THE
FREETHINKER
EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Obstacles to Peace

It was stressed last week that if we are to secure a real peace in the future, it can only be upon a basis of internationalism.

The initiative here will rest with five nations. The British Empire, U.S.A., China, Russia and France. The smaller—not smaller in quality—will follow automatically. It was hoped by many that international peace would have resulted from the League of Nations. But the League was foredoomed to failure, and there were many in this country who worked for that end; some openly, others by craft and underhand plottings. When the constitution of the League was announced we wrote the following in the "Freethinker," January 29th, 1920:—

> A League to be effective must be inclusive. And it must include not alone on the grounds that certain groups are admirable ones, but, still more, that they are not. When a man is suspect the closer his proximity to the policeman the better for the rest of the community. If Germany can be trusted there is justification for her exclusion. If she cannot be trusted—if any nation in Europe is sufficiently without sin to cast the first stone—there is all the greater reason to compel her to enter a league that will prevent her breaking the peace of the world. More than that, every member of the League ought not merely to promise not to break the peace of the world, each nation should voluntarily place it out of its power to do so. If the League is to be effective it can be so only by every one of its units forgoing the luxury of maintaining an army or a navy large enough to defy the League whenever its decisions displease one or two in connection with international disputes. The only military and naval forces as between nations should be under the control of a League of Nations. If the nations cannot agree sufficiently among themselves to trust each other this much, then it is idle to talk about a League of Nations. You may have a series of shifting and changing alliances, you can have nothing else.

The League of Nations was doomed by its constitution and by those who controlled it. The old governing gangs, which between them had brought about the war, were in power. Their main concern was to perpetuate the past rather than to remould the future. It was a game of manœuvres in which, in the name of peace, each was ready to give up what he needed least if others were content to surrender what they needed most. One recalls the confession of Lord Londonderry that he had the greatest difficulty in preserving the right to use bombing planes; the world has paid heavily for his success. Had Lord Londonderry failed in his "patriotic" purpose there might have been a check on Germany's so-called secret rearmament. The members of the League were bound together in terms of distrust.

It will be remembered that at a critical stage of the present war Mr. Churchill offered France a common citizenship with Britain. The acceptance of that offer would have been a long step in the right direction. Such an arrangement would have left each country free to frame its own laws, and to manage its own internal affairs. And it would have been a great advance in the direction of the humanisation of all concerned.

It may be noted that we have moved in that direction under pressure of war. We have more consciously friendly feelings towards Dutch, Belgians, Norwegians, French and others of our allies than ever found expression in times of peace. Even Russia, the country that was so heavily slandered and misrepresented, which was to a very great extent treated as a pariah by the Churches, by "society," by Cabinet Ministers, and the Press, is now found to be a people with whom we may associate without serious fear of contamination; we may even admire the Russian people for their heroism, their intelligence, their human feeling and for their success in—helping us.

But if we can develop this sense of one-ness, of a commonness of human nature and human needs in a time of war, why can we not establish it as a permanence in times of peace? If the Christian Churches can unite with each other, and with non-Christians and anti-Christians for the purpose of making war, why cannot they unite for the purpose of maintaining peace?

The question here is: Will the Allies trust each other in peace as they have been forced to do in war? If we can work together for destruction what obstacles are there that will prevent our trusting each other for construction?

There will, of course, be many legitimate difficulties in the way, but they should not be greater than those the Allies are now facing. These difficulties will come from without and from within. They will arise from the self-interest of some and the shortsightedness of others. Each group will encourage the other. It may even be that the war itself will have called into being a form of dictatorship that, created for the purpose of conducting the war, will give encouragement to tendencies that have been gaining strength for years.

We have, for example, created a horde of officials, armed with almost autocratic power, who will certainly not readily be suppressed. We have been made familiar with such expressions as "I will not permit," "I will not allow," "I do not intend" from officials that is not usual in our social history, and by the time the war is over we shall be so used to being told by Controllers and Ministers what we shall eat

and drink, what we may read, what we shall wear and where we may go, that there may grow up a feeling that freedom is not, after all, a very necessary thing. Winning the war may have created for us a Frankenstein that will not easily be destroyed.

Of all things that man seeks power is the most attractive and once exercised is nearly always reluctantly surrendered. Appetite grows by what it feeds on, and some of us experience a difficulty of picturing this army of semi-autocratic officials willingly surrendering their power and sinking back to the comparative obscurity of private life. Dictatorships are seldom born full grown, and in the history of nations it is not uncommon to find examples of power achieved in the name of freedom perpetuating itself by sheer tyranny.

Neither can we reasonably expect that the present privileged and semi-ruling classes will descend from their eminence without a struggle. Family rule in this country is not so strong as it was, but it is still powerful, dominating by influence instead of by the sword. If anyone doubts this we commend the reading of a book published in 1939, "Tory M.P.," by S. Haxey. He will find therein a very rich array of Members of the Government who are related to the peerage, far out of proportion to either their numbers or their abilities. If a similar inquisition was made concerning the diplomatic services, the same state of things would be disclosed.

It should be said that I am not one who believes that every nobleman is of the comedy stage quality of incipient idiocy. On the contrary, allowing for the undeveloped brains that decorate the House of Lords, I am strongly of opinion that the average of intelligence in the upper House is at least equal to that of the lower chamber. But so long as any class of the community enjoys an over proportion of power or influence—and influence is only one form of power—so long shall we have one-sided legislation with a consequent lack of justice to the community.

Let me illustrate this by one case—that of Sir Samuel Hoare. He is best known to the general public for the way in which he worked with Laval in the matter of giving Abyssinia over to Mussolini. Sir Samuel has always been in touch with public affairs. He was in Russia before the Bolshevik revolution, and an account of his experiences is contained in a stupid, but revealing book, published in 1930, which has the significant title of "The Fourth Seal." The title is taken from the "Book of Revelations." Hoare moved in high circles in Russia, as an accredited diplomatist, but appears to have known next to nothing of the Russian people. But then, we in this country find our papers printing the news that London, with its eight millions, is "empty" in August because a few thousand of the upper classes are on holiday. Sir Samuel had the greatest sympathy with all highly placed people in Russia—from the Czar downwards. He found something to admire in most of them. But with the many millions of people, their forced ignorance, their superstition, as low as anything on the face of the earth, their sufferings from yearly famines and pograms, the long, long trail of men and women to Siberia for the offence of reading advanced philosophical foreign works (Prince Kropotkin's brother was sent to the mines, and committed suicide there, because the police found in his rooms some works by Herbert Spencer), for the age-long sufferings of the Russian people there is not a word of sympathy, not the slightest recognition of the fact that even the bloodiest of revolutions do not come without a cause, and that the ferocity of a revolution is generally proportioned to the ill-government that precedes it. Dr. Dillon, who did know Russia, has told how the order was given to the heads of colleges to encourage young men to drink and prostitution because it kept them off "dangerous" studies. To all these evils Hoare was blind. It was enough for him that the people had raised their hands against God's annointed. His conception of the revolution is shown in the title of his book "The Fourth Seal." He gives us the quality of his judgment in this passage:—

> "And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth. To kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."

That is all that Sir Samuel Hoare could see in the greatest revolution since 1789. Contemporary with one of the great movements of human history, this ex-Cabinet Minister lacked the intelligence to see that under his eyes there was being exhibited one of the greatest upheavals of human feeling.

I need only add that Sir Samuel, who must apparently have a post somewhere, is our ambassador to Madrid; and Franco, an almost open supporter of Hitlerism, has received from Lord Halifax—another of our permanent responsibilities—a certificate of being "a true Christian gentleman."

We are a Democracy—of a peculiar type—on the whole, and one recalls the saying of George Meredith that Englishmen, ever since the Norman Conquest, have a constitutional crick in the neck at the sight of a lord. I do not think that should excite much wonder. In public life the "people" have only emerged during the past century and a quarter. Little more than two generations ago large masses of the English people lacked a vote; and in the first quarter of the last century men were transported for life for the crime of two of them agreeing to ask (together) for a rise of a couple of shillings in their wages—then about fourteen or fifteen shillings per week.. Of course, the Englishman has always loved liberty—in a way. But those who govern have for a long time been conscious of the truth that you may with comparative safety load the average liberty-loving Briton with the heaviest of chains, provided it is done in the name of freedom, and he will submit. But place a skein of silk round his shoulders, and call it chains, and there will be a devil of a row.

I do not imagine that those vested interests, which must be affected by any adequate reform, will offer open opposition. It will be done in the name of Freedom, the rights of property, there will be a religious flavour introduced in denouncing reform as an onslaught on "spiritual" liberty. The fight will be carried on by backstair influence, by side-tracking, and by the hundred and one different diplomatic dodges with which hereditary power is so familiar.

One may take as an illustration of this the way in which the increase of death duties was met. Many of our wealthiest aristocrats promptly converted themselves into limited companies, and so saved their estates from death duties. Several times the government of the day promised to checkmate this plan, but evidently backstair opposition was too great. There was no question that the manœuvre of a Limited Company was a direct frustration of the intention of the government, but no Chancellor has had the courage to attack these morally bogus companies.

So I think that when peace comes, and the way is open for a renewal of that war which bases its activities on the necessity of fighting social inequalities and social wrong—a war that requires a courage certainly not lower than that displayed on the battlefield—there will be a strong opposition to meet. In that fight

there will be risks to be run, and rewards to be gained. But they will be mainly the risks that come from loss of status or of one's friends in circumstances where a man's enemies are often those of his own family, and where the rewards are mainly in the contentment that comes from seeing injustices removed and a better social order inaugurated.

Another testing question will arise from this war. A demand has been raised, and we hope will be pressed, that the names of the chief enemy offenders in the conduct of this war should be carefully collected and that when peace comes they should be tried, charged with a criminal offence, and dealt with in terms of strict law. We made that suggestion soon after the war broke out, and we hope that this time the policy will be adopted. I also suggest now that the most severe punishment should not be death. It is the influence of Christianity that has made death the "supreme" sacrifice or punishment. It is that only to those whose native courage has been sapped by religion. To the wise it is life, not death that calls for courage and which may excite our worst feelings. Perpetual imprisonment—not confinement—might be a fitting punishment for those who have so wantonly outraged all the decencies of life. So long as the offenders lived they would be a standing lesson to others.

Our task should be to make it quite clear that there is to be no condonation of successful world piracy, no easy retirement on secured plunder. That form of international protection of successful villainy, when it is a case of a King or a President, should be ended at once and for ever. Their fate should be decided by an international court, and the punishment should indicate beyond question that the era of dethroned rulers escaping with their loot and living comfortably in retirement is at an end. There must be the same law for the head that has worn a crown and the feet that have trodden the ordinary road of criminality. High status must not be allowed to furnish protection for ill-action; it should rather be an aggravation of the offence. When the news of the Bolshevik Revolution reached London the first question asked in the House of Commons was "Is the Czar safe?" The other hundred and forty million inhabitants of Russia apparently did not matter. It was Carlyle's dumb millions and shrieking thousands over again.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

THE BLACK INTERNATIONAL AND THE NEW COUNTER-REFORMATION

II.

THE Church is, of course, perfect by every definition—including Newman's! It has always known when and how to change when and as the times required. The Catholicism of St. Benedict was not that of "Peter"—or whoever the first "Bishop" (or Presbyter) of Rome may have been. Innocent III. views the world very differently from his humble contemporary, St. Francis, who, in his turn, would have recoiled in horror from the Inquisition founded by his brother Saint, Dominic. Yet all three were equally necessary to the Church, and, indeed—as Dr. Coulton has recently demonstrated in his "Inquisition and Liberty"—this strange combination alone saved it from the ravages of a Reformation, arising three centuries before Luther and Calvin.

Similarly, the neo-Mohammedan organisation of the Jesuits, which horrified all true medieval Catholics from Pope Paul IV. to that arch "fundamentalist" Pascal whose anti-Jesuit "Provincial Letters" (1656-7) represent the last stand of pre-Jesuitical, pre-capitalist Catholicism, with its "corpse-like obedience" and its ultra-capitalist ethics—or lack of them! has little enough in common with the more austere and less pragmatic Catholicism of elder ages. Yet it is, historically, as certain as anything can well be that, but for Loyola, Lainez, and the famous "Compania," the waves of the Reformation, certainly; and (very probably) of the French Revolution, three centuries later, would have obliterated the Bark of Peter and drowned the successors of the Fisherman "five fathoms deep"! For the past four centuries the Catholic Church—as we have elsewhere shown—has survived only, thanks to its Jesuit "Dervishes" with their (originally Arabic) motto: "Ad Majorem Dei gloriam" (cp. our book—"The Jesuits—A study in counter-revolution.")

Above, we have given some more obvious examples of the various ways in which, historically, the Church has "changed" in order to become "perfect." And we have given these examples not for any mere academic purpose, but rather, with the object of pointing our present moral. For, it is not open to serious question that the ancient chameleon is on the eve of another fundamental change; and that—unless all the signs of the times unite for the express purpose of deceiving us—the era of Jesuitical Catholicism; one virtually synonymous with the bourgeois (capitalist) epoch in human history; is now coming to an end along with the era that begat it. And that a new era of sociological, of collectivist Catholicism is already coming into being before our very eyes. What we view to-day—with uncomprehending eyes!—is in fact a new counter-reformation, similar to that so brilliantly and successfully conducted by the Jesuits four centuries back..

We can, indeed, without straining historical accuracy, press the comparison in detail between the past counter-reformation of the sixteenth century and that at present in full blast in our own current era. In both movements we have the martyred forerunners: Savonarola on his gibbet, the Lamennais in his garret—both struck down by the ban of the Church—for being ahead of their times! (We have elsewhere indicated Lamennais—1783-1854—as the real founder of Social Catholicism, as Savonarola—so often wrongly described as a reformer—represented the undoubted starting point of the *counter*-reformation. (Cp. our pamphlet—"The Roman Catholic Church and the Modern Age.")

Pursuing the parallel further we see in Leo XIII. the "Ignatius Loyola" of our new counter-reformation; and his great social encyclical, "Rerum Novarum" the so-called "Workers' Charter"—May 15, 1891—as the "Spiritual Exercises" that gave rise to the whole movement. In Pius XI. we have the modern "Lainez" (i.e., Second General of the Jesuits) who rounds off the work of his equally great predecessor. (Do we also err in seeing in Jaques Maritain, the "Cardinal Bellarmine" of a predominantly secular age?)

At any rate, without unduly straining analogy, it is evident that the Church, so often moribund in the mistaken estimates of its critics, from Voltaire to McCabe, no more intends to give up the ghost than in the days of the Borgias, when, similarly, virtually all enlightened observers held that the end of the hoary Antichrist of Babylon was veritably at hand. Now, as then, the Church refuses to lie down and die. Once again, she demonstrates afresh that dæmonic vitality, that terrifying power of perennial renewal when already in articulo mortis that Lord Macaulay noted a virtual century ago in his famous essay (1840). We relevantly recall the aphorism of the old theologian: "The Church is an anvil that has broken many hammers!"

For our own part we are not obsessed by desire to have recourse to the supernatural to explain any and every mystery. An extraordinary event, or institution, is only—extraordinary! That is to say, it is not susceptible to ordinary explanation. We regard the Catholic Church as, indeed, the greatest of all known social institutions, but we do not feel disposed to have recourse to the mythical to explain the real! With millenia of Paganism behind it to draw on; with the Roman Empire of the Cæsars to sponsor its inexperienced youth, and where, apart from itself could a finer political mentor be found—with a millennium of virtually unchecked dictatorship in which to try out every conceivable experiment, to test every human weakness, to understand every human passion; is it really so astonishing that the Roman Catholic Church should have evolved its magnificent polity; the collective achievement of nineteen centuries and of a whole sequence of civilisations? That—in the apt phrase of a modern theologian (Dean Inge)—"it should understand nearly all the needs of the average woman!"

Be that as it may, this fact is at least unmistakable: the Roman Church, that evergreen chrysalis, is yet again, undergoing a secular metamorphosis before our eyes. She changes along with the times; but her goal, her ultimate aim, remains the same. World-Power is still her undeviating object. Only the road thereto has changed its course and passes through country alien to that of the past. In an age as rude, as crude, and as ignorant as was that of medieval times, the road to world power lay through theology through the persistent and skilful exploitation of immemorial superstitions such as linger long in a per-industrial age, one characterised pre-eminently by stagnant conservatism, by "'the idiocy of rural life," to quote the famous words of Karl Marx. In such agrarian peasant communities as were those of medieval times, "development" was unknown, and the Scholastic Doctrine of the "fixity of species" appeared self-evident. In such slow moving ages, we repeat, the sure road to permanent power lay through the methodical exploitation of superstition. It was a cult in which the Church excelled.

F. A. RIDLEY.

(To be continued)

"IT MOVES!"—EVEN IN WALES

WALES is considered in some Freethought circles to be a "backward area." Whether that idea is correct or not, I am not prepared to say. But things are moving slowly, even in Wales.

On Wednesday, September 17 last, I was present in the Swansea Council Chamber at the monthly meeting of the Corporation, when a letter from the secretary of the Swansea Free Church Council was read. With the letter the secretary enclosed a copy of correspondence with the Traffic Commissioner, and invited the Town Council's support for the appeal for improved bus services on Sunday mornings "at or about the times services are held in the churches." In his letter to the Town Council, the secretary said: "We can readily understand that it is impossible for many Church members living on the outskirts of our widespread borough to attend the morning services of their respective churches in the town. There have been many complaints of lack of transport, but any effort your Council can make towards securing the success of our appeal would be much appreciated."

This was not by any means the first letter received by the Swansea Corporation from religious organisations in the town. In December, 1940, letters were received and deputations heard from the Council of Evangelical Churches and from the Lord's Day Observance Society, protesting against the proposal to open the cinemas on Sundays. The cinemas remain closed on Sundays. A few weeks ago the English Baptist ministers of the town protested against the registering of the fire-guards on Sundays, and the Welsh Nonconformist Churches of Llansamlet (a village on the "outskirts" of the borough) protested against the same thing; but when the letter referred to above was read, even the Town Clerk—the shock-absorber-in-chief amongst the Corporation officials—was taken aback. When he had partly recovered his breath and his composure, he described the letter as one containing a "most unusual" request. He added that he had only just received the letter, and that he "was not at the moment in a position to offer any advice or guidance concerning it." And, without discussion, it was referred to the Parliamentary Committee for consideration.

That Committee met on Tuesday, October 7, 1941. After the correspondence had been read, Alderman Percy Morris (Lab.) said (from the Chair): "I did not think I should live long enough to hear the Free Church Council pressing for bus services on the Sabbath Day. I can well appreciate the difficulties of many people—those who are good enough to come out on the Sunday morning—and the difficulties of the Churches involved; but really, this is a matter outside our province and must be left with the Traffic Commissioner and the authorities concerned. If I were to go outside my province, one helpful suggestion would be that all should go to the church nearest their home, help in a village church or a city church—and so be able to make up the leeway they have lost."

Alderman Dan Evans (Lab.) commented that his old mother used to walk at least once a month to the chapel on Gellionen mountain, but "these people" could not go to a chapel without "endeavouring to break the Sabbath," as they call it.

Councillor H. Libby (Ind.) moved that the Committee could not support their representations, but Alderman Edward Harris (Ind.) thought that if the Chairman's advice was accepted a large number of chapels would be practically deserted because of the outward movement of the population; but the Committee would not wish to destroy these old associations, and for that reason he would support sending the letter, at least as a matter of courtesy.

Councillor W. G. Rees (Lab.) said many present could complain of the Sunday services generally, and last Sunday dozens of workers were very late on duty because of its inadequacy.

The Chairman replied that this was a serious matter on which definite official steps were being taken. He wished Alderman Dan Evans's mother were alive now to make him walk a few miles on Sunday mornings!

Eventually it was agreed to refer the letter to the Traffic Commissioner, together with a summary of the points raised in the discussion. That, and nothing more!

I should explain that Alderman Percy Morris takes an active part in the religious activities of the town, and that Alderman Dan Evans attends church or chapel as often as I do!

Now for sermons on the attitude of the Parliamentary Committee from the Free Church ministers! An appropriate text would be Rev. iii. 15, 16: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

But what bare-faced pieces of hypocrisy the previous protests were!

THOS. OWEN.

THE OXFORD GROUP

FATHER O'CONNOR, of St. Cuthbert's, Heaton, Bradford, is a Roman Catholic celebrity whose chief claim to fame is that he is the original, or the inspiration, of "Father Brown," the little, benevolent priest who figures in the late G. K. Chesterton's detective stories. As a character around which to weave detective stories, Father O'Connor may be an admirable little priest; but when it comes to the question of detecting principles in matters of public policy, it seems that Father O'Connor abandons the shrewd, perceptive mind of Father Brown, the detective story hero, and assumes the mind of Father O'Connor, plain Catholic priest.

In a letter to a local newspaper, re the Oxford Group controversy concerning exclusion of Group leaders from the privileges of automatic exemption from military service, Father O'Connor takes Mr. Ernest Bevin severely to task, charging him, in effect, with religious persecution. The reverend father asks, "Does Mr. Bevin understand what a principle is?" Well, well, well. How does the pot feel, being called black by the kettle! It seems that the shrewd Father Brown (O'Connor) observes that in excluding the Oxford Group evangelists from the benefits of clerical exemption, Mr. Bevin has failed to recognise the democratic principle of equal and fair treatment all round. Possibly, possibly.

If Father O'Connor is really anxious to establish the democratic principle of equal treatment for all sections of a community, however, we think we can refer him to a much broader question of principle than a military service matter affecting parsons only. If discrimination is a bad principle inside the clerical caste, cannot we observe an even worse principle (or lack of principle) in the discrimination which gives automatic exemption to the clergy, while conscripting every other class of the community? Or is it, as John Stuart Mill said, that to some people "principles" are principles only so long as the question at issue affects their own interests!!

Father O'Connor might retort, of course, that as the clergy *are* exempt, they should all be exempt—even the Oxfordites. Taken by itself, that statement sounds fair enough. But Father O'Connor is not criticising Mr. Bevin on the grounds that he is discriminating in a matter of privilege. He has suggested Mr. Bevin is faulty on principle in this matter. We would go further. We would say that the Act itself is faulty in this matter, because it applies a method of conscription that is not subject solely to the test of reservation on account of national necessity, but excludes a class of the community as a class, regardless of the service given by the individuals of that class. We commend this very serious matter of principle to Father O'Connor for his attention, hoping he will have as good a "Press" in this matter as when he appeared in the newspaper, with photograph, to champion the rights (!) of his brother parsons.

There is another aspect of this question, too, which might be examined with profit. Father O'Connor's chief, Cardinal Hinsley, has declared (among many other pillars of the Church) that this war is being fought to preserve the Christian way of life. If this really is the case, why should the clergy, as leaders of "the Christian way of life," shelter behind this Act which exempts them from military service? If they believe that to be one of our war aims, they should neither be afraid nor ashamed to join our ordinary men as conscripts in the fight—and on the same terms, too; no priority commissions, but promotion from the ranks according to merit. We wonder just how many parsons of all denominations have joined the Army at all, and how few have joined as ordinary soldiers, to fight for the Christian way of life.

F. J. CORINA.

ACID DROPS

THE "Universe," the leading English Roman Catholic organ, calls us to correction. The other week we published one of the many Roman Catholic curses of excommunication. It was a very thorough cursing—every part of the body in detail, and in almost every situation, with hell as a final dose. We were under the impression that this particular curse is not now in use, and we accept the correction with due thanks. That error shall not again occur. Meanwhile, we offer our sympathy to the English Roman Catholic priests, who cannot behave as they would behave, or "cuss" as they would "cuss," if the Roman Church was in full sway.

Having confessed penitence, let us look at the essential facts. Our error was one of dates—not of essential fact. The "Universe" does not deny that this brutal and brutalising curse was in use; it says it was, and so far it is an exhibition of Roman Catholic brutality and bestiality when it was in full power and, in any case, the circulation in Dublin (until recent years in London) of "A Sight of Hell," intended for reading by children, and of Father Pinnamonti's "Hell Open to Christians" is as brutal and as vindictive as anything in the excommunication curse. There is no dispute that excommunication did cut off man from intercourse with his fellows, and that he went to hell if he died under excommunication.

It is no news that the Roman Church (under compulsion) changes its teaching from time to time. The development of culture is too powerful for even the Roman Church to deny its power. Its boast that it is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, is not true if it refers to the teachings it places before the public. It is only true that it is the same with regard to it maintaining its intolerance so far as circumstances will permit.

Our First Lord, Mr. A. V. Alexander, says that his visit to the Navy has convinced him that naval officers have a "deep consciousness of the directing hand of Providence over them." We are not quite sure whether Mr. Alexander has been pulling the legs of naval officers, or the naval officers have been pulling the legs of Mr. Alexander. Anyway, the statement sets one wondering how much "Providence" it would take to make up for deficient gunnery or bad seamanship.

The Archbishop of Canterbury says that teachers "must know what they ought to teach." We agree, but also they ought to know *what* they teach, and religious instruction does not come under that head. What the Archbishop wants is that teachers shall teach something about which they know nothing, and which is provided for them by a body of men who know no more about it than the teacher does.

The editor of "John o' London," in the issue of that journal for October 10, sets out to tell the world a lot about religion, and finishes up with a definition, which has the one drawback that it does not define. He says that the belief in God is the belief in good, which is, if he will not mind us saying as much, just nonsense—that is, non-sense—that is, without sense. It fits nothing at all. The merest glance over a book on mythology, to say nothing of a look at such books as those written by any modern anthropologist, will show him that there are shoals of gods—good, bad and indifferent. And not one of them were believed in *because* they were good, but just because they were believed to exist. Of course, as mankind has deified every force he can think of, some of the gods are bound to be better than others, so we have relatively good gods and relatively bad ones. Travelling over the world of gods, one finds a greater variety offered for our patronage than one finds article in a Woolworth store.

The editor finally sums up in what is evidently taken to be a burst of unquestionable philosophy. Here it is:—

> "I define religion as the best and highest—*whatever* it be that a man believes."

Now this is not intended for a joke, it is offered in all seriousness by one who regards himself as giving a definition that will work. So let us look at it. The highest that a man believes is religion. You need not be a believer in a god or a future life, or in Jesus or anyone or anything in particular. It fits everyone and leaves out none. The highest and the best you can think of may be Jesus or unlimited gin; it may be the belief of Stalin or the Editor of "The Freethinker." Anything will do, for every man has something that he places first. It runs from the Pope to Hitler. No one is left out—so long as he has something that he values most. Everyone is religious. It is an affirmative without a conceivable negative, a right without a left. There is no distinction between right and wrong. Stalin is as religious as Cardinal Hinsley.

But we may, very timidly, point out to the editor of such a high-class journal as "John o' London" that definition must define. That is, it must have an opposite. It must deny at the same time that it affirms. A thing is this because it is not that. The editor's definition has no opposite—it draws a line nowhere. He is saying that all must be right because there is nothing wrong, and in that case he is wiping out both right and wrong. In other words, it is just clotted bosh.

Sir Michael Sadler has shocked the "Sunday School Chronicle" by suggesting, as a kind of counterblast to the proposal of the Churches that the schools shall be Christianised from top to bottom, that the State shall build schools which shall specialise in all sorts of opinions, religious and non-religious. The "S. C." thinks it is impracticable. We suppose it is as things are, because it would bring non-Christian opinion before the public in a way that would still further weaken the influence of the godly.

We do not question that there are some Freethinkers who would support Sir Michael's proposal, for to many we know, dissent from religion has often meant forming another semi-religious body. We have never had a great amount of sympathy with that idea. We would keep both religion and anti-religion out of schools. We see no greater justification for bringing up the children of Freethinkers merely to echo the definite opinions of their parents than there is in bringing them us as little Methodists or little Presbyterians. We really do wish to gain freedom for the child, and the only way that we can see is to give them enough information to form their own opinions. They may differ from their parents, but the progress of opinion is due to exactly that fact—the capacity to differ from their parents. There are few parents that are so wise and so well informed that their children may not surpass in either direction or in both.

The wisdom of God's servants is astonishing, but there are some things that seem above their understanding. For instance, a North London preacher says, "Ask a man who plays his eighteen rounds of golf on Sunday morning why he does not go to Mass." The answer would seem to be that he prefers a game of golf. But we would wager that that answer never struck the priest.

Both the secretaryships of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and the Church Missionary Society are vacant. This, according to the "Church Times," is by "divine permission." Exactly where the Lord comes in is by no means clear, but perhaps the pious organ of Anglo-Catholicism has had it from high that the two societies are actually in close touch with the Deity, who settles the question of such great posts personally. The missionary business, though still far from dead, even in war time, does not enjoy quite that halo of divinity it once had, and the "Church Times" sadly makes an effort to restore the S.P.G. "to its place as the pre-eminent and characteristic exponent of English Christianity in the foreign mission field." We have an idea that even God Almighty will never be able to do that again.

The same journal, after making a passionate appeal for its readers to believe without question the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection—both of which conclusively prove that Jesus was more than a man; in fact, was a God—has followed it up with an article to prove that the Ascension really happened. There can be no doubt, we are told, that in the sight of the Apostles "our Lord ascended into Heaven." It appears that "a visible ascent into the air is highly suggestive of final departure," and this, "according to the evidence, is precisely the impression that it actually conveyed." How can the wicked infidel reply to such magnificent reasoning? Only by hiding his head in shame. He wilfully refuses to believe such convincing proof that Jesus was more than a man when it is as clear as daylight that if Jesus had not been God, he could not have made the Ascension. Ergo he *was* God. Or to put it in another and simple way, the Ascension proves that Jesus was God; only God could have made an Ascension. Therefore, Christianity is a Divine Religion. We wonder why no one thought of all this before.

We suppose it is because it is called the "*Sunday* Graphic" that the editor feels it must publish something that is sufficiently foolish to indicate religious sentiment. In its issue for October 12, the "Graphic" asks whether it is not possible to appoint a committee to "investigate this nation-wide desire for spiritual revival and the means by which it may be met?" Of course, "nation-wide" might be justified by securing a dozen persons in each of the English counties, but what the "Sunday Graphic" wishes us to assume is that the nation as a whole is clamorously hungry for religion. And that is just rubbish. If there is this strong desire for religion, what is there preventing it making itself visible? There are plenty of churches, shoals of preachers, and all the advantages—social and economical—are on the side of the godly. Why ask for a committee? We suppose the "Sunday Graphic" knows the mental quality of most of its readers.

Although God is supposed to look after our dear little birds, he seems to have done nothing to protect his own buildings against the Nazis. In Southwark, for instance, more than 100 churches, schools and convents have been either destroyed or damaged in air raids, and the local Catholic Archbishop is making despairing appeals for help in rebuilding, or rather, in collecting the necessary funds to do so after the war. The real question should be: Will God prefer churches, schools and convents to be built first, or houses for the bombed-out people, irrespective of creeds? And it should prove rather interesting to speculate as to which the local authorities regard as the more urgent problem—irrespective of God's wishes on the matter. We have an idea that even a God-soaked building authority will plump for houses for the people first.

We recently came across the following: "No artist can afford to neglect the history of Christian art." Hear, hear—but wait a moment. Is there any such thing as Christian art? If there is, we have never come across it. We have met with artists who painted religious subjects, but that was applying their art to religion—it was not the religion that created the art. One might as reasonably talk of Christian bricks because they were used to build a church. There would be no harm in using the phrase if it were not followed by the assumption that an artist owes his skill to his religion. The only piece of Christian art we call to mind is when Jesus wiped his face with a woman's handkerchief, or the woman wiped the face of Jesus (the story is given both ways), and the imprint of the face of Jesus remained on the handkerchief.

A crowd of Manchester Christians have demanded that the reconstruction of the world after the war must be on "Christian" principles. Christ, it appears, must be represented at the treaty table—which probably means that various priests or parsons must be there to tell the peace makers exactly what God has told them to say. A Bishop Marshall was careful, however, to point out that "some of us hold tenets which many of you reject"—a most illuminating example of Christian unity. And it proves without doubt that it would be possible, if we allowed these people to sit at the treaty table, that valuable time could be wasted with a Cardinal squabbling with a Calvinist pastor, or with a Jewish rabbi, or even an Anglican Bishop, as to the exact part Christ was playing there. We can even visualise the various statesmen wondering whether they were hearing Christ's authentic words. However, it is most unlikely that any of God's representatives will be allowed to interfere in any peace terms—though these busybodies will no doubt make tremendous efforts to bring the Lord in somehow.

The "Statist," which claims to be an "independent journal of finance and trade," actually had an article recently on religious education. "We hope we are not unduly suspicious," it says, "but one cannot help feeling that those who are anxious to preserve, if possible, the present European civilisation are animated by a feeling of expediency rather than inspired by any ardent zeal for religion." The "Statist" need not fear that it is "unduly" suspicious. Perhaps it has not yet encountered at their strongest the religious forces of this country. When it does, it may find that the word "expediency" is better known to them than to the "Statist."

The "Catholic Times" reports that Brazil has "banished secularism from the schools." It also says that the downfall of France was due to "The Agnosticism of the State." That is the kind of lie that only a Catholic priest can tell with supreme gusto.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

C. North.—We are greatly obliged for cuttings. Those who keep their eye on the local Press are doing us a real service.

T. Drinkwater.—Thanks for securing new subscriber. We believe there are many more to be found, and now is quite a good time for securing them. We do our best at this end, but we must rely for many things on others.

T. W. Walters.—The Oaths Amendment Act gives every British citizen the right to affirm wherever an oath is usually required. It is not claimed, and it should not be given as a favour. It is the right of every citizen.

War Damage Fund.—H. M. Scott, 3s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WILL all who wish items to be printed in the next issue of "The Freethinker" please note that they must reach this office not later than the Saturday preceding the issue in which the communication is to appear. We have now to go to press a day earlier than we have hitherto.

We haven't a military caste in this country, but we have a military tradition, and parts of it are almost as bad. For instance, we have not yet killed the belief that officers and men ought not to mix socially, at least when in uniform, on terms of equality. Every now and again there crops up cases where it is not considered permissible for officers and men to eat at the same hotel table or dance on the same floor at the same time. Sometimes notices to this effect are exhibited, and we have never heard of privates having the courage, or officers having the sense of human equality, to tear them down. Now we have an agitation, which has spread to the House of Commons, as to whether officers should, while in uniform, smoke a pipe in public. It will take a long time and some bold men to break down this cultivated snobbery. It needs a few men to have the courage to break it down. We emphasise that word courage, for it requires as much courage as it does to win the Victoria Cross, and certainly courage of a much higher form. In the British Army one might find 20 brave enough to win that most prized decoration, to one who would have the moral courage to defy a custom that is humiliating to those who observe it.

It is often said in defence of these customs, sometimes they are rules, that the men themselves prefer this social separation. They would not feel at home in the company of their officers. That may be true—in many cases it is true—but it is an exposure of how far we are from being a democracy. An officer who is himself free from snobbery ought to be able to make his men feel at home with him. the fact of their being officer and man should prove no barrier to social equality when off duty. And the private should feel the same equality off duty without it interfering with obedience to duty when they again meet as officer and private. Unfortunately, there *is* truth in the statement. But it is a demonstration that our talk of the equality of men as human beings is largely froth.

Finally, we need not halt with the Services. Does the man with just enough to live on and the man who is getting a large income feel they are equal as men? Or the man who lives in a large house and he who lives in a small one? Or the manager of a large store with his "counter-jumpers"? Or the youth who comes from Eton and the one who finishes in a secondary school? Or the man with a title for the man who is without one? If we say that in each case one of the parties is looking down on the other party, we are only stating half the situation. For the greater ill lies with he who looks up, not with he who looks down. A duke cannot look down on a dustman unless the dustman looks up to the duke.

Is it necessary to say that this evil aspect of looking up or down applies solely to the social sphere? Where one man looks up to another because of superior ability in any direction he is paying a compliment to he who is honoured, but he is also bearing testimony to himself having at least intelligence enough to recognise and pay homage to natural ability when he sees it. He lifts himself up in the act of submission.

Mr. Cohen has had many letters of late from provincial and Scottish readers inquiring when he will be visiting this or that place on a lecturing visit. No one can regret more than he does the circumstances which force him to remain so much in London. But the war has thrown much more work on his shoulders, and with increased demands on his time and strength, he has to work with due regard to both. But he can assure all his friends in all parts of the country that he misses seeing them, and talking to them, quite as much as they say they miss him. Disappointment on both sides is one of the penalties of living so long in harness as to become almost an institution. And to take Saturday, Sunday and Monday out of a week leaves a very ragged time residuum.

Owing to the destruction of our type-setting machinery in the "blitz," we now have to get the paper set up outside, and that makes the job less elastic than it was. Copy must be delivered on time, and there are things arising which could be settled on the premises in two or three minutes and which now take an appreciable time. One day, when the war is over, we shall make an effort to reinstate our linotype, but although we have been urged by some to do it now, we do not think it wise to invest about £1,300 on new machinery until the war is over. It is not our own money we should be gambling with, and a second "blitz" is not impossible, although as we have already been visited by the "enemy" in our home and in our business place, we have had our share.

There is one feature of the present situation which our friends might bear in mind. The clergy are making a desperate push to get what they can out of the war. In this way they are advertising what they conceive to be the urgency of religion. But at the same time they are helping to advertise the counter-propaganda of Freethought. We suggest that our friends should take full advantage of the existing state of affairs. We also suggest that the introduction of this journal, and our published pamphlets, particularly the "Pamphlets for the People," will bear good fruit. Two or three shillings spent in this way should return good dividends.

"I am plesaed to inform you that "The Freethinker" is read by about 60 per cent. of the crew, who are now on the verge of becoming Freethinkers." That is an extract from a letter sent to us by a sailor in the Navy, and is an indication of the useful work being done by sending a copy of "The Freethinker" free each week to names and addresses, remitted to us, of men in the armed Forces likely to be interested in our literature and movement. We are asking for more names and addresses.

Mr. J. T. Brighton reports with regret that black-out conditions have compelled him to close an interesting and successful open-air season. He has kept his area open and active, and return visits have always been welcomed by waiting groups ready to hear his message. Mr. Brighton's kindly nature and witty presentation often attracts those not in agreement with him, and that is a useful asset.

That notorious *Christian* gentleman, Cardinal Hinsley, when launching the "Sword of the Spirit" movement, welcomed all Christians who would help. When some did volunteer—there were many Protestant leaders among them—it was made clear that "co-operation" meant that Roman Catholicism should be on top. Then the Protestants, not unreasonably, began to withdraw. They found "honour," where the interests of the Church were concerned, was not substantially with the "honour" of ordinary folk. Now we see that the leader of the movement in Leeds says that "Non-Catholics are looking to Catholics for a lead." We only have Bishop Poskit's word for this, but the Bishop says he would welcome co-operation with non-Catholics on all matters save religion. That is what Roman Catholics mean by co-operation. Using people while it can, and then throwing them over when they are no longer useful. Again, a feature of Hitlerism. At present, the Roman Church supports Fascism in Rome and Spain, and opposes it—in public—in Britain. And in America, Roman Catholics are among the strongest opponents to the President's policy. Nor ought it to be forgotten that Roman Catholics for years were active workers in preventing a friendly understanding with Russia. It would be rather interesting to get a religious census of the interned British Fascists in the Isle of Man.

A very nice, tolerant, Christian gentleman is the Rev. H. W. R. Elsley, of Tokington Vicarage, Wembley. He writes in "Education" for October 10: "The whole time and atmosphere of every school should be redolent of Christianity." He also says, "I honestly and conscientiously believe that the Christian principle is to respect the conscience of any minority. But it must be insisted that the rights of the minority do not include the over-riding of the majority." Which, being interpreted, means Mr. Elsley believes in the rights of the minority so long as the majority—when they are Christians—may do as they please. Said we not that Mr. Elsley is a tolerant Christian gentleman?

THE RELIC CULT IN CHRISTENDOM

VENERATION and worship of the relics of departed saints and martyrs played a very conspicuous part in medieval Christian observance. During the Darker Ages this craze grew increasingly prevalent. In its earlier manifestations it was treated with Pagan derision, nor did all the faithful regard it favourably. In the important third volume of his "Five Centuries of Religion," Dr. Coulton cites Jerome's intemperate reply to one of its Christian critics who, he said, "opens his fetid mouth and spits filth against the relics of the holy martyrs, calling us dustmen for treasuring them, and idolaters because we venerate the bones of the dead." Other Christian writers deplored the popularity of this grisly superstition who were bitterly assailed for their temerity but, needless to state, all that survives of their protests is preserved in the answers of their enemies.

In early Christian times almost every altar was furnished with its sacred relics, mostly of very doubtful authenticity. "It may be said, I think, without any exaggeration," avers Coulton, "that, on the whole, the most eminent relics of the Middle Ages were those whose pedigree is least capable of sustaining strict historical examination. Erasmus in his 'Colloquy' on pilgrimages, does not go beyond historical precedent when he describes the evidences offered him at Walsingham for the authenticity of the Virgin's house and the Virgin's milk." Profiting by popular credulity, the monastic orders secured the pick of these alleged memorials of the dead, and their possession enormously enhanced the wealth and prestige of their favoured communities.

Stately buildings were erected in Western Europe from the offerings of the faithful at shrines where relics reposed. Dr. Coulton cites Bromholm in Britain as one notable instance in which a previously very obscure shrine in Norfolk became opulent and famous in consequence of its amazing miracles. According to tradition, a priest, in 1206, returned to England from Constantinople carrying with him a cross which, according to Roger of Wendover, was made "from the very wood whereon the Saviour of the World hung for the redemption of mankind; but seeing that his words were not believed in St. Albans, he departed thence, bearing with him, little as men knew it, a treasure beyond all price. Now this said priest had two little sons, whom he was most eager to nourish and foster; wherefore he offered his Cross to many monasteries on condition that he and his sons should there be taken as monks."

Various convents scouted the supplicant's story, so he travelled on until he reached Bromholm, where his offer was at once accepted and the holy cross was reverently placed in the priory church. Then, alleges Roger, "divine miracles began to be wrought in the aforesaid priory to the praise and glory of the life-bringing Cross, for dead folk were restored to life, the blind saw, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, those possessed of devils were freed. . . . So the aforesaid Cross is frequented, adored and worshipped not only by the English nation but also by men of far-off lands."

So celebrated did this previously poverty-stricken priory become, that the King, Henry III., went to worship there. In even more glowing terms than Roger's, another contemporary scribe records the astounding happenings at Bromholm, where from its destitute state there now emerged "a new and noble edifice, of the highest renown, and especially noted for its expenses and hospitality." For some time Bromholm appears to have rivalled Canterbury itself, and so plutocratic became the foundation that the monks grew haughty and imperious and engaged in obstinate litigation with their superiors, the parent priory of Castleacre. Still, Bromholm was the recipient of many favours from the great, and in 1401 the Pope himself granted to those "who worshipped at Bromholm, on Passion Sunday and the three days before and after, the same indulgence that he gave to St. Mark's at Venice; and Capgrave, writing about 1450, credits this Holy Cross with 27 resurrections from the dead."

Recent critical inquiry has dealt destructively with the legend of the 11,000 holy virgins of Cologne. It was said that in the fifth century A.D. a revelation accorded Clematius the information that certain martyred spinsters were buried in that city. From this simple story "the legend passed from mouth to mouth, from hagiographer to hagiographer, growing like a snowball." Through a grotesque error in transcription, the original 11 virgins were multiplied into 11,000, and the new figures, having been adopted, the homely 11 of course failed to compete with the increased computation. So, says Coulton, "we have Capaccio's and Memling's splendid pictures of the Princess Ursula and her 10,999 companions on their way to martyrdom. . . . Then in 1106 a Roman cemetery was discovered near Cologne; these multitudinous bones were obviously those of the 11,000." It is true that the remains included those of men and children, but these were explained as the virgins' attendants, and the legend was completed by the priestly invention of an imposing array of anecdotes and names.

Their boasted possession of St. Benedict's bones made the fortune of the monks of Fleury. Vézelay also became opulent when the tale was broadcast that

it treasured the remains of St. Mary Magdalene. So inconvenient became the crowds that besieged some of these shrines that it was deemed imperative to forbid the holy relics any further performance of their miraculous powers. This command was usually obeyed. On the other hand, the bones of Becket at Canterbury suddenly became active in 1445, "lest the bones of the glorious martyr Thomas should lurk under the darkness of ignorance."

Miracles served not only to reanimate the wonder and credulity of the crowd, but to put fear into its heart. Nearly every outstanding monastery possessed its Book of Miracles, and an early writer asserts that the relics of the Celtic Church were "in great reverence among both clergy and people in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, so that they are far more afraid to swear false oaths over such relics than over the Gospels."

The Columban monks endeavoured to soften the hearts of rapacious princes who had despoiled their property, by bearing their relics to Pavia. Impressive miracles occurred on their way thither, but the princes remained unrepentant. So much so that "they even began to backbite this holy body with venomous tongues; and some among them said, 'We will not let go the possessions which ye seek by reason of these horses' or asses' bones which ye have brought hither.'" Then, the story runs, one of these sinful rulers was smitten with insanity, but as soon as he sought mercy from St. Columba he was restored to sanity. All were now so alarmed by this miracle that they promptly surrendered the estates they had stolen.

Economic inducements to increase the revenue of a monastic settlement through the reception of the relics of a renowned saint or martyr were decidedly great. In John's reign the translation of the Canterbury martyr's remains to a newly erected shrine in the grand chapel nearly doubled the monastic income from the gifts of the devout. No marvel then that the traffic in relics was conducted throughout Christendom on a gigantic scale. For relics brought endowments, monetary offerings and other advantages. The inventory of relics possessed by the Durham monks alone is a strange one. Coulton notes that: "They boasted not only the coals of St. Lawrence, but also one of his joints still bearing the traces of the sacrilegious fire. They had portions of Moses's rod, of John Baptist's raiment and the charger which had held his head; the Virgin Mary's shirt, and rock marked with the spots of her milk; of the tree under which the three angels sat with Abraham; and the Tree of Paradise." There were many other curios, all too numerous to mention.

Yet, even in our relatively enlightened age the merry pastime of priestly imposture continues. The pilgrimages to exhibitions at such places as Lourdes and Treves have long been popular in the Catholic world. But Joan of Arc and other more recent favourites have somewhat dimmed the glory of Lourdes and Treves, much as these once superseded the adoration of saintly relics whose very existence is ignored and sometimes completely forgotten.

T. F. PALMER

A REPLY TO "S. H."

I HAVE read with much interest your two contributions to "The Freethinker," and, as a comparatively new reader of Freethought literature (although I now realise I have been a Freethinker all my young life) I cannot help but ask myself the question, "What are you getting at?"

Perhaps asking this question is really unnecessary, as inwardly I have a feeling—I may, of course, be wrong—that your thoughts may be tending somewhat in the same direction as mine. That, in fact, Freethought propaganda, effective though it may have been in the past, when bound up closely with working-class interests loses much of its effectiveness nowadays through lack of just this one element.

I propose, therefore (Editor permitting), to take your article (of October 5) and examine some of your statements from my own, perhaps restricted, point of view.

I have so far had the pleasure of meeting only the stalwarts of Furnival Street out of the entire Freethought movement, and if their enthusiasm is any indication, Freethought is in a quite healthy condition. But that may be the health of activity. They, at Furnival Street, are doing something—are active all the time—in the interests of Freethought—and that's the point, "S. H." Are you—even part of the time? And are you persuading those who you bring to "the greatest of all causes" to do likewise?

Now I have introduced these words, "the greatest of all causes" with some misgiving. Personally, I do think it is quite that. I believe that the reorganisation of society making unnecessary and atavistic a Freethought movement, is "a far, far better thing," but I am fully aware that the two are as closely bound for the ultimate healthy activity of mankind as the bow and the violin to the production of sweet music.

Here, then, is a possibility of filling that "mental vacuum" that seems to be troubling you so much, and it is, too, a healthy possibility, as it is in a way bound up with the principles and objects of the N.S.S. For does not Secularism affirm that "human effort should be wholly directed towards its (life's) improvement"? Would it, therefore, be out of place for "The Freethinker" and the Freethinker to take a more definite and positive attitude towards working-class problems?

But perhaps I am presuming too much. Can I be certain that all those connected with the Freethought movement would be sufficiently interested in the propagation of an "idea" having as its objective "the application of human effort towards life's improvement"? Can I even be certain that the pages of "The Freethinker" would be open to a discussion on such a subject?

That such a vigorous and militant Freethought movement with a strong and progressive working-class background would not need a leader is, to my mind, perfectly clear. Sheep need leaders, but those who know what they want and are fully conscious of the means to attain their ends, do not. In any case, leaders are always likely to get "bumped off" first, so why not play safe? A live Freethinker is more useful than a dead hero.

I am afraid that your reference to great men leaves me quite cold. I cannot agree "that a movement which can show such worship-worthy heroes is almost always a movement which is in a healthy condition," although the examples you quote seem to justify such a conclusion. A healthy movement is, in my opinion, one based on principles fundamentally sound, principles that will stand the stresses and strains of time and argument, without fracture, principles based on truth—not on lies. I cannot imagine such a movement standing for anything less than "the greatest good for the greatest number." Should such a movement produce a "personality," he can be regarded only as a by-product—not as the important element. The "leader cult" has produced, among other noxious things, two movements, covering between them almost a quarter of the earth's surface, both existing and both intent on maintaining their existence by the suppression of free speech, and in both cases, by the application of an admixture in varying proportions of brute force and cunning propaganda in non-homœopathic doses. So much for leaders!

If there is a lesson to be learned by the Freethought movement it is, in my humble opinion, simply this. That an advanced working-class movement is necessarily freethinking. If, therefore, an avowedly Freethought movement does not ally itself wholeheartedly to such a working-class movement, well——! J. PHILLIPS.

ESOTERIC PRIESTCRAFT

(For Young Priests on the Sophisticate Register)

Lesson One—Introductory

OUR (i.e. your) organisation, known to the world as "The Papist Church," is entirely for the benefit of us, i.e. you. The interests of the laity are only to be considered in so far as they subserve our interests. Just as a farmer has no altruistic concern about his cattle and sheep, but only looks on them as a means of enriching and benefiting himself, so do we (i.e. you) look on our (your) chattels. After all, people who can be taken in by us are only mugs and mutts not deserving of any other fate but to be, like sheep, *shorn*.

Priestcraft is the exploitation of the religious sentiment, which is based on the queer situation in which men find themselves. Whence they come, why they are, whither they go (if they go anywhere) are questions which are apt to worry people. It is part of your job to see that these questions *do* worry them; many people would not bother about these questions unless instigated by other people. But it has become such a custom that the questions are brooded on by the majority, even if only in a vague and puzzled way.

Men are often in desperate situations owing to illness, accident and, most desperate of all, in face of death. Ages ago they got the idea that there were unseen powers in the Universe that could and would do them injury, and somehow the idea came that these powers could be bought off or bribed. Then it even came to be thought that with big enough bribes and suitable behaviour these unseen powers would actively *help*. None of these powers have ever been seen or in any way verified. There is no proof of them that will stand criticism, especially in the form in which they are believed in, i.e. as supernatural *persons*. But men have so desperately wished to believe in these "persons" that they have taken the flimsiest evidence as proof. This is where we get our chance. We tell people that we know all about these powers. We tell them that we are official intermediaries between the higher powers and them. Of course, we have to embroider the tale in order to make it plausible; that is our (your) trade. We are not the only people in the trade. There are other tales being told. Confidence tricksters are numerous. It is our (your) job to call all the others imposters. If possible, these competitors must be destroyed, because competition in our trade is not good for business. It is true there is such a mass of credulity for smart people like us to work on that there is room for many. But a multiplicity of confidence tricksters telling mutually destructive tales leads to inconvenient criticism and scepticism, and we have always advocated and practised drastic measures against competitors whenever possible. This will be adverted to in later lessons. Historically speaking, we are committed to a very unplausible tale (for persons of ordinary common sense), and, in fact, it is almost necessary to breed simpletons if criticism is to be reduced to a minimum. In fact, we may say that we really have quite a large mass of what are, to all intents, bred-and-born simpletons who may be said to be the mainstay of our business. Without them we could scarcely carry on. You remember that Napoleon said that God fights on the side of the big battalions. It was not much of a testimonial for God, but it was for the big battalions. The very mass of them is impressive. Luckily for us, humanity consists of "mostly fools," and as we cater for them we have good chances of getting the big battalions in our power.

Being a very old firm, our present-day position and activities need a short historical account to explain them and to show the trend of our policy. This we will give in the next few lessons.

C. R. BOYD-FREEMAN.

It was truly said that "dead men are the best counsellors; books will speak plain when counsellors blanch."—Bacon.

Nothing contributes so much to the reputation of a prince as great enterprises and extraordinary achievements. —Machiavelli.

A MODERN VOLTAIRE

THE function of the humorist is undervalued. In his little, unobtrusive way, the man who jests and sets you smiling back at him does a great service. The physiological value of laughter has never been appraised. Although doctors bestow a benevolent patronage on cheerfulness, and give it a minor place in the pharmacopœia, no one will dispute that the humorists are benefactors of society. Yet, with the exception of Rabelais, Cervantes and Dickens—who is liked better for his pathos than his fun—humorous writers are held to be only second-rate literary artists. It is not that we do not laugh, but we laugh apologetically, as if laughter were a weakness of humanity, a thing pertaining to the trivialities of life. So many people think that "Vanity Fair," which is, on the whole, a serious book, is, therefore, greater than "The Pickwick Papers," which is, in the main, a comic book. Yet there is much to be said for the view that smiles are as important as tears. Falstaff is just as great a creation as Hamlet. It is allowed in all but pedantic circles that Shakespeare was a great man, and his Falstaff is comedy in the highest.

Rabelais declared, indeed, that laughter is the peculiar property of man, the outward sign which distinguishes the paragon of animals. The man that hath no music in him—we know for what he is fit; and just as certainly the man who has no laughter in him is fit for nothing that is of high service to man.

An advanced movement like our own can have no better champion than a humorist. And if the cause be a great one, and if the arguments barbed by wit and winged by laughter, have any real worth, they strike the deeper because of the humour. In a theological discussion a laugh is a blessing, and a born humorist like Robert Ingersoll was genuinely our benefactor. Although a master of the lash, he used his whip caressingly. He does not cut his subject to ribbons like Swift, nor, like Voltaire, sting like a thousand wasps. Rather is he like a Voltaire into whom has passed the geniality and suavity of Renan. It is a mellowed and transformed Voltaire, looking upon a busier world with the laughing eyes we know so well.

Ingersoll was a master of what Milton calls the "dazzling fence." His attacks on orthodoxy during a generation were so formidable that he forced the reluctant clergy to reply, and he drew Cardinal Manning and Gladstone into the controversial arena. In his discussion with Gladstone, the English statesman taunted Ingersoll with riding a horse without a bridle, with letting his ideas run away with him. Ingersoll retorted crushingly that this was better than "riding a dead horse in a reverential calm." In this particular encounter, Huxley claimed the victory for Ingersoll. "Gladstone's attack on you," he wrote, "is one of the best things he has written. I don't think there is more than 50 per cent. more verbiage than is necessary, nor any sentence with more than two meanings."

Men seldom talk as brilliantly as they write, but Ingersoll was an exception. A volume might be compiled of his clever sayings, not as invented in the author's study, but as impromptu remarks that flashed in social intercourse. When a friend, finding a set of Voltaire's works in his library, asked how much it cost, the Colonel answered: "I believe it cost me the governorship of Illinois." Speaking of a hot-headed and sanguine acquaintance, he said: "Show him an egg, and instantly the air is full of feathers."

One of his best stories was that of an excitable Fenian, who was boasting of the condition of Ireland. The Irishman said, "We have got 30,000 armed men in Ireland ready to march at a moment's notice." "But," replied the other man, "why don't they march?" "Why?" retorted the Irishman, "the police won't let them." When Ingersoll first met George Foote he was desirous of paying the English Freethought leader a compliment. At dinner, Foote passed the oysters, and Ingersoll said, smiling, "Not like oysters, Foote. That's the only fault I can find in you." How good, too, was the Colonel's description of a banknote: "A greenback is no more money than a menu is a dinner."

On one occasion the Colonel had, in a law case, to refer to a legal book—Moses: "On the Law of Mandamus," and the judge, thinking to be witty, asked: "Is that the same

author whom you refer to in your work, 'The Mistakes of Moses'?" "No, your honour," promptly replied Ingersoll, "I am quoting from 'Moses on Mandamus,' but my work is on Moses and God Damn Us." A woman preacher once called Ingersoll "an infidel dog," and he replied: "The lady would have been annoyed had I referred to her as a Christian female of the same species."

Ingersoll's masterpiece, "The Mistakes of Moses," is a Freethought classic. Imagination and humour were the qualities in which Ingersoll surpassed the orators of his day, but his humour was extraordinarily good. A collection of his jests are, perhaps, the finest individual contribution to Freethought literature since Voltaire. A good example is his jest, "With soap, baptism is a good thing."

Robert Ingersoll occupied the position in the United States as a militant Freethought orator and writer, which Bradlaugh filled here in this country. Both were big men physically and intellectually; both were born orators; but here the resemblance ends. Bradlaugh sought to beat down Superstition by sheer force of logic and law. America dearly loves rhetoric, and Pagan Bob as an orator had no equal in the States. He dealt rhetorically with elemental emotions, and he enjoyed the fame of being a pioneer. Like Gambetta, he thrilled the hearts and flushed the cheeks of thousands. Phrase after phrase has this rare quality, and reads like prose-poetry, grandiose and sweeping:—

"Liberty, a word without which all other words are vain."

A thorough humanitarian, Ingersoll's work is full of a fine and noble indignation, directed against all that is cruel and despicable in superstition. Flaming the message of Freethought over a continent, he deserves remembrance From thousands of minds he lifted the awful belief in eternal torment, and banished those degrading theological conceptions which oppress his countrymen, and which are a bitter heritage from the bad old days of the Ages of Faith. The Ingersoll we treasure in our hearts was a keen-eyed warrior, as well as a very noble man, who fought a brave fight in the Army of Human Emancipation.

MIMNERMUS.

(Reprinted)

INMOST THOUGHTS

DESPITE all consideration of expediency, it has been customary for statesmen and such to give us a break now and then, and sometimes in private conversation, or at a luncheon—after the wine—to speak off the record. This practice, which had almost become part of Britain's unwritten Constitution, is now in jeopardy, for both a national figure—Moore-Brabazon—and a local figure (as yet)—the Mayor of Hampstead—have recently been greatly importuned by having what was said or written privately, publicised by a political snooper. The Mayor's letter, which expressed his inmost thoughts on the question of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance, and which had been marked private by his own hand, was actually read out at a public meeting by the recipient, Councillor Murray. I am not especially interested in the political feuds, but in the principle involved—the right of a statesman or public administrator to say in private what he really thinks about things without his being betrayed to the mob by some political snooper. If we fail to uphold this principle, it seems to me that men who are public figures will always—privately as well as in public—have to speak and write with their tongues (or possibly their pens) in their cheeks. The under... lying principle that is at stake is that of a public administrator being allowed such a reservation as was claimed by Bishop Synesius, when he said: "The people insist on being deceived. For my part I shall always remain a philosopher in my mind, but a priest in public."

The ado that has been made in the national Press about Brabazon, and in the local Press about the Mayor, calls to mind a certain experimental film which was presented to the public some years ago; a film in which the characters, in addition to carrying on their normal conversation, were also made to mutter their inmost thoughts in undertones. Actually, I suppose, the idea was not so very new. Shakespeare had beaten them to it, and had often represented such duality by causing his characters to speak in "asides" or in soliloquy. In contrast to the tax-paying public of to-day, however, an audience for a Shakespearean play, having once paid for their tickets, were given the low-down on what was being enacted, whilst some wretched character of Shakespeare's was represented to them as unwittingly preparing hospitality for his would-be assassin.

Such betrayals of private confidences to the general public have become alarmingly frequent in recent years, and one remembers how distrust was engendered by some American journalist reporting what Chamberlain was supposed to have said in private about his intentions towards a certain far-away country. One might recall how General Lyuatey was reported by the "Star" as having, in a banquet speech, represented French aims in the Riff War as being strictly commercial and imperialist.

In the long run the snoopers will take the ground from beneath their own feet. Public figures will become so cautious that we will be denied the privilege of such gleanings, and "inside information," which we have always been so happy to get, will become more and more inaccessible. Water will be served instead of wine, and after-dinner speeches will be made up of meaningless, philosophical abstractions, comments about the weather, complaints about the speakers' rheumatics, and perhaps an occasional description by the veterans of the sun rising over the misty hills of Wales.

It was Jack Tanner, of the A.E.U., who "blew the gaff" on Brabazon, and Councillor Murray who read out the Mayor's letter to a meeting at which I happened to be present, and I think that by way of castigation that I do right in "naming" them. Why on earth didn't someone think of that with regard to the Blackshirt rioters at the I.O.M.? In the pubs and cafés of Hampstead, people of all nationalities are asking over and over again, "Was Councillor Murray right in reading out the Mayor's private letter to a public meeting?"

I have tried putting this question myself, and the only answer I have been able to get is, "What would you do, chums?" Murray is canny, and answers this question by putting another:—

"I should like to know whether, in the Mayor's view, I am obliged to keep silent if someone, not asked for confidences, writes to me saying that he intends to shoot the Mayor at the next Council meeting, adding, 'Of course, you won't tell anyone, will you?'"

Seeing that the reservation of both Brabazon and the Mayor relate to the question of aid to Russia, Tanner and Murray might quote the Russian precedent, which was one of the greatest snoops in history—that of the Bolsheviks who, on coming to power in 1917, "blew the gaff" on the world's diplomats by publishing the secret treaties!

J. CLIFF. PROTHERO.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

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

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, Mr. John Katz, B.A., "The Reconciliation of the Peoples."

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, Rev. C. B. Sercombe, "Apostolic Church."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): 3-0, Mr. John Paton (of the Union of Democratic Control), "The Atlantic Charter—a Critical View."

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