

THE FREETHINKER

▪ EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN ▪

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from last week)

The Churches and the War

We have said nothing yet concerning the question of the Churches. To leave them out would be the height of folly. Those would-be social reformers who refrain from saying or doing anything that even suggests an unfavourable criticism of religious beliefs, are either fooling themselves or throwing a cloak over their timidity. Multitudes of people, they say, do not care about religion, the Church of to-day is not the bad Church of yesterday, besides, we can undermine the powers of the Churches by altering the social structure on which they rest. In the face of what is going on around us this is wishful thinking with a vengeance. Its origin, its character and its value may be gauged by the fact that it is the very fear of the power of religious organisations and the Churches that forces this apology. Many votes would be lost if a candidate for municipal or parliamentary honours declared himself to be an Atheist. In the vast majority of cases it would be enough to lose the election. The antipathy to Russia would not have been nearly so sustained and so bitter had the actions of the revolutionists been in the name of religion. Even in private life opposition to religion may often mean the loss of social status in local communities; and in business it is more than thousands of shopkeepers dare do to make a public confession of being opposed to all religious beliefs.

It was thought by our immediate ancestors that when the Education Act of 1870 functioned education would certainly lead to the decline of religion. In some measure that expectation has been realised. There is less definite religious belief than there was. The Churches are more accommodating than they were. They work with staffs lower in their intellectual capacity than they did seventy years ago. But the Churches are not less cunning. The boycott is still powerful, and the Churches as defenders of vested interests are well appreciated by those concerned. And so here we are in 1941 with the Churches demanding the return of complete religious control over the schools in a programme that *must* involve the lowering of the level of education, and will place the clergy as the real appointers of teachers, particularly head teachers, with the result of lowering the standard of education at a time when it was never so urgent that it should be raised as high as possible.

The Ethiopian does not change his colour nor the leopard its spots. The boast of Rome that the Church is the same to-day, yesterday and for ever, still holds. Even the "great lying Church" is not incapable of speaking the truth.

Among those who read with their heads as well as with their eyes, there can be no doubt as to the determination of the Churches to make capital out of the war. Where others see a great conflict involving the immediate future of humanity, the Churches see little more than an occasion from which may be wrested a greater measure of ecclesiastical power. The Archbishop of Canterbury, true to form, led the way with the colossal lie that the war was one for the protection of Christian civilisation. In sober truth no such thing as a Christian civilisation has existed in Europe for at least five centuries. And in that period from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Renaissance, whatever was best in those centuries was due to the surviving influence of Greek and Roman culture. Until recent years philosophy and science had to fight against the power of the Christian Church for their existence. This can be asserted with absolute truth. Even to-day the Christian ban on independent thinking is not completely removed. And in the development of a philosophy of ethics there is a huge gap from the last flicker of the ancient civilisation until about the seventeenth century. The only world-shaking religious development of recent time has been Hitlerism. There has been nothing like it since the display of ferocity, bigotry and brutality shown in the Crusades. The characteristics of the two movements, their intense belief in a mystical mission, their ruthless bloodshed, general spoliation, the conviction of a chosen people and the denial of individual rights to all outside a particular group, are present in both movements. To make the analogy complete we have the threat to a higher civilisation from a lower one in both instances.

It is an old religious maxim that man's misfortunes are God's opportunity. Given a certain type of mind and the generalisation must be admitted as sound. The ancient expression of the same idea, but going deeper, was the Roman "Fear made the gods." Polytheism had gods of all kinds and for all occasions. Monotheism has but a single God, and with him solemnity is mistaken for majesty. Neither the Jehovah of the Christian nor the Allah of the Mohammedan is reported as ever having laughed. Given misfortune and disaster and with the true Christian believer the presence of God is obvious.

The "Collar the Kids" Campaign

Where others saw in the war a fight for human freedom and dignity, the Churches saw little but an opportunity for ecclesiastical aggrandisement. They also recognised that an attack on the adult was next to hopeless. An attack on children promised more, and that attack was planned to operate through the schools. One may venture the belief that this attack would not have been made as openly as it has been made had not an assurance of help been given from high political quarters.

It must be noted that no complaint is brought against the State schools on the grounds of inefficiency. One suspects that the fault lies in the fact that the State schools have done their work too well. In fact, for years the complaint of the sectarian schools has been the difficulty of lifting non-provided

schools to a level approaching that of the State schools. Those who know the state of the children of the poor two generations ago, their uncouth bearing, their ragged clothes, etc., etc., will readily recognise the transformation that has taken place. And it is unquestionable that a great deal of the responsibility for this change for the better is due to the teachers, not to the influence of religion. For the teachers not merely educated the children, they achieved the more difficult task of educating the parents through the children. This is a feat the Churches never succeeded in, even if it was ever attempted.

The real complaint brought by the clergy against the State Schools is that they do not prepare the children in such a fashion that they will fall readily into the hands of the parsonry. It should be very humiliating to the clergy to feel that their only chance of forming a generation of Christians is to make war on the child, but every occupation has its own private code of ethics, and the clergy have theirs. They deserve our sympathy.

The Churches have laid down their demands in the shape of five points. At present, religious teaching in the schools is optional. It lies within the power of the local governing body to dispense with it. The Churches ask for religious teaching to be made compulsory. At present, if religion is taught in the schools, it must be the Christian religion, but it must not be the Christianity of any particular Christian sect. It must be as graceful as a coat that fits everywhere and touches nowhere. The religious lesson must at present be given at the opening of the school, and religion must not be introduced into other lessons. The Churches demand the creation of a "Christian atmosphere" right through the school and at all times. An examination of teachers on religious subjects is not now allowed, and inspectors have no power of testing the religious lessons given. The Churches demand that religion may be one of the qualifying subjects in a teacher's appointment, and inspectors must report on the efficiency of the religious instruction given. The right to withdraw children from religious instruction is to remain for the present, but in the clerical plan the only way to prevent a child from receiving dogmatic religious instruction will be to keep him or her away from school altogether.

Quite clearly this plan, if successful, means a lowering of our standard of education. Men and women who value their personal honour and independence will fight shy of a situation which places them under control of the clergy. Their real masters would be a body of men who have no real interest in education as such. They are merely seeking fodder supply for their churches. If a teacher is known to be an unbeliever, his appointment will be difficult and his promotion impossible. Can one picture the clergy and their friends appointing a teacher whose opinions are of a non-religious or anti-religious character? It is not a better educated people the clergy want, but a more Christian people. And to secure this they advocate a form of control not so severe as, but not very different from, Hitlerism. Hitlerism and Church policy fit each other, to use an expression of Ingersoll's, like the upper and lower jaws of a hyena.

It says little for the mentality of some of the Christian members of the House of Commons, including some members of the Government, that they should have expressed agreement with the main outlines of this clerical plan. They need reminding that the present House of Commons has no representative quality. By its own vote the present Parliament has prolonged its existence, but for the purposes of carrying on the war only. It is a war government, pure and simple. Apart from religion, a better sense of

constitutional responsibility would have been shown. It will be remembered that Hitler gained power on one programme and then proceeded to put another policy into operation. Hitlerism and clericalism have many points in common.

We may also rest assured that if the politician helps the clergy, the clergy will in turn help the politician. In that case the "new world" that is to arise after the war may not be so very new after all. "Never again" was a very familiar slogan during the last war; so was the promise to make the world safe for democracy. But a much larger war is here, and democracy has never been so threatened since the days of ancient Greece.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

MISSIONARY "HEROES"?

MANY of us remember the thrill we got when we were very young and we heard that a real live missionary was coming on the Sunday to tell us about his experiences amongst the savage heathen. We fancied the missionary, armed only with the true faith to confront a mob of howling savages, in one hand the British Bible, the source of England's greatness, and, with the other, pointing to the sky. The savages would then immediately drop their bloodthirsty intentions and fall on their knees, to be duly baptised by the missionary, from whom they learned the first verse of a Sankey hymn.

But, as Carlyle says, "Our beards have grown since then," and we know now that this fanciful picture of our childish imagination was too highly-coloured to be true. What are the facts?

The missionary of to-day would have us believe that it was Christianity that tamed all the savage tribes, and they will tell us that the comparative safety of the missionary of our time is enjoyed as a result of the wonderful example of and the sacrifices made by the missionaries of the middle of the last century—that time so rich in missionary enterprise; the industrial age, when England really became great and rich—the time of child-labour, slums, degrading poverty and rags for clothes—which was the very time when millions of pounds were subscribed to send clothes to natives who had never worn them, didn't want them, and who, by wearing them one day and discarding them the next, soon became a prey to illness, particularly lung disease.

A very interesting account of these early missionaries is given in a book the writer purchased on a second-hand bookstall, "New Zealand, together with some account of the South Sea Islands," by Lieut. the Hon. Herbert Meade, R.N., published by John Murray in 1870.

Lieut. Meade was a very accurate observer who possessed considerable skill with his brush, as shown by his sketches in the book. Not alone an accurate observer, but a very impartial one, some of his comments on the missionaries of New Zealand and the South Seas at that time are most illuminating. Thus, for example, he comments again and again on their squabbles and fights amongst themselves.

To such an extent do their jealousies flourish that he recounts it as extraordinary that one missionary he met spoke for a whole half-hour without blackguarding any of his fellow missionaries.

As Lieut. Meade says: "At almost every island there is the same miserable old story—the teachers of each persuasion accusing their rivals of calumniating them to the natives, of admitting and counting as converts such as are so only in name, of personal discourtesy and of not being gentlemen."

He also commented upon the comforts enjoyed by many of these heroes and tells us: "We found Mr. Nettleston very snugly quartered in a commodious house surrounded by a very extensive garden perched on the crest of a little hill, commanding a charming view and drinking in the coolest of the fresh and life-giving sea breezes; how many an English clergyman's mouth would water at the sight of such a parsonage, with its ample garden and well-filled

larder under his lee—so neat a parish, so docile a congregation—and all this free of rent, rates, taxes and churchwardens."

Lieut. Meade pointed out that sometimes the natives were not converted singly, but turned Christian en masse if the chief decided to do so, and that this conversion was often hastened or retarded by political motives. The self-denial required to give up the services and companionship of, perhaps, a score or two of wives, was their guarantee and test of sincerity. Commenting on this the writer said: "The change is generally an improvement in the condition of the younger women, who can easily find husbands after their own hearts amongst the bachelors of the tribe, and are happier with them than as the concubines or slaves of the chief, who could take as many women of his tribe as he chose to fancy, to the manifest exclusion from marriage of many of the inferior men of the tribe. But to the elderly ladies, the dear old tabbies, whose magnetic charms have lost the lodestone of youth, their fate seems hard indeed."

He speaks of the spirit of intolerance shown to the natives in trifling matters, as, for example, that of smoking tobacco, the one solitary luxury these simple people possessed; the repression of age-long customs, such as dancing, about which they try to impress upon the natives a sense of shame in the naked body where no such feeling existed before.

The writer has quite a good sense of humour—he says that in one island he was told by a missionary what a high standard of morality had been reached "because there are virgins here." As Lieut. Meade rather naively remarked: "He omitted, however, to specify the age of these interesting damsels."

Dealing with the simplicity of the natives, he tells an interesting story:—

"In a neighbouring island, a merchant captain stopped for a short time and commenced converting the natives. He prevailed on them to destroy their idols, but had not got much farther when he had to set sail.

The islanders were therefore left with little or no religion to supply the place of the paganism which he had destroyed. He told them that he had no Bible to give them, but that they should endeavour to get one at the first opportunity, as without the Word of God they could not hope for salvation.

A long time passed before another trader touched at the island, and then their first request was for the Holy volume. The trader, seeing an opportunity for what he considered a smart bargain, replied that he fortunately had a "Word of God" on board, but that they were such exceedingly rare and valuable articles that he could not part with his except for a large quantity of oil, and an agreement was made by which the natives were to pay 120 gallons of oil, valued at least £20, for the skipper's New York Society's Bible, marked 3s. on the cover.

The natives went to work, and having succeeded in collecting the quantity demanded, obtained their Bible, but did not know what to do with the prize when they had got it, for not one of them could read a word of it. So it was wrapped carefully up in ever so many folds of tappa mats and coconut leaves, and hung up in the chief's house as a sort of fetish, where it remained for years till a few months ago, when some native teachers were landed on the island to expound the Gospel to them.

More than one-third of the whole population can now read.

Sunday is observed here as strictly as in Scotland and the state of morals is worse."

All this happened in 1870 when it was supposed that missionaries had much greater dangers and more primitive conditions to face than they have to-day, but even then the missionary swindle was being worked for all it was worth.

F. A. HORNBROOK.

The opinions of men are received according to the ancient belief, and upon trust, as if it were religion and law. . . . Another religion, other witnesses and like promises and threats, might by the same way imprint a quite contrary belief.—MONTAIGNE.

NATIONAL DAYS OF PRAYER

THOSE ardent Catholics, the late G. K. Chesterton and Mr. Hilaire Belloc, have written a great deal in defence of their religion and in scorn of all others. Mr. Chesterton wrote in addition much about literature with great keenness and appreciation, and both writers have produced some excellent poetry. Yet I cannot remember either displaying very much enthusiasm for the quality or merit of the hymns sung in their Church—or, for that matter, sung in any of the other Churches.

Great literary critics as they are, they must have had a most uncomfortable feeling that most of our hymns, and particularly many of those so solemnly sung by the pious in a way which resembles the awful clerical voice, are just so much gibberish. I do not know whether they ever gave expression to what they thought about hymns, but, of course, the subject has been dealt with many times both in these columns and elsewhere. Professor W. H. D. Rouse once wrote an article for the "English Review" which he called "Our 'Melancholy' Hymnal," and a sorry time the trash got at his hands. He wanted "a thorough sifting" of our hymns, which he characterised as "detestable doggerel and insincere sentimentality." But he seems to have overlooked the fact that it is only these that could possibly be sung with such ridiculous solemnity. Some other method of approach would be required if the beautiful songs and poems of our great poets were to be used instead.

Although most of our readers have been pestered by the appeals for a "national" day of prayer at various times, I expect few have actually seen the various leaflets and printed prayers which act either as an aid in the approach to God Almighty, or give the line which must be followed. A friend kindly sent one of these to me, published by the World's Evangelical Alliance, and I am sure if one wanted to parody this kind of thing he would not have succeeded half so well in producing anything quite so funny.

Speakers in the first place "should be free to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit." In fact, "each speaker should seek to receive a message from God to the Church and Nation." This would take a lot of beating in itself, for it is obviously implied that getting a message from God can be on tap, as it were, and is just as easy—or almost—as getting one on the telephone. But prayers "should avoid anything approaching exhortation," rather difficult for those sincere believers who have been taught to "ask and ye shall receive." However, the compilers of this leaflet must be given credit for one thing—they insist that "four minutes for each one who leads in prayer should not be exceeded." To limit a prayer to four minutes on the special occasion blessed by the King and the Archbishop, will be a big blow to many in touch with the Almighty; but I have an idea that even the most incorrigible believer in prayer would not mind it shortened sometimes. Fancy having to listen, say, to twenty minutes of raucous balderdash!

Under the heading of "Confession" we are most solemnly warned against "the sin of relying upon material resources instead of upon God." Perhaps this is what is known as sinning against the Holy Ghost—than which nothing more horrible can be thought of. At all events, it does seem rather peculiar that, in spite of this horrifying warning, our workers are constantly urged to turn out vast quantities of such material resources as tanks, aeroplanes and munitions; and not a word comes from those in authority to turn out nothing at all but rely exclusively on God.

(Continued on page 498)

ACID DROPS

MR. A. V. ALEXANDER, the First Lord of the Admiralty, is, we believe, a pious Methodist and a lay preacher. It is not surprising therefore to find him applauding what he calls the "true sense of religion which animates officers and men of the Navy." In a message he has sent to the World's Evangelical Alliance Mr. Alexander added:—

"You yourself will recollect that their reliance upon the Divine power of which you speak has been the hall mark of the private lives of many of our greatest admirals. Frequently when I have been interviewing naval officers on their return from dangerous operations . . . they have expressed to me their deep consciousness of the directing hand of Providence over them."

It will be plain from this, if officers and men do *not* return to Mr. Alexander—as in the case of the men on the "Hood"—there was no directing hand of Providence, unless it was the hand which sent them to their doom. In any case, Admiralty orders make it almost compulsory for men to attend church parade.

Someone seems to be have been pulling Mr. Alexander's leg. He appears to have taken these naval officers too seriously. They are not all religious—that we know from first-hand evidence—the officers themselves. The "directing hand of Providence" is just revivalistic rubbish. What a pity that Christians cannot be brought to the point of realising that holding an official position does not in honesty provide a pulpit from which to preach their own ill-digested and misunderstood religion! A finer sense of honour would act as a brake on one's religious exuberance. Mr. Alexander should stick to his last, and by so doing set an example of intellectual honesty to others.

The "Universe" is very angry. It appears that one of Italy's Fascist papers—which is determinedly Roman Catholic, by the way—has put forward the plea that Catholics should support the Axis Powers because on their side there are over 100 millions of Roman Catholics, and only about three millions in the "Anglo-Saxon" camp. Of course, the figures on the Continent are arrived at by adding all the Catholics in the conquered countries, as they are now supposed to be in the permanent "New Order." Well, supposing we left out the Catholics in France, Holland, Belgium, etc. There are at least 30 millions of them in Germany and 40 millions in Italy who are in the Axis camp and most earnestly want their two countries to win. What about them? Needless to say, the "Universe" has no answer to that question.

One of our daily papers asks what would the world be like if Christianity were to suffer banishment? That is a curious way of putting it, for the constant question is not what should we do without Christianity, but what are we to do with it? That has been the problem for centuries. The secular law has had to prevent different sects strangling each other and also to prevent the Churches enforcing their own barbaric doctrines, to wipe out laws such as those against witchcraft, etc., and, against the opposition of Christians, to enforce a legal equality without which civil progress is impossible. Perhaps Mr. Alexander will reflect on these things and so be prevented from misusing his official platform by turning it into a very poor kind of a pulpit.

What a change! The "Evening Standard" for October 22: "Soviet Russia, battered, bruised and bleeding, is still the Atlas which upholds the world of free men." To appreciate this, one must also appreciate the religious lying that went on for over 20 years. There were, of course, other forces than the Churches which, for interested reasons, backed up the holy lies of the Churches. But these forces would have been ashamed to show their hands had it not been for the moral sanction of the Churches behind which they operated. And it is not because Russia has changed so much as it is that the lie is now so patent that even the Churches dare not repeat it to-day.

But do not let us miss the lesson of the moment, or neglect being forewarned in time. When the time of victory comes the forces—aristocratic, religious and financial—now silent, will be there to sabotage the peace and to revive the hatred of the ill-informed British public concerning the one country in the world with an avowed Atheistic government. Not all the Churchmen in this country are praising the Russian effort, and not all those who publicly proclaimed the usefulness of Hitler as a protection against

the inflow of Russian influence have come to even the stage of praising Russia for what is being done. They are silent, but one day they will be again vocal and busy with their plots against the development of a form of internationalism without which we can achieve nothing better than an armed truce.

In the United States there are 22,000,000 Roman Catholics, and it is from them that the greatest opposition to President Roosevelt comes. That is a fact worth thinking over.

We are constantly insisting that the demand of the clergy for control of the schools was only the public side of a plot between them and members of the Government. A notice in the papers for October 18—"The Times," the "Yorkshire Post," etc.—bears out our contention. Here are some items from this "released" portion of the plot:—

"The suggestion of religious courses for parents of schoolchildren is made by the Board of Education in a circular sent to local education authorities. Leaders of the Churches have been strongly pressing the Department to improve facilities for religious instruction . . . Local education authorities are reminded that approved expenditure, including that incurred in enabling teachers and others to attend courses . . . will rank for a 50 per cent. grant from the Board."

There is more of it, but that is enough to prove what we have been saying ever since the Archbishops and others made public their plot for capturing the schools. It is an indication of the real aims of our religious and political diehards to sabotage after-war attempts that may be made to place education, and other things, on the more satisfactory basis than they are at present. These people look far ahead. We invite others to also remember that the leopard does not change its spots. A people exhausted by a long and desperate war furnishes a very good opportunity for what, to a powerful section in this country, are quite undesirable reforms.

Speaking in the House of Lords on October 22, the Archbishop of Canterbury said that past criticisms of Russia were not relevant. We understand that what his Grace intended to say was that past religious lies about Russia were now inconvenient. We think we are right in saying this, because no regret is expressed at their having been told. They are now simply irrelevant. Still, they may be revived later. But the old guard never apologises for lies told in the interests of faith.

Roman Catholic Bishop Moriarty, of Shrewsbury, says that mothers should not use God to frighten children. We note that the devil is not excluded from playing that part in the education of Catholic children. Perhaps the Bishop remembered "The Sight of Hell" (a specimen of the contents of which we have given in one of our "Pamphlets for the People"), which is one of the series, "Books for Children," and is published "Permissu Superiorum." It is one of the most revoltingly brutal things we have ever read. The worst forms of Nazism may be counted benevolence at the side of it. And the Church boasts of being the same "yesterday, to-day and for ever."

The secretary of the Roman Catholic Propaganda has worked out that there are 366,000,000 Catholics in the world and that a penny per week from each would bring in to the Papacy £79,000,000 per year. Wonderful! We have also indulged in a calculation, and we find that twopenny per week would bring in £158,000,000 per year. There is also a maxim that fools and their money are soon parted. We are not aware who first used that maxim, but it may have been one of the Popes.

Confucius permitted divorce for any of these seven reasons: When a woman cannot live in peace with her father-in-law or mother-in-law; when she cannot bear children; when she is unfaithful; when by the utterance of calumnies or indiscreet words she disturbs the peace of the house; when her husband has for her an unconquerable repugnance; when she is an inveterate scold; when she steals anything from her husband's house.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

For distributing "The Freethinker": T. Roberts, 10s.

"PUZZLED."—The two best recent works on Witchcraft, in our judgment, are "The Witch Cult in Western Europe" (12s. 6d.) and "The God of the Witches" (8s. 6d.). Both works are by Miss M. A. Murray. Most books on witchcraft are descriptive rather than analytic and explanatory. Probably this is because the first form is the easier. One can "mug up" in the first case; one has to attempt understanding in the second.

Mr. C. R. GOFREY writes from Newcastle-on-Tyne: "I think you will be interested in knowing how useful I have found Mr. Du Cann's pamphlet, "The Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ" in approaching the more liberal-minded of my Christian friends. I find it very effective in its approach to those who cannot stand the more iconoclastic criticisms of the Christian semi-deity." We are not surprised. Mr. Du Cann, as a lawyer, knows how to state his case with an eye on the jury. And a good writer should always have some kind of a jury in his mind all the time he is pleading.

H. J. HEWER.—We shall not forget the promise, but it must await the opportunity.

W. BLORE.—Not surprised you received no reply from the B.B.C. Sorry it is too lengthy for insertion in these columns.

J. E. BURROWS.—You can dispense with the Church service in a churchyard on giving notice to the incumbent. But you cannot claim to have a secular service. In a public cemetery a secular or other service may be held, but no attack on other creeds must be made in the service. In these cases it is well to inform the undertaker of your desire, so that there may be no mistake. We fancy a Roman Catholic church would have the ground more completely under its control. With regard to your wishing to send subscription for the "New Zealand Rationalist," if you send by money order you will be quite safe if it is lost in transit and you keep the number of the order. The Post Office will refund. If you prefer it, the subscription could be sent through this office.

Mr. J. PHILLIPS writes that in his reply to "S. H.," fourth par, second line, it should read, "Personally, I do not think." The word underlined was omitted. Sorry!

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—H. W. Reynolds (New Zealand), 10s.

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

WE know we are getting steadily older, but we note that our lively and well-conducted contemporary, the "New Zealand Rationalist," in a congratulatory notice of our beating the "blitz," refers to us as a "veteran Editor." We hope readers will remember that the dictionary definition of "veteran" is "old and experienced." There is no question of our right to be classified at 73 as "old," but we hope that it will not be interpreted as worn out, or played out. At any rate, we don't feel that way. Our main trouble is that there are only 24 hours to a day.

We have not had, and never have had, any fear of death. Death is a feat that any fool may accomplish, and only fools will pride themselves on achieving it. One will have to be dead for a long, long time to equal the time that

one was non-existent before birth. And one may as reasonably moan for not having *lived* for ever before birth as to worry over the fact that one cannot go on *living* for ever after death. Each of us was not but is, we are and shall not be. That gives us our entry and our exit. It is what lies between the "was not" and the "is not" that really matters. Concern should be for the development of potentialities, not for the perpetuation of idiosyncrasies. The crowning folly, if not crime, of Christianity is that it has emphasised the last and substantially ignored the first.

The only fear of old age that we have is largely a personal one. It is that of writing oneself out. We mean by that, of reaching a stage when one goes on writing while one's wit and understanding steadily get weaker and more confused; one is unable to perceive the degeneration that has taken place, without a friend brave enough to say, "Don't write any more." That is indeed one of the tragedies of life—to have the good work one has done buried under mounds of third-rate stuff that may come to represent one's work. It is regrettable when a man of genius dies without ever touching what he might have done had he reached the normal span of life, but it is lamentable to find him living on with his output becoming weaker and weaker until it drowns the better work by which he would have preferred posterity to know him.

We can think of many writers who are now little read because, in evaluating them, posterity has paid attention to the work done in these weaker years, and so clouded over what was done when genius shone clear and strong. Christians have prayed for long life because only the Christian hell made the Christian heaven tolerable, but never, save in minds that had been drugged till they lost consciousness of the higher values did it make the Christian future desirable. Men of genius should live no longer than their genius survives. Fools may live to old age with impunity. They run no risks—save that of getting to the Christian heaven, where they will feel that they have at last reached Home.

We have been pointing out for many years that the teachers in elementary schools can by themselves prevent clerical domination of the schools if they will take their courage in both hands and let their real opinions be known. It is unfortunately true that for a teacher to be known as a Freethinker tells against him so far as promotion is concerned, but it is also true that if teachers would make a firm stand both as regards the dictation of religious bigots in power, and also against the policy of making teachers so many catspaws of these same bigots, freedom of thought and a development of self-respect would be the result. As it is, the few who do speak out often pay the price. But as men can give their lives on the battlefield for a cause, we see no reason why those engaged in the discharge of civil functions should not show an equal courage.

For these reasons we are pleased to find that a number of protests against the plot that is being hatched between politicians and the clergy to turn our schools into training grounds for church and chapel are appearing in educational journals. In a letter which appears in "Education" for October 17, Mr. F. Roscoe writes that the clergy wish to turn "day-schools into Sunday schools," and adds that in every good school pupils "are taught to be kindly and considerate, to place the welfare of the school before their own selfish needs and to eschew wrongdoing. These results have no relation to a knowledge of the trickery of Jacob, the quarrels of savage tribes in Syria, the journeys of St. Paul or the many stories of the doings and sayings of Jesus which are now discredited by theologians of eminence." This is well said. The clergy do not pay loyalty to the school, but to the Church. They do not care whether the New Testament stories are discredited or not. What they feel is that unless education is prostituted to the extent of teaching as literal history stories that the majority of educated adults are ashamed to voice in public, their occupation is gone.

Here is a note from a recent subscriber to this paper and a reader of some of our "Pamphlets for the People":

"I wish to express my thanks for the pamphlets paid for. . . I have read "The Freethinker" since my introduction to it about six weeks ago, and can only regret that I never knew of its existence earlier."

We receive many letters of this kind from new readers, and we appreciate those who are acting as our agents. There is always a new subscriber round the corner.

NATIONAL DAYS OF PRAYER—(continued from page 495)

I wonder how the King, if appealed to, would answer one of the puzzled workers on this point.

Although we are asked to "avoid anything approaching exhortation" we are given gracious permission to pray to God for "Intercession." Among the many things God could give us and will give us if only we pray to him as indicated by the World's Evangelical Alliance are Victory, Peace, an Increasing Measure of Wisdom for our King and Prime Minister, and, of course, help for the Missionary Work of the Church. And in case we don't or can't make up a suitable prayer to bring this about, we get this delightful bit of prize poetry to waft to Heaven:—

Thy Kingdom come, O God;
Thy rule, O Christ, begin.
Break with Thine iron rod
The tyrannies of sin.

I think the "iron rod" is priceless.

But no prayers of "Thanksgiving" or "Confession" or "Intercession" are quite enough to move God to do his bit. You must add plenty of hymns. And in selecting those which in the opinion of the World's Evangelical Alliance the Almighty prefers, we are permitted to get a glimpse of that personal contact with Deity which must be the envy of even an Archbishop. You must be lavish with praise:—

Oh, enter then His gates with praise,
Approach with joy His courts unto:
Praise, laud and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

What a relief it must be for the devout hymn singers to know that it is "seemly so to do."

Another hymn begins with "O God of love, Thine eyes look down" which looks dangerously near an exhortation. Am I to understand that God's eyes would not look down unless exhorted to do so in this seemly (or unseemly) way? But the first line of the next hymn on the list must have given many a true Christian his first nasty jolt. It is "God the all-terrible! King who ordainest . . ." Gracious heavens! God an "all-terrible" just after telling us he is a "God of love"?

Of course, anybody who can swallow the complete contradictions of the Bible can swallow a God of love being a terrible God. In the old days it would have been swallowed on faith alone. But somehow the modern generation likes a little spice of reason added to the dough of faith, and even the most iron tummy may find a "terrible God of love" rather hard to digest.

It is needless to add that the complete set of hymns as given on the leaflet before me only multiplies what Prof. Rouse would call "detestable doggerel." It is difficult for an ordinary layman like myself to understand how it is possible for any intelligent human being to compile the laughable drivel put forward by the World's Evangelical Alliance. Perhaps the explanation is that the compiler has got "religion." What a fate!

H. CUTNER.

MARCHING ORDERS FOR GERMANY

And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it (the city) into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But women and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, thou shalt take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of the enemies which the Lord thy God hath given thee. Of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth (Deut. xx. 13-16).

THE TRAGEDY OF THE GREY-HAIRED VIRGIN

SOCIAL morality is, and always has been, based on expediency and the complex interaction of tribal custom. It was not until the first primitive societies were beginning to develop beyond their earliest stages that morality became associated with the various religions which inevitably arose when man began to think. From that early beginning, racial morals have moved more slowly than material progress until, in 1941, any critical student can still find evidences on all sides of laws and customs which have their origins in the earliest beginnings, and have only been partly modified to meet the rapid changes in every other direction. Small wonder, therefore, that under the static influence of a fixed religious doctrine, imposed by authority only within recent years seriously questioned, we in Western Europe find ourselves facing a revolution. That the whole question of morals should have suffered a sudden internal explosion from causes inherent in the situation, is due, I think, to the recent two World Wars, which for the first time in history, have been on such a scale as to change, willy-nilly, the habits and customs of almost everyone involved. This, with the decay of religious sanctions, has apparently emboldened the younger generation of both men and women to ask certain pertinent questions which tradition is no longer capable of answering satisfactorily. The result reveals a number of crying human problems for which there is no rational answer in law and custom, and which sooner or later will have to be considered if the race is to move forward in harmony with enlightened times.

Consider, for instance, in the light of H. G. Wells's clarion call, "Adapt or Perish!" the very real physico-psychological problem provided by the modern woman, emancipated and educated for the first time in history to the level of her menfolk, who now seeks the right to fulfill herself in motherhood.

Time was (when the status of women was one of complete economic dependency) when the number of unmarried women who lived a barren existence from cradle to grave, mattered little to anyone excepting themselves. Those who were "chosen" were lucky, and that is all there was to it. Under the enforced illusion of chastity, whereby women were not supposed to have any feelings, and were presumed to live a life of felicity in the spiritual value of virginity, there was little to reveal the presence of the great, silent army of unmarried spinsters, excepting its reflection in music-hall jokes, which echoed somewhat callously the neurological complications so well known to their helpless medical advisers. The "acid and vinegar" on which it was presumed these thwarted millions of women lived, and the characteristic souring of the traditional "old maid" was regarded as something fit only for crude ridicule.

Now, however, with the new emancipation of women, and their growing economic independence, the problem, long hidden, is beginning to press for consideration. Women who no longer feel dependent on a man's income to support them through life, are rightly asking why it is that *unlike all other species*, they are to be condemned by convention to deny themselves their own fulfilment—the very *raison d'être* of their being—simply because they happen to live under the régime of a moral code devised for their forebears in a tyrannous and superstitious age? They are asking why it is that they must go about the world envying their sisters the priceless joy of motherhood simply because they do not feel justified in contracting a long-term union with someone with whom they could never live happily and whose support is no longer necessary in their newly-found independence of having a home provided for them?

Few men, I believe, are capable of appreciating the sufferings of thwarted womanhood, though the physical consequences are well known to all medical practitioners. The denial of the strongest instinct in the sex cannot in the long run be justified excepting on grounds of the utmost expediency. And for the self-supporting woman of to-day, apart from tradition, does such expediency exist?

It is utterly futile to plead "equality" between men and women in questions of this nature. One law for the man and the woman is oppression. Everyone knows that apart from the momentary union, the whole function of relationships devolves on the female, who can neither forget

it nor conceal it. Can a code of morals which treats the action of a few minutes on the same basis as the whole burden of childbirth stand for a moment the test of critical valuation?

Not long ago I was talking to the wife of a country vicar. She commented on the future of a number of fine, healthy young women, friends of her daughter. "It seems a pity," she remarked, "that probably quite half of those girls will never marry, never have children, doesn't it?" "It does," I replied, and suggested that she should talk the matter over with the vicar.

"Adapt or Perish!" The poignant personal problem of the frustrated virgin will sooner or later have to be considered. It is not enough that a few bold spirits have taken the risk of social sanctions both for themselves and their children, rather than eke out their old age in ill-health and regrets. It may be some comfort to some of them to know that we are now allied to a great country (for whom, incidentally, the writer holds no general brief) where both they and their children would receive all honour and respect due to motherhood. That their children would bear honourably their name, or the name of the father if desired, and that not a finger would be lifted towards them in the fulfilment of their joy.

And if any reader is tempted to think that I have exaggerated a subtle but vital problem which is no problem at all, let him have a talk with any modern medical man or psychiatrist. Let him consider the true function of the parrot and the miserable lap dog, or, better still, study for a moment the pathos and longing in the eyes of some woman approaching the end of the reproductive period, as she gazes hopelessly into a strange cradle and—beyond it to the loneliness of the grey years which lie ahead.

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

THE DANGER OF MIXING

AT the conference on Science and World Order recently held in London a Declaration of Scientific Principles was adopted in which, among other items, it was affirmed that liberty to learn, opportunity to teach and power to understand were essential for the extension of knowledge, and that the pursuit of scientific inquiry demands complete intellectual freedom and unrestricted international exchange of knowledge, which can only flourish through the unfettered development of civilised life.

The declaration contains nothing new or startling to Freethinkers in this country. Since its formation in 1866, the National Secular Society, in its principles and objects, has affirmed that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised State.

Equally true, the Declaration of Scientific Principles contains nothing new to science. It merely re-affirms principles which always have operated in purely scientific efforts, and if to-day there is confusion in the public mind as to the standards of science the responsibility lies with those men of science who, for their own purpose, mix conventional ideas with their science.

Science handles every branch of human knowledge and deals with it in the only way possible for proper understanding. It analyses, sifts and organises knowledge into a comprehensive whole, with one rebel to the process—the Church. The reason for the opposition from the Churches is quite clear: their religion cannot submit to popular analysis and remain a business proposition in a progressive community. But science has carried its investigations into the domain of spiritual beliefs, those beliefs have been traced to the roots, and the natural history of religion is now a chapter in scientific achievement. The task before the Churches now is to prevent as far as possible the spread of that knowledge, and to pretend that science and religion have become warmly embraced in co-operation and mutual friendship.

Actually, spiritual beliefs lose nothing of their characteristics and dignity by restoring them to their natural environment and leaving them there. Indeed, that is the only environment in which they can retain self-respect and claim a useful service to mankind in his intellectual development.

A child playing with its toys on the hearth is a charming natural picture, but what shall we say of a full-grown man playing on the hearth with the toys of a child?

In like manner "gods" belong to the infancy of the human race; that is where they are natural and healthy, but when civilised people can be made to prattle to a supernatural relic, can tolerate poverty and slumdom for themselves but provide magnificent quarters and generous pocket-money for that relic, pocket-money which must be in the current coin of the realm, and which is collected for god, counted for god and spent for god by humans, surely some evil influence must have been at work for a very long time.

R. H. ROSETTI.

"HALF-WAY HOUSE"

ONE may feel sympathetic towards Mr. J. R. Sturge-Whiting in his middle-life struggle of the intellect, and it is to be desired that clarification of his position will soon take place, in order that his talents may be directed more forcibly to the Freethought struggle which commands his support.

Mr. Sturge-Whiting's hesitancy, however, in accepting what seems to him to be a dogmatic position, is due to a misconception that is more common than might be supposed.

He says, "Atheist is too dogmatic (as a term of personal description) unless used in the special sense of the denial of the traditional gods."

May I ask, "Why *special sense*, and why *traditional gods*?"

Surely there are no gods except traditional ones! In these days a god without tradition behind it would merely be the expression of some current form of lunacy, and would be regarded as such even by those who believe in the established gods. With regard to Atheism in a "special sense," I am at a loss here. I have always understood there to be Atheism; just that, without qualifications or senses implying different forms of Atheism. And I have always regarded myself as an Atheist because I do not believe in God or gods.

I have always regarded the matter as being fairly simple, and to reaffirm my viewpoint I went for help to the dictionary.

There I secured an analysis of terms which strongly justified my adoption of the term Atheist, and I suggest it might help Mr. Sturge-Whiting out of his misconception of the dogmatic nature of Atheism. Here is the analysis.

GOD

A BEING conceived of as possessing DIVINE POWER.

ATTRIBUTES

- (1) BEING—Existence; that which has life; a creature.
- (2) DIVINE—Of or belonging to God.
- (3) POWER—Ability to act or to do.

SUMMARY: God, then, is (1) an existence, life or creature, conceived of as possessing (3) the ability to act or to do (2) that which belongs to itself. No wonder God is only "conceived of"!

ATHEIST

One who DISBELIEVES the existence of God.

ATTRIBUTES

DISBELIEF—To hold not to be true.

SUMMARY: The Atheist is one who simply asserts the untruth of the proposition of God.

There are, of course, many forms in which the proposition of God can be made, all of them without evidence of a testable nature; but, if the above analysis of the nature of God is the best that can be made with the aid of a really good dictionary, it seems that if we discuss God without the aid of a dictionary we shall be led into that morass of loose expression and evidenceless speculation which causes men to become bogged in a mess of theological nonsense and apologetics, and is responsible for their avoidance of the honest term Atheist.

"Atheist" cannot be a dogmatic term, moreover, within the literal meanings of "dogma." The general meaning of dogmatic is an assertion that something is true beyond

dispute; the theological meaning is a settled belief in matters of religious faith.

The Atheist, as such, does not assert something as a positive truth. He simply demonstrates that something is not true. And having demonstrated the untruth of a lie, he is not required to invent another lie to replace the first. Rather does he claim that mankind is better rid of a lie because lies clog the road to knowledge and understanding. To accept the name 'Atheist, then, simply means that one rejects a theological untruth—the basic untruth of God.

But at the point on the road where Atheism is reached, there are various continuing routes branching off. These routes accommodate many types, from simple men to idealists. I well remember, years ago, meeting my first, simple Atheist. He was the husband of a seaside landlady. He could neither read nor write, but at the age of 60 he had a profound philosophy, emphatically expressed, and based on long observation of life in the realism of a seaside Corporation labourer's job. "What the hell good is God when it comes to sweeping streets?" he would ask, "and who says man is better than an animal? A hoss is a lot more useful than a parson. Religion's a damned fraud, anyway, because I know that when I'm dead I'm done for."

You see, Mr. Sturge-Whiting, your "identifiable mysteries" caused no problem for this 60-year-old realist. The personal aspect of the God question was what concerned him. This is the only aspect, surely, for a God that takes no personal interest in men and women and children is neither god nor good. Most believers would agree with that.

If Mr. Sturge-Whiting feels that there is no God taking a personal interest in him; if he feels it to be untrue that God is a being with power to do that belonging to itself—a monstrous absurdity of words with no meaning whatever—then he ought not to hesitate about calling himself an Atheist.

One of Mr. Sturge-Whiting's difficulties seems to be that he expects an answer to all the problems of life. He says, ". . . materialists leave far too much unsaid, and the mind still *in vacuo*, on issues outside the realm of pure reason." But this is not relevant to the question of the name Atheist, nor to the attitude of Atheism.

Materialism is a scientific attitude to life. Materialism, I agree, needs Atheism. But Atheism does not necessarily need Materialism. To be an Atheist requires only that one shall recognise the lie about God; to be a Materialist requires much more. In any case, why should either Atheism or Materialism be expected to provide information on "issues outside the realm of pure reason"? When knowledge brings these realms within reason (if there are such realms), the information will probably be available. Until then, it is certain that no satisfactory information can be provided from any other source.

Finally, "shifting back the mystery of the Universe by giving it a Creator" really does not lessen the mystery, but doubles it, because we then have the problem of a Creator in addition to the problem of a Universe. Why invent something more than we are conscious of? The Universe has problems enough—and we have had too many gods and creators retarding our understanding of those problems.

More Atheists, Mr. Sturge-Whiting, means less gods; and Atheists are more useful than gods in sweeping the mental highways, as well as the municipal highways at seaside resorts. Won't you join us? F. J. CORINA.

A CHRISTIAN FUTURE

Look into this little prison (in hell). In the middle of it there is a boy—a young man. He is silent; despair is on him. He stands straight up. His eyes are burning like two burning coals. Two long flames come out of his ears. His breathing is difficult. Sometimes he opens his mouth, and breath of blazing fire rolls out of it. But listen! There is a sound just like that of a kettle boiling. Is it really a kettle which is boiling? No; then what is it? Hear what it is. The blood is boiling in the scalded veins of that boy. The brain is boiling and bubbling in his head. The marrow is boiling in his bones. Ask him, put the question to him—why is he thus tormented? His answer is that when he was alive his blood boiled to do very wicked things, and he did them, and it was for this that he went to dancing houses, public-houses and theatres.

(From "The Sight of Hell," p. 20; a series of books for children, published *Permisu Superiorum*.)

CORRESPONDENCE

OUR NEED

SIR,—What man wants is the Truth. He requires more education, information, cinemas, libraries, museums, planetariums, etc. Let us explore. Is religion true or merely humbug and nonsense? We want a free Press, free speech—more books to make us think. The size of the world has sunk to the size of a pea in the palm of your hand. Are we on the threshold of a new age of enlightenment, or on the brink of chaos and in the twilight of another period of Dark Ages? These fly-blown dictators must go. Let the spirit of man go free. Let us reach towards the stars. Man alone and only man can work out his own salvation without all these bleeding Christs and hailing Marys. Chuck all religious books into the dustbin and start afresh. We don't want pie in the sky when we die, but pie here and now in the only world we know.

"Beware of all the holy books
And all the creeds and schools,
And every law that man has made
And all the golden rules."

—Yours, etc.,

"JUDEX."

A CORRECTION

SIR,—Your statement in your issue of October 19 that Mr. H. G. Wells has "changed his views" about the war is quite untrue. His attitude to the British Foreign Office, Lord Halifax, Russia and the demand for a statement of our War Aims (which he initiated in "The Times" and which led to the Sankey Declaration of the Rights of Man) has been consistent throughout. He has also been very sound on our national praying bouts and our praying generals. Why he should be misrepresented in "The Freethinker" of all papers perplexes him. Is it, he asks, something personal?—Yours, etc.,

M. WELLS,

Secretary to Mr. H. G. Wells.

[The passage referred to occurred in an article by Mr. G. H. Taylor. By our own knowledge of Mr. Wells' opinions, we agree with the correction. Probably the use of Mr. Joad's name, who has changed his opinions about war, is responsible for the confusion. We share Mr. Wells' regret that the mistake should have occurred in "The Freethinker."—ED.]

Cunning leads to knavery; it is but a step from one to the other, and that very slippery; lying only makes the difference; add that to cunning, and it is knavery.—LA BRUYERE.

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Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.): 11-0, Prof. J. C. FLUGEL, D.Sc., "Sublimation, Happiness and Progress."

COUNTRY

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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.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): 8-0, a Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society: A special meeting of members and friends at 2-30, in the proposed new premises at 25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, on November 2, 1941.

Newcastle Debating Society (Socialist Hall, Old Arcade, Pilgrim Street): Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.