religious movements. That is a question we have been asking for years, but up to date we have had no kind of answer.

The Feltham and District Trade Council recently arranged a demonstration and "service" in support of the Soviet people. The procession was headed by the local vicar, the Rev. P. D. Godfrey. There seems to have been some little difficulty in carrying out the programme, for the arrangement to sing the hymn "When wilt thou save the people?" was abandoned, although the International, with its "No saviour from on high deliver, not trust have we in prince and peer," was. Finally the meeting closed with "God Save the King." We hope the mental muddle indicated by this mix-up is not characteristic of the general body of the demonstrators.

The Bishop of Portsmouth has discovered that Russia at heart is not Atheistic. It has, he says, always been the home of the saint, the martyr, the mystic. We do not know what "at heart" covers; probably it means nothing at all. If it means that the vast majority of Russians were very superstitious, we agree, and great as the development of Russia has been since the revolution, we should be very much surprised if the majority are not still religious—this is, still superstitious. You cannot change the habits of a nation in a single generation, and the Atheistic leaders of Russia know it. The same thing might be told of the English people. The majority of people in this country are still very superstitious—the belief in charms, in dreams, in faith-cures, in days of national prayer and the like prove it. We go even further and say that all countries in the world are in much the same condition. What has happened is that the Christian religion has been weakened, the number of non-believers in any country has increased, and that is a registry of the advance of genuine culture in spite of the numbo-jumboism of established Churches.

Canon Rogers says that the well-known hymn, "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before," represents a point of view repudiated by "all the gallant soldiers" he knows. We are not surprised. We never heard bodies of soldiers singing it, nor is the majority of our soldiers really interested in Christianity. But all the same, the Armed Forces are well peppered with chaplains—receiving officers' salaries—and all sorts of mean tricks are resorted to in the Army to keep up the imposture of our forces being really Christian. Meanwhile, the Churches dare not advocate that attendance at church services should be entirely voluntary. They know that only a small minority would attend.

Twenty-nine Christian missionaries, formerly in the British colonies in West Africa, have now been interned in Jamaica. There is no question of their loyalty to either Hitler or Christianity.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. DARBY.—Certainly some Freethinkers are allowed to broadcast in this country, but they are never permitted to broadcast Free-thought. It must also be remembered that broadcasting is in this country to all intents and purposes a Government controlled instrument, and to that extent represents a danger all the time. It can suppress and distort news as it thinks fitting, and there is no government—left or right, good or bad, constitutional or otherwise—that will not turn news into propaganda and mislead by education. When this war is over, "Freedom on the Air" should be one of the planks in every reform platform.

C. H. DARBY.—Thanks. Received, and shall appear.

J. SANDERSON.—We are pleased to hear from a new and gratified reader of "The Freethinker," also for the compliments you pay us for some of the books we have written. We do not think it possible to get exhibited in this country films showing up the Christian superstition, though there are some on religiously harmless phases of evolution. We are taking all possible care of our health. A Free-thought radio station would not be permitted in this country, and no genuine Free-thought address is permitted by our parson-haunted institution.

T. WILLIAMS.—We are not surprised at what you say. Have you noted that Christians take the insult that they could not be desirable citizens unless they had God to help them as a compliment?

R. WARBURTON.—Thanks for address. Copy of "The Freethinker" shall be sent.

T. W. WILLIAMS, F. WARBURTON.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.

A. ALEXANDER.—Pleased to have your congratulations and good wishes. We agree, "No Friend of Democracy" is a very useful pamphlet.

W. JOHNSTON (S.A.).—The verse will be found in Romans iii. 5-7.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—B. Jenkins (S.A.), £20.

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

WE must apologise again for the delay in sending out copies of Ingersoll's "Rome and Reason," but there has been some delay in delivery from the printers. We are daily expecting delivery and all orders will be at once discharged. We will try and guard against such delays in the future. But printing and publishing is no easy job nowadays. First, one has to get a permit from the paper control. Then a mill has to be found that can undertake the order. Then most printers are full up with orders, and there is a further delay. So the game continues, with all sorts of difficulties and delays turning up. Damn Hitler! and also those people in this country who so openly played into his hands so long as they could do so with safety to themselves.

Our hearty thanks for those who have sent us on copies of the pamphlets required for reprinting. For the moment we have all we can get on with. But more will be required, the titles of which will duly be published.

Once again, what a change! All of us remember the years during which the general cry in the British Press was "No contact with Atheist Russia!" and the way in which this cry was responded to by the interested classes in this country—the clergy and others—until the average working man began to think of Russia as a pariah nation with whom Christian Britons could have no friendly relations. And now we have the same people praising Russians for their courage, dilating upon the new nation the Soviet system has created, and urging the workmen of Britain to do their damndest to help Russia. What a change! It is, of course, to our interest to praise the Russians now, and to help them—because that happens to be a way of helping ourselves.

We were again reminded of this change of opinion on reading a leading article in the "Sunday Dispatch," regretting that the Russians cannot broadcast direct to the British workmen, and suggesting that this broadcast might lead our people to do more. It also printed a broadcast the Russians would send to England if they could, and a very good broadcast it is. But how could such a message from the Atheist leaders come through the B.B.C.? One might as well think of the B.B.C. inviting the Editor of "The Freethinker" to give a series of addresses on Atheism! Lord Reith would drop dead with indignation. The 7-55 a.m. horrors would desert in a body, and the gentleman who is responsible for the closing of the Children's Hour, and who has the infernal impudence to tell little children to think of sins they have committed and ask God to help them be better in future would be struck dumb.

And finally, would the workmen and others have needed this pressure if their minds had not been poisoned against Russia by our clergy, newspapers and leading statesmen? If there was ever a case of chickens coming home to roost, it is happening now. But why not do the handsome and invite one of the representatives of Russia to tell the British people what Christian Russia was when the revolutionists took charge, and what it has become? The idea is worth thinking about.

We are pleased to see that the Government has, so far, stood firm against refusing to grant all members of the Buchmanite body freedom from military service. This has been claimed for the whole of the Oxford Group on the grounds that they are all "lay evangelists." That, we suppose, is the equivalent of embryonic parsons. The Group has always been suspect in its operations, and it will be remembered that the leader of this mass of exhibitionists and semi-erotic individuals publicly "thanked God for Hitler." The American branch of this body has been openly branded as working for Germany, which, the accusation runs, supplies some of its funds.

But one piece of injustice naturally engenders another. The clergy are not brought under the rule of compulsory service, a rule that also applies to those studying for "holy orders." If some, why not others?

South African Freethinkers living in the Durban area, willing to help form a branch of the National Secular Society there, are invited to communicate with "Freethinker," Box 385, Durban. From this end we wish every possible success to the effort.

The cause of Internationalism should be advanced by a performance which is to be given by the Youth Relief and Refugee Council at the City Literary Institute Theatre, Stukely Street, W.C.1, on September 27, at 5 p.m. There will be a programme of items by Czechs, Hungarians, Austrians, Germans and Spaniards. The show will be knit together by a running commentary, and the commentator will be Peter Cotes. Admission will be free, but there will be a collection in the interval when speeches will be made concerning the forthcoming International Youth Rally for Victory. The Youth Relief and Refugee Council has the active support of many well-known people, including Miss Eleanor Rathbone, M.P., Professor J. B. S. Haldane, Brig.-General Sir Wyndham Deedes, C.M.G., D.S.O., D. N. Pritt, M.P., T. Edmund Harvey, M.P., and Professor Gilbert Murray.

Mr. E. A. Macdonald writes from South Africa:—

"Living in this distant land, remote from the perils if not the consequences of the war, the hearts of all Freethinkers go out to you in your plucky fight against unavoidable disaster, the more so, when we realise that your difficulties have come at a period of life when you should be enjoying greater ease. I, for one, am proud that our Movement has a leader whose spirit in old age is as pugnacious and indomitable as ever. You are showing the way a true Freethinker, during adversity, should live and, if necessary, die. So long as a brotherhood of such resolute champions for truth and decency in social relationships survives on this vexed planet of ours, there is no room for despair, let political and religious reactionaries rage ever so fiercely.

"Here and there I have come across a few faint-hearts amongst even Freethinkers who, faced with the triumphs of the enemies of mankind, display a proneness to take refuge in a form of cynical defeatism. One such told me weariedly the other day that he had long been without faith in God, and now he had lost faith in man also! It is obvious that you and your colleagues are far too busy to give such abject philosophising serious consideration. Your example is a sufficient reply. Good luck to you, sir!"

Quite a cheery note in circumstances that are not the most cheerful we have known or hope to know.

We referred to this matter some time ago and pointed out that one's *liking* for the food given played with normal men and women a very important part in nutrition. Consequently, we were pleased to find the Prime Minister stressing the same point in a recent speech in the House of Commons, when dealing with the feeding of workmen and their output. He said a part of his speech was not reported in the general Press—at least, we did not see it—so we reproduce it here. It is taken from Hansard:—

"Allowances must be made for the very severe change in the diet of the heavy manual worker. It is quite true that no one has gone short of food; there has been no hunger, there has not been the confusion of the last war at some periods, but no one can pretend that the diet of the British people, and especially of their heavy workers, has not become far less stimulating and interesting than it was a year ago. Except for our Fighting Services, we have been driven back to a large extent from the carnivore to the herbivore. That may be quite satisfactory to the dietetic scientists who would like to make us all live on nuts, but undoubtedly it has produced, and is producing, a very definite effect upon the energetic output of the heavy worker."

That strikes us as a good common-sense view of the matter, and more good will be done in telling the people the truth than pretending that American bacon, of the kind sent, is quite as good for us as our own breeding, or that we can do without quite well all things we cannot get.

Very little is permitted in the London Press against the plot to capture the schools for the Churches. But here and there the provincial Press is more liberal. We specially note a letter in a recent issue of the "Cumberland Times," signed "A Parent." The letter is well worded and strong in its restraint. The conclusion strikes the right note:—

"The parents are the dominating influence in a child's life. They have no more right to stunt a child's mind than they have to stunt its body. We have the R.S.P.C. to bring to justice those who hurt the child physically, but no society to fight the still greater cruelty—the cruelty that warps the mind of the child. A child does not belong to its parents, but is given in trust. The child has a right to demand that it shall be allowed to grow up strong and free in mind and thought, so that it shall be able to face up to and decide the problems of life for itself, as it has to grow up strong and healthy physically."

GOD'S CURSE

(There were several forms of the Roman Catholic Excommunication. We give below one of them. It is for those who read it intelligently an indication of the essential brutality of the historic Christian Church.)

"BY the authority of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and of the sacred canons, and of the holy and unsullied Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and of all the heavenly virtues, Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominations, Powers, Cherubim and Seraphim, and of the holy Patriarchs, Profits and all the Apostles and Evangelists, and of the holy Innocents who alone are worthy in the sight of the Lamb to sing the new song, and of the holy martyrs, and the holy confessors and the holy virgins and of all the saints and elect of God, we excommunicate and anathematise this malefactor, and we expel him from the holy Church of God, that he may be delivered over to eternal torment with Dathan and Abirim and with those who cried to the Lord God 'Away from us, we wish not to know thy ways,' and as fire is quenched with water so may his light be quenched for ever and ever, unless he repent and render full satisfaction. Amen. And he be accursed of the God the Father who created man, accursed of God the Son who suffered for man, accursed of the Holy Ghost which cometh in baptism, accursed of Holy Cross which the Christ ascended for our salvation, accursed of the Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, accursed of St. Michael the receiver of blessed souls. . . . Let him be accursed wherever he may be, whether at home or abroad, in the road or in the path, or in the wood, or in the water, or in the Church. Let him be accursed living and dying, eating, drinking, fasting or athirst, slumbering, sleeping, waking, walking, standing, sitting, lying, working, idling—and bleeding. Let him be accursed in all the forces of his body. Let him be accursed inside and outside, accursed in his hair and accursed in his brain, accursed in the crown of his head, in his temples, in his forehead, in his ears, in his brows, in his eyes, in his cheeks, in his jaws, in his nostrils, in his front teeth, in his back teeth, in his lips, in his throat, in his shoulders, in his upper arms, in his lower arms, in his hands, in his fingers, in his breast, in his heart, in his stomach and liver, in his kidneys, in his loins, in his —, in his thighs, in his knees and shins, in his feet, in his toes and in his nails. Let him be accursed in every joint of his body. May Christ, the son of the living God, curse him throughout his kingdom, and may heaven with all its Virtues rise up against him to his damnation."

One should not find it difficult to picture the essential brutality of nature that could create a curse of this kind. But it has never been abandoned by the Roman Church. It is still in force.

C. C.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

"No soul that lived, loved, wrought and died,
Is this their carrion crucified."—SWINBURNE.

"There is nothing on earth divine beside humanity."

—LANDOR.

HOW popular conceptions of religion are changing in this country is illustrated by the disappearance of the once-familiar remark, "God willing." Writing of the old coach-roads of England, Mr. Tristram notes that in King Charles the Second's giddy reign the stage-coaches were advertised to do the distance between London and Bath in three days "if God permit"; but in 1780, the time had been reduced to two days, and the pious saving clause was omitted. Indeed, "God permit," according to Grose, was a regular slang term for the old stage coach, and readers of Scott will remember what the antiquary said about it. But a contemporary story has come down to us of the village carrier who, upon being asked when he would be at Aberdeen, replied: "I'll be in on Monday, God willing and weather permitting, and on Tuesday whether or no."

"D.V." are initials that have dropped out of public notice, except in the case of small religious communities that are themselves mere survivals of the past. "Deo

volente" is the proviso, "God willing." But Mr. and Mrs. Everyman of the present day do not trouble to put such a proviso in ordinary announcements as to future events, and order their dinners and go journeys without the addition of "D.V.," or even thoughts of the clergy at all.

The clergy, naturally, still insist on the willingness and interference of their god. Some years ago, in a far corner of South Carolina, a pastor was prompted, in the midst of a drought, to offer up prayers for rain. Shortly after, rain fell and lasted some days. The contentment of the inhabitants of South Carolina, however, was not great, nor enduring. A few, it may be, were pleased; the majority were indignant. Certain crops were ruined and business affairs compromised. In this complicated world nothing ever happens without offending somebody. This rain, supposed to be summoned by a pastor's supplication, forced the inhabitants of the town to go to court and get an injunction against the reverend man. So the story goes.

This American yarn shows the resentment men would feel nowadays were the old Christian Bible Stories to happen in our day. For, according to the legends, the prophets were for ever doing things more troublesome to the mass of men than merely asking for rain, and getting more than a shower-bath. They foretold the onslaught of Assyria, the triumph of barbarians from the West, and poked their sacred noses into many things. Statesmen and rulers of those far-off times may have been forgiven for supposing that these howling Dervishes were a public and a private nuisance.

The present day is not an age of faith. It is the twilight of the gods. Our own 50,000 priests no longer call benefits or evil out of the sky, beyond asking for fine or wet weather, or calling blessings on the present tenants of Buckingham Palace, or the Duchess of York's baby. They do not openly pray for the discomfiture of Stanley Baldwin, or the success of Lloyd George, or the destruction of Bernard Shaw. They are alert enough to know that they could never succeed in praying for or prophesying anything that pleased everybody. The majority would restrain them with judicial injunctions, or the minority would have them locked up, preferably in a mental institution. The old, bad conception of a tyrannical, bullying deity has gone for ever, and the majority of men no longer believe in a limited-liability god, and that such a supernatural being could be swayed by the sweet smell of sacrifice or the stimulus of entreaty.

According to our 50,000 clergy, the Christian god is the Lord of Hosts, the God of Battles, and also the Prince of Peace and the Saviour of mankind. These priests, who consecrate regimental flags and christen battle-cruisers, also prate that their god is a loving parent, and that all mankind are his children. What absurdity and what hypocrisy! In the last war Prussian pastors said: "Germany must win, because she ought to win. God cannot desert his children." The British priests used almost the same language, tempered by local patriotism. "Give peace in our time, O Lord," says the preacher. "Because there is none other that fighteth for us but only Thou, O God," responds the bowed congregation. Observe that the priests of all the nations concerned blessed the flags which floated over the seas of blood, and invoked their gods for victory. Many millions of human beings, the very flower of a whole generation, perished in the last war. And the priests, who were exempted from military service, presume to thank their deity for this wholesale murder, and perpetuate the martial spirit which provoked it. The priests have failed, and their god has failed with them. What, after all, is their deity but a magnified, non-natural man, encrusted with the ignorance of the ages? If the peoples were wise, this god would be dethroned at once and for ever. Then the people would no longer require thousands of priests to tell them the "old, old story," and absorb millions of money in the process. Money may be more usefully spent than in placing ancient ignorance in perpetual cold storage.

A story is told of a dying Italian silversmith. A priest was fetched hurriedly, and the holy man snatched up a silver crucifix and held it before the dying man, with the words: "Behold your God!" "Yes," replied the artist. "I know him quite well. I made him."

It is now the twilight of the gods. Modern man has outgrown ancient ignorance, and the conscience of the race is now rising above the deities of decadent superstitions.

MIMNERMUS

(Reprinted)

THE PRICE OF SILENCE?

SINCE the Armistice in 1918, to the outbreak of the present war, most of the clergy were loud in their denunciations of war, and were active in their efforts to assure the people that they would oppose any future carnage of mankind.

But from September, 1939, most of the apostles of the "prince of peace" have either lapsed into curious silence and inactivity on the question, or have joined those loud-voiced patriots (!) who urge upon us the righteousness of this latest bloodbath, whilst they (with some exceptions, of course) shelter behind the Act of Parliament which gives them automatic exemption from compulsory military service.

Surely, though, if the clergy, up to 1939, were really opposed to war as an unchristian or immoral thing, their opposition should have stiffened on the outbreak of war, rather than be relaxed, for the most urgent need for the combating of an evil is when it is actually in our presence. Why, then, this silence of the Churches; this melting away of opposition to war when war became a fact of social life?

Can it be that this silence has been bought—as the silence of the Church has so often been bought? And if the silence has been bought, what was the price?

Can it be that the price of the silence of the clergy was a subtle, but irresistible suggestion that if they behaved themselves circumspectly they might be permitted to have a greater measure of influence in our schools; that their already pernicious influence on the mentality of our children might be permitted to extend, to ensure a more plentiful supply of customers from the rising generation for their declining business establishments?

Whether this tempting suggestion was made, in fact, I do not know; but I know that there are people of influence in our midst capable of the chicanery of buying principles with promises, and I know that the clergy, as a body, are among the least scrupulous of our social groups in such matters. Further, the unanimity of the denominations on this question of the need to increase Christian influence in the schools leads the suspicious mind to wonder, because denominational agreement among the jealous Christian sects indicates a well considered plot, and much preliminary bargaining. It does seem that, despite their brotherly hatred of denominational competitors, the clergy are shrewd enough to see that against the expanding force of Secularism unity is their only weapon; that to band together to secure over our children a control that could not be obtained separately or denominationally is the only way to ensure the future of the almost empty churches.

And so it appears that for almost two years (since their conversion to the idea that war can be good, providing it is war for Christianity) the Churches have been "turning on the heat" in an effort to hatch the rotten egg of compulsory religious instruction and religious tests for teachers; an egg rotten in its very conception, arising as it does from the union of denominations whose sentiments about each other are furthest removed from love. But whether or not this rotten egg be the price of the silence of the Churches, one thing is clear. That egg will be hatched unless we whose children will be poisoned by it do something now to smash it into fragments.

In the preoccupation of war conditions this subtle blow against mental freedom for our children and teachers is being formulated. Pressure is being brought to bear on the Government, political threats and innuendoes are passing around, and soon the reptile from the egg may be in the schools. Before it is too late we must strike back. Despite the war and its many problems for us all, we must strive to win one victory for freedom at home, defeating the enemies in our midst.

"The Freethinker" has already given one suggestion—that all freethinking parents should withdraw their children from religious instruction as a form of protest. This the writer has already done. But more is necessary. Every

branch of the National Secular Society should protest to the local education authorities, to the teachers' organisations, and to the Minister of Education. Where no branch exists, individual Freethinkers should take up the task. Members of Parliament should be challenged on the question, and teachers, neighbours with children (and without), colleagues and workmates, should be acquainted with what is happening. Your local parsons should have it made clear to them that strong feeling runs against them and, above all, the children themselves should be warned of this impudent attempt to give them larger doses of religious propaganda; they can do a lot by their candid, honest talk at school.

To do these things now, and others if we can think of them, will help to defeat the present attack against freedom of thought for children and teachers, and might also put our feet more firmly on the path to complete victory in this matter by helping to secure at a later stage the final adoption of completely secularised education.

F. J. CORINA

Following is the letter sent by our contributor to a headmaster. It may be useful to others:—

"Dear Sir,—Influential sections of the clergy in this country . . . are seeking to extend the scope of religious instruction in our State schools, which means . . . that the schools are even more to become places for theological propaganda. In a nation which claims to be conducting a war for that desirable condition, 'freedom and independence for every individual, sect and nation,' it seems ironical that we should be faced with the threat of mass production of theological ideas in our children, who surely deserve the freedom from mental tyranny which is one of the objects of the present struggle, and the sacrifices of their parents.

"Of course, it may be that the clerical idea of freedom is that it includes their enjoyment of a license that would be denied any other section of the community—that is, to propagate their doctrines in our schools, in school time, and at the expense of the community at large, who, judging by membership figures in the Churches, have little use for those doctrines. The attempt to obtain such license is not only contrary to every just conception of freedom, but is impudent in the bargain.

"As a parent and a citizen, contributing to the cost of education, and believing true education to be the training of the mind to think for itself, rather than to think according to ideas which it has been forced to absorb, I resent this attempt by the clergy to use our children as prospective clients, and to turn our teachers into deputy curates, by imposing on them tasks that are legitimately only within the province of the home, the Churches and the Sunday schools."

LENS ON IDEALS

L. Susan Stebbing: "Ideals and Illusions" (Watts, 8s. 6d.).

IN "Thinking to Some Purpose" (Pelican Books), Dr. Stebbing made a lively and important contribution to popular education, which is elaborated by this examination of ideals and illusions. It is a pity, therefore, that it is not more economic in treatment, fuller in content and cheaper in price, but it is nevertheless a "must" book for those who profess concern for the building of a new world order. Given a certain perseverance, they will learn from Dr. Stebbing how to think clearly and express themselves definitely, how to assess values critically and separate imagery from ideals—in fact, how to recognise the good life and live it purposively.

This preparation is an imperative duty in a sick world. We must "find out what we hold to be worth seeking at all costs, know clearly what it is we are seeking, and discover whether there be any way of remoulding this sorry scheme of things so that it be nearer to our heart's desire. This is a task that has constantly to be undertaken afresh. I believe that we shall fail in this task unless we are willing to think steadily; we shall also fail if we wholly lack any tenderness towards the traditions of the past—the wisdom handed down to us by men who were ignorant of the marvels of science, but not of the delight of loving and being loved."

Dr. Stebbing's own approach to the search is summarised at the end of the book. She is not contemptuous of the urge to attain certainties, such as those offered by religion, but recognises that it is very compelling. "It is not at all easy to face the fact that we cannot have certainties. We like to think that there is a moral code, if only we knew it, that was wholly right, given out by God on Mount Sinai or written in our hearts. No doubt the German Youth have found satisfaction and peace of mind in the Nazi creed, with their belief that Hitler is always right; and the Fascisti, with *their* belief that Mussolini is always right. These leaders are felt to have a wisdom that is beyond question. Unfortunately the leaders do not always agree, and the deliverances of one wise man are in conflict with those of another. The case is not widely different with regard to the leaders of Christian opinion. So that we have only two alternatives. . . ."—to follow a leader or take the more difficult course of deciding for oneself.

"Life is not a game," she adds, "for which rules can be prescribed once for all; nor a rehearsal for a Great Drama, the first performance of which is not yet; nor a porch leading us into heavenly courts. It is an illusion to find the value of our lives here and now in a life to come; it is an illusion to suppose that nothing is worth while for me unless I live for ever; it is an illusion to suppose that there is no uncompensated loss, no sacrifice that is without requital, no grief that is unassuaged. But it is also no illusion but uncontested fact that here and now we know that hatred, cruelty, intolerance and indifference to human misery are evil; that love, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness and truth are good, so unquestionably good that we do not need God or heaven to assure us of their worth."

This fine statement is charged with a nobility typical of creative freethought at its best, a fitting climax to a penetrating analysis of excellences and evils. Some of these excellences Dr. Stebbing calls "spiritual," explaining (as she always does) the value she attaches to this ambiguous word. They include "love for human beings, delight in creative activities of all kinds, respect for truth, satisfaction in learning to know what is true about this world (which includes ourselves), loyalty to other human beings, generosity of thought and sympathy with those who suffer, hatred of cruelty and other evils, devotion to duty and steadfastness in seeking one's ideals, delight in the beauty of nature and in art—in short, the love and pursuit of what is worth while for its own sake. . . . These excellences are to be found in *this* world; no heaven is needed to experience them."

About the positive evils she claims to be neither comprehensive nor precise, but is sure that her list "includes nothing that is not without qualification evil. Anything that hinders or makes impossible a right relationship between people: hatred of anyone; delight in the suffering of anyone, including deliberate cruelty; obtaining power over anyone and exercising it for his hurt; unkindness in all its various forms, including insensitiveness to other people's needs; using people exclusively for my own aims; indifference to truth; lack of self-control; fear."

She agrees with Mill that the other great positive evil is poverty. "Much has been written, or sung, in praise of poverty, but those who praise it do not usually seek it. . . . If it is argued (as I have heard it argued) that 'the poor' like to be overcrowded and to live in dirt and squalor, I should reply that, if this be true, 'the poor' suffer another evil—contentment with conditions not fit for such a being as a man. To live without beautiful things—indeed, in positive ugliness—to be untrained to appreciate fine music or fine literature or plastic art, never to have opportunities of discovering the joy to be found in seeking knowledge, is to be deprived of conditions necessary for the development of the human spirit. . . . It is easy to sneer—after the fashion of a distinguished Churchman, comfortable in his circumstances and proud of his family tree—at the way the poor take their pleasures and spend their leisure. But the finer enjoyments of life, apart from loving and being loved and from the consciousness of a job well performed, or of duty well done, are not to be had without training; leisure of mind and body are essential for such training. One has first to learn to outgrow the childish taste for sweets."

I have chosen these quotations to show the character of the author and the spirit which informs her work. It is instructive to compare them with the utterances of the

divinely advised. Here, for example, is Cardinal Newman (quoted by Dr. Stebbing) on the purpose of the Church:—

"The Church aims, not at making a show, but at doing a work. She regards this world, and all that is in it, as a mere shadow, as dust and ashes, compared with the value of one single soul. She holds that, unless she can, in her own way, do good to souls, it is no use her doing anything; she holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, for all the many millions who are upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony, so far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin. She considers the action of this world and the action of the soul simply incommensurate, viewed in their respective spheres; she would rather save the soul of one single wild bandit of Calabria, or whining beggar of Palermo, than draw 100 lines of railroad through the length and breadth of Italy, or carry out a sanitary reform, in its fullest details, in every city of Sicily, except so far as these great national works tended to some spiritual good beyond them."

And the notorious Archdeacon Paley on the need for resignation among the poor:—

"We are most of us apt to murmur when we see exorbitant fortunes placed in the hands of single persons; larger, we are sure, than they can want, or, as we think, than they can use. . . . But whenever the complaint comes into our minds, we ought to recollect that the thing happens in consequence of those very rules and laws which secure to ourselves our property, be it large or small. . . . To abolish riches would not be to abolish poverty, but, on the contrary, to leave it without protection and resource. . . . It is not for the poor men to repine at the effects of laws and rules, by which he is benefited every hour of his existence, which secure to him his earnings, his habitation, his bread, his life. . . . Besides, what, after all, is the mischief? The owner of a great estate does not eat or drink more than the owner of a small one. . . . Frugality itself is a pleasure. . . . the very care and forecast that are necessary to keep expenses and earnings upon a level form, when not embarrassed by too great difficulties, an agreeable engagement of the thoughts."

To complete these contrasts one needs an indication of the social approach of another familiar type—the person much given to good works. Dr. Stebbing, rich in quotations, supplies it, too. It is taken from an address delivered in 1801 by Miss Hannah More to the starving women of Shipham. "I wish you to understand," said the gracious virgin, anxious to make it clear that charity is not a right and that the rich also suffer, "that you are not the only sufferers." She concedes that they have borne their share:

". . . and a very heavy one it has been, in the late difficulties; but it has fallen in some degree on all ranks, nor would the gentry have been able to afford such large supplies to the distresses of the poor had they not denied themselves, for your sakes, many indulgences to which their fortune at other times entitles them. We trust the poor in general, especially those that are well instructed, have received what has been done for them as a matter of favour, not of right—if so, the same kindness will, I doubt not, always be extended to them, whenever it shall please God to inflict the land."

The temptation to go on picking plums from Dr. Stebbing's store is hard to resist, but these samples must suffice to show their quality. I hope that a host of readers, particularly amongst subscribers to this journal, will thoroughly explore the well-stocked cupboard of her learning and warm humanity.

CEDRIC DOVER

CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—I am flattered that you should have devoted so much of your space to my book, "The Church, Impotent or Triumphant?" and I ask you, of your courtesy, to let me point out that in one or two respects you have, of course, inadvertently, misrepresented my position. You will agree that it is of vital importance that all men of good will should at least contrive at mutual understanding.

Your review makes it appear that the Roman Church and the "High Church Group" are equally the objects of my criticisms. I myself am, as I always have been, one of the "High Church Group," or, as I should prefer to say, I am a Catholic Christian of the Anglican Obedience—a Liberal Catholic, that is—immensely in the debt of Scott Holland and Charles Gore. It would be merely impertinent of me to ask you to give me space to defend or explain my position. But it is because I am a Catholic that I am a Socialist, and while I criticised the Roman Church for what I regard as sins of commission in backing Dollfuss and Franco and thus preparing the way for Hitler, my criticism of the English Church and of the other bodies of organised Christians, collectively exercising far less international influence that Rome can exercise, was for sins of omission—was, indeed, for sighing and regretting and doing nothing.

You refer to what I say in my book of anti-Israelism, which I agree is "a foolish term." I have considered the Jewish problem at length in my "The Jew To-day" and in "The Folly of Anti-Semitism," which I wrote in collaboration with the late Herbert Sidebotham. I do not forget the diabolical persecution of the Jews by the Church—and this is a point of real importance—I think that Lucien Wolf was absolutely right in his assertion that modern anti-Semitism has always been fundamentally political and economic, and not racial and religious. Wolf wrote his comprehensive article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" 30 years ago. Subsequent history has justified him completely.

We all wish for a better world. I do not believe that it is "a case of the Churches or nothing." On the contrary, I believe that unless the Church plays its part in the creation of the better world, it will be reduced to impotence, while I also believe that without its co-operation there may be a better time, but that it will not be anything like so good and comely as it might be.

As I said recently in the "New Statesman," I can understand the historical and philosophical defence of the Marxian assertion that there can be no tolerable time in society until the destruction of the belief in God. I am equally and honestly convinced that without a general quickening of that belief there can never be a genuinely equalitarian society.

Forgive the length of this screed. But we must reason together if we are to act together, and unless all men and women of good will contrive to act together, it may well be found when the war is over that one devil has been driven out to make room for a legion of devils.—Yours, etc.,

SIDNEY DARK.

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