

# THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Christians and the War

EVER since the war began the representatives of the Christian religion have been busy explaining where their God stands in the world-conflict. They dare not say that God could not have prevented the war, and it is impossible for even a Christian apologist to say definitely that he has done anything to bring peace nearer. As things go, the war must come to an end one day, and it is certain that when it does we shall have a pantomimic procession to St. Paul's to thank God for the victory he has given to the Allies. But the real question will never be asked by the clergy, which is: "Why did God permit the war to commence?" or if that question is asked, it is never answered. To say that God will not interfere with man's free-will is ridiculous in the face of the nature of the Christian faith in prayer. Whether the prayers are public, semi-public or private, if they have any influence at all on events it must take one of three forms. Either they induce God to do something he would not have done had prayers not been offered, or God moves men to do something they would not have done without prayer, or he "confounds our enemies," and so helps us to win the war. I was almost writing that believers cannot have it both ways, but as a matter of fact, there is nothing new in Christians, whenever they are faced with mutually contradictory conclusions, adopting both. One absurdity more or less is a trifle where religious beliefs are concerned. And the genuinely religious attitude is, when faced by two contradictory positions, to accept both.

A contribution to this mass of self-contradictory explanations of God's place in the war is made by an eminent Nonconformist, the Rev. Sydney Berry. Mr. Berry says the question of the Churches and the war is a very big subject. "Big" is a relative term—a man must be big to a flea, but he is very small at the side of an elephant. He also says that there are queer folk who think that unless the Churches are passing resolutions they are sinking into lethargy. I do not think this is true. The Churches, as a matter of fact, have done little else than pass resolutions ever since the war began. They must, for instance, have passed many hundreds of resolutions in the "collar-the-kids" campaign they began soon after the war commenced. There is no complaint that the Churches do not pass resolutions; they do little else—publicly. It is the nature, the quality, the aims of these resolutions that arouse comment.

So Mr. Berry points out that the Churches "gather their congregations together . . . which is strength.

Prayers and intercessions are continually offered. The ministry of strength and comfort goes on ceaselessly and cannot be measured in words." The last few words might have read: "had better not be measured in words," for if Christians need these artificial stimulants, this constant resource to spiritual dram-drinking, it really puts them in a poor light. Why the necessity for this constant appeal to God to do something—which never materialises—or this dependence upon artificial stimulants? One thing at least Russia has shown the world. This is that if men and women can fight a war with unsurpassed courage and determination, plans can be made intelligently and carried out faithfully all that is necessary to carry on life (one may take it that the tales of the Russian people cowering in terror before a government that tortures and which is perpetuating a state of de-civilisation, must be laid by for at least the "duration") why cannot Christians rise to the same level?

Now I not only believe they can, but I assert they often do. I reject altogether the implication made by these preachers of Christianity that what other people—in Russia and all over the civilised world—can do, without this constant appeal to a casually careless-minded God, Christians are incapable of accomplishing. Christians are not of necessity of poorer material than non-Christians. I agree that there are certain types of people who crave for artificial stimulants of one or another kind. This stimulant takes many forms—alcohol, self-delusion, religious exercises and so forth—but in essence they are the same, they are so many forms of encouragement that ineffective human nature demands. And if Mr. Berry and his preachers would face the position boldly, and say honestly that all men and women are not capable of facing life without some artificial stimulant, much of the criticism of religion would be invalid. But they do not take up this position. Actually, they argue that the artificially perpetuated feeling for religion must be continued, that while human nature may achieve convalescence, it can never reach perfect health. It is that which we Freethinkers deny. I do not marvel that when a preacher looks over a church filled with bowed heads and listens to moaning confessions of human helplessness, he feels proud and satisfied; but it is a poor thing on which to congratulate oneself. As a Freethinker, I deny the existence of any radical distinction between the nature of Freethinkers and Christians. I affirm that Christians can be as self-dependent, as humanly good, as non-Christians—if they will only try.

### A Bundle of Paradoxes

Mr. Berry goes plodding along the road of mental confusion and self-indictment under the obvious impression that he is making a successful defence of Christianity. The Churches, he says, have had their share of destruction. Churches have been destroyed, and some of the "subsidiary buildings of the Churches have been thoughtlessly requisitioned by the Government, congregations have moved from the danger zone to safer ones," and so forth. All this is true enough, but such statements are not justifications of Christian belief—they are rather an indictment. The war has shown that churches are as vulnerable to

German bombs as "fun-fairs," prayers are as powerless to give protection as curses, congregations of devout believers find that safety is a question of area, not of piety. It is true that when St. Paul's was bombed, the Dean, Dr. Matthews, said that the altar was saved by a miracle, but that only threw into greater relief the pertinent question why God was not effective over a wider area. It may be that God protected the dome from destruction, but as reasonable a theory is that the Germans refrained from bombing it because it would serve as a fine guide to the most thickly congested part of the City.

The point I am driving at here is that Christians—where they are effective—do actually act as though God need not be bothered about. In moments of urgency they act as though they had no belief in God. They take the same precautions as non-believers, they rely upon the same weapons of defence and assault as non-believers; it is only in the (comparatively) forced leisure of disaster that they revert to prayer. Christians act quite sensibly part of the time; why do they not act sensibly all the time? We wish Mr. Berry would help us solve the riddle.

Mr. Berry finds comfort in the situation inasmuch as "the devastation is helping to break down the barriers between the different sections of the Church." They are offering the hospitality of their buildings to their less fortunate neighbours. . . . "People who worshipped in separate sanctuaries are now together." As Dominic Sampson would say, "Prodigious!" It has taken a world war to induce Christians to worship together. Mr. Berry says that "the pressure of wartime has a logic of its own." We agree, but the conclusion is not that which Mr. Berry draws. What was it that prevented these believers in Christianity from worshipping together? There was no law against their doing so. There was nothing in social relationships that prevented it. As a mere matter of fact, for a very long time now people of all sorts of religious beliefs, from Unitarianism down to Roman Catholicism, have met with friendliness to consider questions of a social nature. Social life always tends to throw people together where fundamental social considerations are concerned. The members of a social group have common ideas and common ideals, and where there are differences, the differences, when honest, are expressive of a common desire to realise the facts of given situations and their consequences. It is when religion steps in that an insuperable, or nearly insuperable barrier arises. For while in social life the forces at work drive men together by a sense of common interest, the influence of religion grows more and more divisive as human development proceeds. The Roman Catholic religion—the most primitive in Europe, or in the world unless one includes pure savagery—bears strong witness to the truth of this.

I have space for but one other point of Mr. Berry's. He tells us that the Churches have given some of their finest men to the Forces—as chaplains—that the Churches have taken in bombed-out people, a "bridge has been built across that gulf which separates the Churches from the lives of the people," etc. All this may be true—it is true—but what is there in all of it that is not to be found in greater measure, and with equal self-sacrifice (I use this misleading phrase because Christian usage has made people regard generous action as involving self-sacrifice) without the slightest reference to Christianity? Out of mere human feeling, the poorest have shared their homes and their food with these luckless sufferers from the war. What proportion of the parsonage have gone to the war, and what proportion of the men of eligible age have preferred to shelter under the privilege granted by the Government not to serve? Whatever sacrifices the

clergy have suffered during the war, they are simply nothing to what have been made by what Christian usage has accustomed us to call the "common" people.

One other point. The end of the war gave Europe its one chance for taking a firm step in the direction of a non-war world. This was the League of Nations. But from the outset the opposition to this becoming a really effective body was very strong in this country, until under the Baldwin—the honest Baldwin—Government the League was virtually wrecked. What part did Christians play in this? Some helped—true. Lord Hugh Cecil was one of these, and there were many others. Let us say there were as many Christians as non-Christians backing the League. This merely emphasises the point I have raised so often: What is there for good that the Christian Churches give the world that cannot be given—that is not given—without introducing Christianity at all? That is a question I am constantly asking, but to which no answer has yet been given by any responsible clergyman. Nor do I think that the Rev. S. M. Berry will be readier than his fellow preachers to give a plain answer to a plain question.

CHAPMAN COHEN

### KLAUSNER'S "JESUS OF NAZARETH"

AMONG the hundreds (or is it thousands?) of so-called biographies of Jesus of Nazareth, few have been written by Jews from a genuine scientific point of view. In the nature of the case, this was difficult, as the centuries of persecution suffered by the race in the name of Christianity made it almost impossible for a believing Jew to look at Jesus with a purely objective eye.

But though anti-Semitism has always been rife in many countries, particularly in Germany, the majority of civilised people have become more or less ashamed of this anti-Jewish feeling; and Jewish scholars have been able to devote more study to what was considered at one time among them a kind of forbidden subject—the study of Christianity from Jewish sources. Of these students, Dr. Joseph Klausner has long had a well-deserved reputation. In particular, as Canon Danby notes, he is a great authority on Jewish Messianic ideas during our first two centuries, "a subject of study at which he has persistently worked and which compelled him to devote an attention, closer and more minute, than has yet been given by any Jewish scholar, to the subject of Jesus, his Messianic claims, and the problem of Christian origins." One result of all his studies in these matters can be seen in his "Jesus of Nazareth, His Lifetime and Teaching," published in an English translation from Klausner's Hebrew by Canon H. Danby in 1925.

It is doubtful whether any previous Jewish writer has put together in one volume so much historical research into a vast controversial problem "with neither satiric nor apologetic bias," as the author himself points out. Klausner seems to have gone much further in using Rabbinical and Talmudic sources than such authorities as Schürer in "Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ," or Edersheim in his "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah." And if my own opinion is worth anything—and I have made a special study of Christian origins for many years—I should like to add that if Klausner fails to prove that Jesus existed as a man in a work every line of which testifies to a fervent belief in this, it is doubtful if anybody else could do it. Rarely has so much scholarship, particularly from all available Jewish sources, been applied with such persistence or plausibility.

Klausner has no doubt whatever that the Talmud does mention Jesus—the real Jesus, of course: the Jesus of Nazareth of the Gospels—not the Jesus of such fairy tales as make him to be a Great Robber-Chief with 900 followers, or a Wise King of the Jews. He is quite certain that Jesus came slowly to believe that he was actually the Messiah, and that this belief can be seen developing in the Gospels, which are, to all intents and purposes, historical documents.

He believes, therefore, in the twelve Apostles, including Judas Iscariot, and it is obvious also that he finds it very difficult not to believe in the miracles recorded in the Gospels. He has hardly any patience, however, to discuss the Virgin Birth, and quotes an old Syriac Gospel to prove that the parents of Jesus were Joseph and Mary—as if that settled the matter once for all. Klausner gives copious quotations from the Gospels, rejecting with ease any particular statement in a Gospel he does not agree with, but confidently appealing to all the texts he can to prove his case.

His great thesis is that Jesus was a Jew of Jews, and a Pharisee at that; and that there is nothing in the ethical teachings in the Gospels which cannot be paralleled in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha and the Talmud or current Rabbinical teachings. Only through the sheer genius of an "inspired" reformer, Jesus has commuted these teachings into something new—which, however, has not been, or cannot be accepted by the peoples of the world because pure ethics are not enough; there must be a body of teaching also dealing with social, political and economical duties as well. All this Klausner claims can be found welded together in one harmonious whole in Judaism which, on this account, is greater than the "Christianity" of Jesus.

In his early chapters, Klausner goes minutely into the Hebrew sources, as he calls them, of the life of Jesus; and more confused and chaotic sources could hardly be imagined. Klausner does not like Friedlander's emphatic statement that all passages in the Talmud relating to Jesus are "late additions and pure forgeries," and, in my opinion, very lamely tries to get over Friedlander's objections. He also tries his utmost to sustain *part* of the notice of Jesus given in Josephus as being genuine, but cannot give any plausible reason why Josephus ignores Christianity in his long account of Jewish history and wars. He insists that Tacitus "clearly refers to Jesus," though "we do not need the evidence of Tacitus to know that at the beginning of the second century the belief was widespread that there had been a 'Messiah,' or 'Christ,' who was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate." Suetonius and Pliny are only valuable as proving the existence of Christianity as a religion. Nowhere in these chapters does Klausner show any real acquaintance with the very weighty objections of opponents.

Klausner then gives an excellent account of the principal "Lives" of Jesus—a particularly welcome critique of Strauss, Renan, Edersheim, and the many German writers who have dealt with the problem. Unfortunately, he has but a word to say of the upholders of the myth theories like Arthur Drews, W. B. Smith and Kalthoff, and seems never to have heard of Dupuis, Volney and John M. Robertson. In fact, the myth theory he never faces. Klausner is obviously of the belief that the whole story of Jesus can be proven from literary sources, and that there is no reason whatever to go to any study of comparative religions for the origin of Christianity. This is the weakest part of his book.

Where Klausner really shines is in his descriptions of the Palestinian background and the social, political,

and economic conditions of the Jews at the (supposed) time of Jesus. This is excellently done, and it is obvious that he himself attaches much importance to such an account, for it takes up the bigger part of his book. Out of just over 400 pages, he devotes the first 230 to everything but the actual life of Jesus. Over and over again, even in the rest of his work, he will turn aside to describe enthusiastically some particular district in which Jesus is supposed to have been, or to quote some Talmudic parallels of sayings of Jesus or his disciples—as if that proved anything. As an example of irrelevancy, take his treatment of the town of Nazareth. He admits that its existence in the time of Jesus is unknown, as Dr. Cheyne shows in the "Encyclopedia Biblica"; however, it did exist in spite of that, but the site "was destroyed at an early date." He then goes into raptures over the present town of Nazareth—which, of course, has nothing to do with the case. Over and over again one comes across similar treatment of vital issues.

H. CUTNER

### ACID DROPS

THE only answer to the day of National Prayer up to the present is the growing severity of the German forces on Russia. Perhaps the advice slyly given to God to "get busy" in our interest has not been received. Or it may be that some of the Nazi representatives in heaven have sabotaged the petitions. Who knows?

But, quite seriously, is it not time that we put an end to this periodical parade of primitive superstition? Everyone engaged in the war knows that the issue will be determined, not by prayer, but by men and munitions. And it is little short of an insult to our soldiers, sailors and airmen, to say nothing of the civilian effort, to proclaim that what Russia can do without God we cannot do without the intellectual and moral "dram-drinking" of days of prayer. God should know what to do without the advice given him in these performances.

Or, if we must have these performances, why not keep the King out of it? The last day of prayer was by his "request." Actually it should read he was requested to request. That would have been nearer the truth. But while the nation has a King, he is so far representative of the whole of the people, and there is no greater moral justification for making it imperative that he shall profess to share the religious opinions of a section than there is for his asking that all shall hold the same political opinions as he has himself. We should like to see a free King in a free country.

That instrument for keeping popular attention from "dangerous" subjects and drenching the unthinking with outworn religious ideas, the B.B.C., is giving a series of Bible lessons to children. It is going through the story of Moses as though we were dealing with an historical character, and as though what he did and said can be given with the certainty of a police court record. If this is not deliberately lying to children, irrespective of age, we should like to see an example of what is. Probably many of the speakers feel that this is a pretty low-down way of getting a living.

Miss Dorothy Sayers is doing her best these days for God. She is constantly explaining and expounding him, and in her latest book she does her utmost to demonstrate how God makes things from "nothing." It is all very easy if only one thinks like Miss Sayers. It appears that when God made the Universe out of nothing, he did it just as a "creative" artist makes something out of nothing. For example, when a beautiful picture is painted—that is done out of "nothing" in the sense that it comes from the artist's imagination. So is the "creation" of Hamlet or Falstaff. And she quotes Berdyaev's "penetrating" phrase, "God created the world by imagination." It is very good to learn that God has imagination among his other obviously human qualities.

Actually, according to Miss Sayers—and who, indeed, can know so well as a writer of detective stories—God's work in "creation" was threefold—a charming example of the way our Deity got in a hint of the Holy Trinity. There is first the Creative Idea, passionless and timeless; then the Creative Energy, working in time with Sweat and Passion, finally, the Creative Power, the Image of the Indwelling Spirit. And these Three are One "whereof none can exist without the other," as Miss Sayers so wittily puts it. It should be added that Creative Power is the Ghost. Needless to say, all this is expounded in detail with, we are told, "brilliant lucidity." In other words, the problem is now solved and nobody has any excuse for not fully understanding the way God made or created the Universe out of nothing.

By the way, what is an action like, that is "passionless and timeless"? It must be first cousin to a footless stocking without a leg. Still, it evidently pleases the reviewer, because he says Miss Sayer's exposition is written with "brilliant lucidity." Perhaps he was just poking fun.

Monsignor R. A. Knox, who is considered one of the brainy representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, and who sometimes appears in that curious futility, the B.B.C. Brains Trust, denies that those who followed Jesus knew nothing about them. He retorts that they knew Jesus and his miracles. They were not performed in a corner. Of course not—how could they be? But what is remarkable, as Gibbon long ago pointed out, is that no one knows of these miracles outside the New Testament. And Judea was not then out of touch with the world. But no one appears to have thought it necessary to record the slaughter of children by Herod, or the men who came from the grave and walked about the streets of Jerusalem, or the days of darkness when Jesus was crucified, and so on, and so on. Really, the remarkable thing about the New Testament miracles is not that they occurred, but that everyone passed them by with the nonchalance that the mewing of a mid night cat would have received. They were evidently copy-righted.

Monsignor Knox is also impressed with the feelings of Matthew when Jesus selected him. He must have wondered, Why? We suggest that we have in Matthew's wonderment—we congratulate Monsignor Knox on his discovery—the origin of the Londoner with a bad stutter who, when asked in Cheapside, which was the way to the Strand, painfully ejaculated why, with so many millions of people in London, was he picked out to answer the question? We seem to see the reason for Knox appearing in the Brains Trust.

We may remind the Bishop of Portsmouth that the Russia we are praising to-day for its courage, its intelligence, its determination to die rather than submit to Hitlerism, the Russia that our specialists praise so highly after paying special visits, is the Russia that has been encouraged to throw off its religion and has a Government which for the first time in history has openly preached Atheism.

Even that is not the end, for the Russia we are now praising is the Russia that the Christians of this country pictured a few years ago as delighting in murder, with a Government holding down the people by an iron hand, a Russia that taught the community of wives, with other forms of vileness that only a disordered religious imagination could revel in. And even now there is not a single Christian leader who has had the decency to put on the white sheet of repentance and confess that the stories circulated by Christian writers and preachers were mainly deliberate lies.

What hard-shell democrats we are, to be sure. But not quite so hardened as to forget that the common man must not be permitted to speak decent English. If we have stories of the "common" soldier, he most frequently talks a kind of English that one does not often meet nowadays. And in religious tales the man who does not believe in God

(no, "gawd") is usually unacquainted with either grammar, aspirates or pronunciation. In all directions this policy keeps alive the foolish superstition that unbelief and a "lowly estate" is mostly connected with lack of education.

We were reminded of this by an article which appears in the September issue of "Nineteenth Century and After." A Mr. E. Gaitens writes on the "Marble Arch" and its meetings. He listened to a number of speakers. The Salvationist, the Roman Catholic and a Welsh preacher all use quite good English, and no fault is found with their pronunciation. The pronunciation of the others is deplorable. The Communist murders English with the unconcern with which the Russian Government were believed to murder priests and children—before they became our Allies. A critic of the Adam and Eve story also fails to pass the simplest of linguistic tests. An unbelieving sailor also fails to pass without committing linguistic murder, and so it goes on. It is an old story, but an intelligent foreigner who studies such things may reflect that, combined with our never-ending surprise that one who reaches eminence was only a "working man," we are a very queer example of democracy.

The priest who answers questions in the "Universe" has been asked who was responsible for the burning of Joan of Arc. The answer is given that Joan was condemned by "a local Ecclesiastical Court under English influence." That is a truly Christian method of suggesting a lie while telling the truth. Joan was burned after being found guilty of witchcraft, and whether under English or Italian influence makes no difference whatever. Witchcraft was a "crime" condemned by the Church on the authority of the Bible. The chief judges against whom Joan was brought were Roman Catholic priests and all the people concerned were good Roman Catholics. And thousands of men, women and children were burned as a result of the attempt of the Roman Church to crush out this fictitious crime. The witch mania was one of the blessings the Bible gave to Europe.

The Federal Free Church Council is to hear an appeal for the appointment of a Commission to see what can be done to bring about "unity" in the Christian Church. Both the Anglican and the Roman Church pretend—that is the proper word—that they are interested, which, in a sense, they are. The only unity the Roman Church will think of is complete submission, while the Anglican, through one of its mouthpieces, makes it quite clear that the blessed word "theology" must come in for any "unity" worth while. "Theology," cries the "Church Times," the science of the knowledge of God—not humanism or humanitarianism—must occupy the centre of the piece." Of course, it is not Jesus, the ethical teacher, who must be the mascot, but Christ—that is, the sacrificed Saviour God—who must be worshipped in full primitive fashion. How can anyone really doubt it?

October is the month of the Holy Rosary, and the Pope has called upon all faithful sons, and daughters, of the Church to "pray specially to Our Lady for the shortening of the war." We appreciate the caution of the counsel." To pray for victory is rather risky. It has been tried, and victory has not arrived. But the "shortening"—that is quite another matter, because whenever the end comes it might not have come so soon as it does, and when it arrives, who can say that it might not have lasted longer if "Our Lady" had not interfered? Of course, this will not bring to life the millions of the dead, neither will it rebuild the shattered homes. But there is no denying that if we keep on praying long enough, the war will end. Persistence does it.

Meanwhile, we again suggest our remedy. It is to God's benefit that we shall keep on praying to him and worshipping; for gods have a habit of disappearing altogether when the prayer ration is cut off. So why not give public notice to "Our Lady" and the rest of the heavenly troupe that unless the war is brought to an end, say by the end of this year, all prayers will cease and all places of worship will be closed? In other words, let us apply the blockade to heaven as well as to Germany.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

**E. ROSE.**—It is downright impertinence to attempt to institute church parade in the A.F.S. But where religious interests are concerned, impudence is without limits. The fact of only one man volunteering for church parade out of a staff of 48, makes the impertinence more noticeable. Copies of the paper were sent to the address forwarded. More will be sent.

**W. A. FAIRCLOUGH.**—Inequalities of labour and remuneration are not uncommon in peacetime, and they are not likely to be less in times of war. We agree that if flesh and blood may be conscripted in wartime, there seems no logical objection to conscription in other directions. But allowing for inequalities here, a great deal of that appears to be going on. We do not know whether Mr. Morrison was a conscientious objector during the last war. Why not write him direct?

**C. F. BUDGE.**—Received. Will appear next week.

**F. WARLINK.**—Thanks for what you say concerning "Views and Opinions." The criticism of the attack on the younger generation was, as you agree, well deserved. It is not want of character that leads to neglect of religion, but independence of mind and character.

**E. S. SMEDLEY.**—Will think over the matter, but our space is very limited.

**W. H. ROBINSON.**—The presence of so many Roman Catholics in the "Jehovah's Witnesses" ranks is a very curious thing. But the Roman Church will do anything to achieve its ends. And to what straits Jehovah must be reduced—judging by the kind of witnesses he provides! There is a saying that a man is known by the company he keeps. It looks as though the same applies to gods.

**W. J. FREEMAN.**—Thanks for cutting. We are quite well, but could do with a little more leisure. Hope your own health will soon improve. After all, you are only our age, and we feel anything but old.

**C. WILLIAMS.**—The best reply to your Roman Catholic friends would be to give them copies of Ingersoll's "Rome or Reason." Its analysis of the R.C. position is complete and crushing.

**WAR DAMAGE FUND.**—E. A. McDonald (S.A.), £5; D. Cordingley, 10s.; Mrs. B. Houston (Canada), £1 7s. 7d.; S. Berry, 3s.

For distributing and advertising "The Freethinker":  
"One of the Armed Forces," 10s.

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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

**MR. COHEN** had not intended to engage in lecturing this winter. He has a great deal on hand, and leaving home on Saturday and not getting back until some time on Monday, with Tuesday getting "The Freethinker" read for the press, makes a big hole in the week. He is, however, visiting Leicester on October 12 and will speak in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, on "Danger Ahead." The meeting will be an afternoon one.

It is good to see a growing uneasiness among teachers concerning the campaign of the Churches to place schools substantially under their control. In addition to other

items we have published from time to time, we note several letters from teachers protesting against one of the meanest of the many mean manœuvres practised by the Churches of this country. We emphasise that injustice and intolerance is a marked feature of the Christian Church wherever it rules. One might almost lay it down as a sociological law that vindictiveness is strongest where the Christian Church is most powerful, and meanness most developed where the existence of Freethinking is not general enough to stand against open attacks on civic freedom.

On this head two letters, both from schoolmasters, which appear in "Education," are worth noting. Mr. Jenkin Thomas, ex-president of the Headmasters' Association, says: "Those who are supporting the demand for a statutory obligation to provide religious instruction and for the inspection of such religious instruction, should realise that the teaching profession is strongly opposed to the demand." We hope teachers will take energetic steps to prevent this being done. The situation is in their hands.

The second letter is from Mr. R. McArthur. He writes, replying to a question from a Rev. H. W. R. Elsley: "Why should not religious instruction be made compulsory? Surely the answer is that that doctrinal basis on which the Christian teaching rests is no longer acceptable to great masses—perhaps the majority—of educated men. Need the clergy be blind to this plain fact. As one who has friends, both Christian and other, I wish to protest strongly against the present attempt to place schoolmasters in the hands of the clergy, and to make their promotion dependent on a certain attitude to the religious teaching in schools. And does anyone doubt that this will be the effect, even if it is not the purpose of the arrangements now proposed?"

We have again to thank those who have been good enough to send us copies of pamphlets for reprinting. We are getting on with reprinting as quickly as possible. But this job is getting more and more difficult.

As to the value of religion in holding evil propensities in check, perhaps the best comment is that Roman Catholics, while forming about 8 per cent. of the population, provide 15 per cent. of the inhabitants of prisons. And the Roman Catholic is more closely watched and better controlled by his priest than any Protestant is by his parson. It is very kind of Christians to adopt this left-hand way of assuring us that Freethinkers are made of different stuff than Christians. But we do not believe it. The Freethinker is not made of different stuff; he is taught to understand his material better and use it in a more profitable manner. And what Freethinkers are Christians could be—if they would try. We demur at the insinuation that Freethinkers are made of better stuff than Christians and insist that there is the same human nature in both.

The Glasgow Secular Society has acquired premises for propaganda purposes, and all members and friends are asked to attend to-day (October 5) at 26, Hillfoot Street, opposite "Palais de Danse," at 3 p.m. A syllabus of lectures, discussions, etc., is being arranged, and many Glasgow friends are anxious to get into action during the winter months.

The following from the official Vatican organ, "Osservatore Romano," cited by the London-published "Spanish Newsletter," will help us to understand the part played by the Roman Catholic Church in the world war—always remembering that in the main Roman Catholics will not dare not, oppose Rome:—

"In the Law of March 12, 1938, which cancels definitely the Law of June 28, 1932, concerning the so-called 'Civil Marriages,' as well as the regulations regarding it promulgated by the Republic, the New Spain recognises religious marriages as the basis of the family. The Law of September 20, 1938, revising the method of teaching in secondary schools, with a distinct orientation towards classical culture and an essentially

Catholic spirit, provides, among other things, for two hours' weekly religious instruction in every class, and places on the same level private Catholic schools with those of the State and, in its Preamble, points out that 'Catholicism constitutes the nerve-centre of the history of Spain, and a thorough religious catechism, the Gospel and morality to liturgy, the history of the Church and adequate apologetics cannot be discarded'; the Law of 10th December, 1938, which abrogates the Law of January 30, 1932, the Republican Government's Law on the secularisation of cemeteries and the transfer of their ownership to municipalities; the Law of February 2, 1939, abrogating the Law of the Republic dated June 2, 1933, concerning Religious Confessions and Congregations, recognising the juridical situation which the religious orders in Spain enjoyed before the promulgation of sectarian regulations by the Republic, and pointing out that the Catholic Religion, the inspiration of her genius and tradition, is the only religious confession existing in Spain; the Law of September 23, 1939, by which General Franco, in restoring to Spanish legislation 'the sentiment of tradition which is Catholic,' abrogates the Divorce Law promulgated by the Republic on March 2, 1932; and, finally, the Decree of October 22, 1939, which re-establishes in the National Budget an appropriation for the maintenance of the clergy and the exercise of the cult in the same measure and proportion as in the last year prior to its suppression by the Republic."

And our representative in Spain is that very pious person, Sir Samuel Hoare!

We have to apologise to both the writer and readers of Mr. Palmer's article in the issue for September 21. Right through the article the name of the great Greek General Seleucus Nicator was printed as "Selencus." Fortunately, the mistake, while not one that would seriously mislead the reader, was annoying to both writer and editor. And once the compositor had made the blunder, it was repeated right through the article. But we have had some very busy press days lately, and we must look to the generosity of both writer and reader for forgiveness.

We were pleased to see Lord Horder denouncing in the "News-Chronicle" those individuals who are marketing rubbishy food products at extravagant prices. In these days they should be treated as criminals. But we wish he would turn his attention to those unnamed (or bogus) medical men who, through the medium of the B.B.C., assure us every now and again that the food we cannot get does not matter, and the food we are getting is as good as anything we can get. They are a disgrace to the medical profession—if they really belong to it.

### THROUGH NATURE TO-GOD?

IN answer to the question, "What do I believe?" I must say, in all sincerity, "Nothing."

To every popular theory, to every generally accepted idea, there are so many alternatives.

When I was very young I believed in God; in the early twenties I doubted God—the Infallible, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent God—but I believed in a force, a purpose, some guiding influence. How then have I travelled from simple, sure belief to an almost absolute cynicism? I have opened the books, and through them have seen beyond the obvious, the apparent, and have asked the fatal question, "Why?" And so have you, and thousands upon thousands of others, but only a few have stayed for an answer, and fewer still have heard the reply, "There is no purpose in life." There is no purpose in life—the reply told in the language of earthquake, of tornado, of scorching sun and endless, drenching rain; in the language of hard, biting frost and bitter, blackening wind. There is no purpose in life, is the reply from a thousand sightless eyes, ten thousand pain-wracked bodies. There is no purpose in life, says ruthless nature, as in agony a woman gives birth to the child that lives but a year, and she herself falls dead at the moment of her triumph. There is no purpose in life, the unfinished poem and broken melody

proclaim, as poet and musician breathe out their last, long ere they reach maturity.

Stop, you say, life is not so empty—look around, there is witness, too, of God's great bounty. Look at the beauty of creation; take a walk, my friend, along a leafy lane one bright May morning. Then let's take a walk, and I'll tell you what I see.

Those hawthorn bushes with their fresh, green shoots, their pure white blossom and fragrant scent—marvel of God's creation, if God there be; and see the almost geometrical perfection of that spider's web—fine, gossamer thread, its fragile beauty enhanced by tiny, sparkling globes of dew. Ponder on the wonder of the spider, marvellous creature of God's creation. Now see the fly, darting with lightning speed on wings so light and fine—further manifestation of God, the supreme creator. But wait—the tiny fly, breaking no commandments, subject to no laws, living as his fate decrees; see, he is ensnared within the net and helpless, as the spider, with swift, sure movements, tightly binds him with that same thread, not now of silken beauty to the fly, but bonds of steel. No, turn not away, here on powerful wings, a song but just a moment stopped, swoops down a bird—creature of infinite beauty—and smashed is the web and gone the spider.

Look where you will, in every Mayblossom lies the canker insect; in every hedgerow grows the poisonous weed. There is no beauty in the rabbit, innocent victim of the stoat or weasel, nor of the swift dive of eagle on the stoat. Look how you will at nature, there is no beauty in the law of tooth and claw.

If God there be, then what a monster. But, cries aloud blundering, wanton, pain-causing nature, there is no God, there is no purpose.

Then why live? To what end? We live and do it gladly, so long as we are free from pain, and even pain-wracked, hoping for its going; we live driven by the blind, purposeless force which is life.

Then out of the chaos do we strive to make some purpose; men sacrifice, they struggle, they die for a cause, an ideal, an ideal.

When men realise there is no providence, no God or Gods controlling their destiny, when the truth breaks through that man's only enemy is Nature, and combine to defeat its impartial cruelty—then will mankind progress.

COUNCILLOR E. H. DARBY

### THE WAY OF THE WORLD

THERE is no truth, we understand, in the rumour that the Government has apologised to the Fascists interned in the Isle of Man for any inconveniences to which they have been put. Neither is any compensation to be paid them for being deprived of the important posts that some might have received had Hitler been successful in annexing Britain. But the Commandant has warned them, with great severity, that if they will take to throwing bricks at Cabinet Ministers they would not get "the reasonable treatment they have so far received." In fact, if they continue to misbehave, there will be instituted "disciplinary action previously unknown in the camp." The Fascists have, we understand, promised not to insist on compensation for any annoyance they have been put to by publication of the news of their behaviour.

After all, one ought to bear in mind that many of these men had announced that within a very few months Fascism would be in control in this country, they would be suffering from a sense of loss, and therefore the inhabitants of the island, who, we see, are protesting against "the privileges enjoyed by the Fascists, particularly the visits of wives with all kinds of food not always available to the Manx people," are a little inconsiderate. But it is not true that in view of the approaching cold weather the Government is arranging for yachting trips to Madeira. The Fascists will have exactly the same weather as other folk.

But a list of the names of those English Fascists who are interned in the island would be rather instructive reading.

There seems something to be learned from the much increased output of war work during Russia Week, and also that at one works 2,000 men postponed their two days holiday in order to increase the output. These men must have taken their inspiration from the Government, which took no more than three months to send a deputation to Russia to see exactly what could be done.

One risk the Russians appear to be running is that of not having a sufficient stock of old men in command of the army. Their generals appear to be mainly between the forties and fifties. Also they have no Eton playgrounds on which battles are to be won. These things offer a very serious handicap in waging a war. Due allowances being made for these shortcomings, the Russian forces appear to have done very well.

There seems to be some significance in Julian Huxley's closing remarks in an article in the "News-Chronicle" on the British Association's meetings in London. Still, it was not a compliment to head the article "World's Brain Trust," but there is something in the closing paragraph which says that in this "Brain Trust" "no one will censor the remarks to be made." The B.B.C. "Brains Trust" could not maintain its low level without a censorship. That is quite plain. But why does not Professor Huxley resign as a protest against censorship? He could leave Professor Joad in charge with absolute confidence that it would retain its present level of futility.

The Churches are out for a totalitarian war in this country. They have mobilised their forces for the purpose of converting the schools into breeding grounds for the supply of members for the different religious bodies; they aim also at carrying the religious movement into the higher schools and universities, and unless we are mistaken, we shall be seeing something in the nature of a religious test openly applied to political candidates. And now there comes a protest from the Roman Catholic Archbishop Williams, of Birmingham, against "a tendency on the part of some education authorities to keep representatives of religion outside the youth movement." The aim of the Churches is to capture this movement, as the Boy Scout movement was Christianised by interested parties. Altogether, Hitler was not nearly so original as some people think. There is not a sinister feature in the training of German youth for Nazism that is not in daily operation in the Christian Churches.

QUANDOM

### FACTS TO BE FACED

IN a recent article, entitled "The Future of Freethought," which was published in these columns on August 24 last, I put forward a point of view which I knew to be controversial, fully expecting that some doughty Freethinker of the older school would arise in his wrath and do his best to smite me to the earth. That such a sequel has not yet taken place seems to me to suggest that, after all, a good many Freethinkers are beginning to realise that the cause they support is not in quite as healthy a condition as might, on the surface, seem to exist.

What I suggested was that the critics of Freethought, who state that the destruction of religious beliefs leaves a mental vacuum, have a certain amount of justice on their side. It would appear, in other words, that most people have what may with some justice be described as religious leanings, which it is necessary to satisfy in one way or another. Such an acute thinker as Dr. Julian Huxley has stressed this point several times, and the modern growth of dictatorship and the worship of the State have given new point to his words. The position, that is to say, is that the majority of men and women, in the present state of civilisation, find it necessary to have some object (natural or supernatural) to which they can look with respect, affection, esteem, or even worship.

Throughout the ages those not especially religious in the orthodox sense have found it necessary to indulge in hero-worship of some great man. The political movements associated with such figures as Karl Marx and Henry George provide noteworthy examples of this tendency and, as I pointed out in my previous article, the recent celebrations of royal anniversaries and the great hero-worship of

Mr. Lloyd George during the last war and Mr. Churchill during the present conflict, show a further development along not dissimilar lines. Even inside the Freethought Movement itself the tremendous prestige enjoyed by such great men as Ingersoll and Bradlaugh exemplifies a phenomenon which is, in the broadest sense of the term, religious.

It is noteworthy, also, that a movement which can show such worship-worthy figures is almost always a movement which is in a healthy condition. In the days when Bradlaugh strode the political arena like a colossus, the Freethought Movement loomed very large in the public eye—larger, perhaps, than ever before or since. The monumental figure of Karl Marx gave weight to the doctrines of Communism which few other political schools of thought have ever enjoyed; and, on the less valuable side, the prestige of Hitler and Mussolini grew in Germany and Italy during a period when orthodoxy was decaying.

It has appeared to me (and it still appears) that the lesson which this should teach to the Freethought Movement has never been duly appreciated. Freethinkers have always been inclined to think that all that is necessary is to destroy the unhappy pretensions of the pious, when universal happiness and goodwill are certain to follow.

In the light of the facts which I have set out—and of others which might be selected from among current events—such conclusions, pleasantly optimistic though they may be, are seen to be by no means as certain as we had thought. And that somewhat vague belief in the future of humanity which we thought quite sufficient justification for leading the good life—well, is it quite sufficient?

The perspicuous reader will no doubt have observed that up to the present I have been entirely vague in my *positive* aims. I have stated what I feel to be the flaws in the Freethought attitude as at present propagated, but I have said little as to the way in which I think these matters could be improved in future. I do not propose to embark on any such detailed exposition at the end of an article which, in these days of severe paper rationing, has already stretched out to an inordinate length. And in any case, I have already, I think, made a sufficient number of explosive statements for one issue, even of such an explosive journal as this. But I should like those who share my anxiety as to the present theological and religious position to give serious consideration to the whole affair as I have stated it. But I warn them, given provocation, I shall probably return to this topic at no very distant date.

S. H.

### "THE HISTORY OF BUTTON HILL"

(Conclusion)

I fear I was one of the comfortable, willing to give easy lessons in comfort to the uncomfortable. I babbled about it at Christian Endeavour Societies, with a background, in my own experience, of a comfortable Clapham villa. What a strong enforcement was Christian cheerfulness when Christian theology and Puritanical prudery had blinded your eyes to all the snakes that lay in your path!

I am glad Sylvanus Stall gets a look in:—

"Recently his father had taken him on one side and 'told him one or two things.' This was a bold step for a Button Hill parent to take. Even Mrs. Ellersby had been uncertain in her own mind of its wisdom. 'It seems so awful, Alfred, to have to tell him. He's so young. Couldn't he just be left to find out—like we did?' Mr. Ellersby had had his way, but his explanations and warnings had all been so carefully figurative and illusory, and both father and son had had been so anxious to get the uncomfortable interview done with, that Eric's ignorance on the essential processes of nature remained as profound as ever.

"His curiosity had been further whetted by a copy of Sylvanus Stall's 'What a Young Man Should Know,' which he found exhibited for sale on the open shelf of a second-hand bookshop in town—and still more by the companion volume,

'What a Young Girl Should Know,' which lay invitingly by its side. He fingered the leaves of both books surreptitiously with one half-ashamed eye on the passers-by. They seemed to promise a more complete elucidation. They went about it and about. But even Mr. Stall funked essentials, and Eric learned little from his books that he did not already know from other and less reputable sources."

Of course, the name Sylvanus Stall, by its alliteration proclaimed itself a *nom de plume*. If the reader could only finger such books surreptitiously, how could the writer be known by his friends to write them? A pseudonym was as necessary as for the hangman. To explain "the facts of life" was an occupation hardly less dubious: one certainly not to be chosen by really nice people. It would not have been pleasant to hear somebody say, "Mr. John Ketch. Let me see, you dislocated the necks of Messrs. Milsom and Fowler." (I thought of this murder of 40 years ago when recently passing through Muswell Hill district—it is sad how some London suburbs have become associated only with crime); but would it be any better to hear, "Mr. Sylvanus Stall! I am so pleased to meet the author of 'What a Young Girl Should Know.' It is so interesting." After all, some criminals must be hanged as the enemies of one's country must be shot; but could not people "be left to find out" about sex? Sylvanus, sensible man, did not think so; but he cautiously obscured himself. Did he choose "Sylvanus" to suggest that he dealt with matters only fit to be whispered in the recesses of a forest? He certainly "funked essentials." Poor man, he hardly dare refer to any part of the human body that was not common to both sexes. He had to write vaguely about "purity," and, like the writers of all pious sex books, found it difficult to disguise a feeling that "the Creator" might have arranged more nicely for the propagation of the species. I am sure, with Sir Thomas Browne, he could have wished that, like trees, we could propagate without conjunction even as the Christian fathers, according to Gibbon, believed that but for the Fall "some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise with a race of innocent and immortal beings." Sylvanus was merciful. He spared us the minatory monitions of one Henry Varley, who suggested that the slightest amount of pre-matrimonial sexual heat might lead to a very hot time in a world to come.

"Passive resistance" arising out of the Education Act of 1902 is very happily dealt with. I can well understand Stephen Mendip being a bit cynical about the protestant process of having your goods taken to pay the rates and then buying them back at an auction sale.

"Then we shall have forked out the money after all, Dad. Crumbs! What a sell!"

"Only under protest, my boy—only under protest," said his father, frowning. "You don't understand."

"Seems jolly tame to me!" Stephen sniffed. . . .

"I have a strong doubt in my mind," Mr. Ellersby told Mr. Knight, 'whether this arrangement about the auction sales is not a total surrender. It makes us a laughing-stock. Did you see that cartoon in "Punch" last week—

'Let the cruet stand and the decanters go.'"

"I saw it," said the pastor. "Mr. Punch will have his little joke, you know. I've no doubt that if he had been in existence in the days of the Early Christians he would have found them all very comic. There would have been plenty of sly digs at St. Paul, for instance."

In a Nonconformist household myself, I admired those who went to gaol and felt like Stephen about the others. However, I like people who kick just a little better than those who kick not at all; and I was sorry my father ranged himself with the latter and acquiesced in the Education Rate, particularly as he regularly read the "British Weekly," the principal organ of the "passive resistance" movement. The comment on "Punch" is delightful. This would have been the attitude of that journal until the Court of Rome had become Christian. Perhaps the pastor, Rev. A. S. Knight, a decade later would have found occasion to squirm at the Early Christian martyrs made comic by Bernard Shaw in "Androcles and the Lion." I confess I have not reconciled myself to this, particularly from a man who has so astutely avoided martyrdom even in its mild modern form. Men fond of funning rarely make martyrs. Perhaps that is the trouble with Wodehouse in Germany.

How, too, like mine was the author's Bible Class. Its leader made the only stipulation that "every subject adopted for discussion should 'have its roots in the pages of the Bible.' But that was not a hard bargain to accept, because the Bible is all-embracing, and, as Frank Ullman said, if the class wished to discuss fried onions they could always find an appropriate text to fry them on." So, if you wanted to talk on Carlyle, you could say he was rooted in Jeremiah; if on Dickens, in the golden rule. The harmless, necessary words were "The message of—" It would not have done for me to have offered those great Victorians' names naked to our Bible Class secretary. If I suggested "The message of—" all was in order. The prayer could refer to "Thy servant—" (T. C. or C. D.). As a dear friend of mine (who died at the same age as Shelley) was fond of saying, rather ambiguously, "The 'Nones are devils for morals.'"

Of matters metaphysical there is but little in "The History of Button Hill." No character is represented as grappling long and nobly with "honest doubt" and revolting into a rebellious rationalism. In this regard the book is much closer to Mrs. Oliphant's "Salem Chapel" than Mark Rutherford's "Autobiography." It is not the less true to life for this. Only a small minority in any religious community are concerned with the reeds. Some leave it because, in the words of a hymn, they "have lost the love they had"; far fewer think themselves out of it. The churches, as this author presents them, are much more significant of the clubability of humanity than of the supposedly undeniable religious instinct.

W. KENT

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

### LONDON

#### Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, Professor L. SUSAN STEBBING, M.A., D.Lit., "Changing Moral Standards."

#### Outdoor

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

### COUNTRY

#### Outdoor

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

#### Indoor

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (P.P.U. Rooms, 112, Morley Street): 7-0, a Lecture.