

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 527)

Our National Church

When dealing with the Established Church two things must be borne in mind. First, it represents the religious beliefs of not more than a third of the population. There has, indeed, never been a time when the Church could be said to represent the population as a whole. In spite of numerous laws involving penalties, or inflicting punishments for disregard of the State religion, nonconformity in some form or other, openly or in secret, has always existed. One might paraphrase Hobbes' famous definition of religion as being superstition allowed, and superstition as religion not allowed, and say that from the social point of view the establishment of a State Church represented the old Church under new management. One hypocrisy was replaced by another. One form of intolerance gave way to another. The distortion of human sympathies and impulses, the hunger for wealth and power went on under the "reformed" Church as under the Church of Rome.

The second thing to bear in mind is that the State Church has always been, as one would expect, an instrument of government. It has been essentially the Church of a class, and in the legislation of the past there is hardly a single reform that has not met with stubborn opposition by the Church Party. Here and there have appeared a few prominent Churchmen who have spoken on behalf of reform measures or movements, but their numbers serve to make more pronounced the fact that the Established Church was and is a bulwark of privilege and class rule. Those who wish to learn the extent of the opposition to reform will find adequate information in the works of J. L. and Barbara Hammond dealing with the period 1760-1832. A more damning record was never compiled concerning a national institution.

A third aspect of the State Church may be noted. This is the steady deterioration of the quality of the men occupying its pulpits. I emphasise that word "men," for notwithstanding the development that has taken place in the last few generations the Established Church, in spite of the many agitations in its favour, stubbornly refuses to permit a woman in its pulpits. Women have fought their way into politics, they have established themselves in the world of literature, music, philosophy and commerce. They have held high office in the State, but the Church is still where it always has been, dominated by the teachings of St. Paul—"Let the woman keep silent in the Church."

The deterioration of the clergy, generation after generation, is marked. Challenged on this head we have given us a list of a few men who have risen above the level of the average preacher. But for one who has so distinguished himself there are scores who never advance beyond sheer mediocrity. The vast majority cannot make even the pretence of being mentally above the crowd.

It could not well be otherwise. The world in which the Christian Church was born no longer exists. Dean Inge said that orthodoxy died with the establishment of the Copernican theory. Logically that is so, yet it did manage to accommodate itself to a world about which even then very little was really known. But generation after generation of development made it more and more difficult for a mentally upright man to feel at home in the Church. New avenues of occupation in science, in art, in literature and in commerce opened, and enlisted the better intellects of the country in their service. Men of first-rate intelligence, and with a sense of responsibility, could no longer rest content with a theory of the world which was being branded by science as a living lie, or at best accepted as on the level of fairy-tales. We are to-day literally living in a new world, and in that world orthodox Christianity has no logical place. The best that the Church can do is to re-echo the truths of science and philosophy which have been established against the opposition of the representatives of Christianity.

The net result is that the Church can no longer select its ministers, it must take what it can get, and be thankful even for that. There has never been a period when the personnel of the established Church stood lower than it does to-day. Intellectually and morally the Church has no future. It has only a past, and that past guarantees the hopelessness of even looking forward to a creditable time to come.

Religious Racketeering

Setting aside the Roman Catholic Church, which is international, the Established Church is the wealthiest in the world. A century ago estimates of the income of the Church ranged from three to seven millions. That income cannot be less to-day; it is highly probable that it is now more, when we recognise the increase of values. There is no corporation in the world that clings to its financial privileges more tenaciously than does the Church.

At the Reformation the Roman Church was the greatest landowner in Europe, and when the crown in the person of the syphilitic Henry VIII. took over Church property, a great quantity of land was distributed among his favourites, and to the universities. It is this circumstance that accounts for so many church "livings" being in the hands of the great landholders. Fifty years ago, and even later, there was nothing novel in these "livings" being advertised in the Press for sale.

There is one other consideration that must be borne in mind. When dealing with the Church of England we are face to face with a species of political racketeering, the more dangerous because it is quite unknown to the vast majority of the population. Not very many are alive to the fact that the Church draws large

sums from mining royalties—Durham alone provides a vast sum—or that the Church is one of the greatest landowners in the country. As a fact it draws large ground rents from some of the worst slum areas in London.

The Archbishops and Bishops are appointed by the Prime Minister, and it may be taken for granted that political considerations play their part in the appointments. Sometimes, of course, the man appointed kicks over the traces, but that does not very often happen. When these considerations are borne in mind many political and religious happenings are the better understood.

It needs no lengthy argument to prove that this combination of political, financial and religious interests represents a serious threat to the development of a genuine democracy. If we are ever to reach that stage this combination must be broken. A democracy cannot be made out of a crowd. Neither does it exist as a mere unanimity of opinion. It is the nature of the opinions prevalent that matters, with complete freedom of expression, the development of a feeling of social equality, respect for intellectual power and a sense of moral obligation. None of these qualities is strikingly conspicuous in any of the Churches.

Finance and the Church

I have said that the Established Church represents a great financial force. It does not so present itself to the average man, mainly for the reason that its income is not now directly collected by the Church, if we set aside what remains of tithes and Church taxes. Neither, as I have said, is it easy to sum up the wealth of the Church. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners in their report for 1938 acknowledge a net income of about three and a-half millions, from lands, dividends and investment, but there is much more than this. The situation is further confused because we have all got into the habit of speaking about Church property, as though "Church property" stood on the same level as the property of an individual or of an independent corporation. We might as well speak of the income tax as the property of the Chancellor of the Exchequer because the money raised in this way is expended by him and the rest of the Cabinet. Churches and Church funds are no more the property of the Church of England, in the sense that an association may own funds for particular purposes, than the crown jewels are the property of George VI. "Church property" is the property of the State, and it is for the State to re-allocate it whenever it thinks proper. This was done in the case of the Church of England in Wales, and the Church of England in Ireland. The decision of such a re-allocation of funds may be a question of wisdom, but until it is decisively disproved by irrefutable legal evidence, I believe what I have stated to be the case.

What is the source of the wealth of the Established Church? The main sources are seven. We may commence with the transference of Roman Catholic possessions in the sixteenth century and the creation of a State Church. This involved, not the creation of an independent institution so long as it observed certain conditions, but the recognition of the Church as a branch of the State. This is further emphasised by the number of parliamentary grants for the upkeep of the Church. There were many of these, among the more notable being the tax on coal for the purpose of rebuilding the State Churches after the great fire of London. Grants for various purposes, running into many millions were made throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

TITHES.—Always the sanction of the State had to be obtained for the levying of tithes. The Roman

Church, independent as a Church, could only levy tithes by the consent of the secular power. The payment of tithes continued after the Roman Church in this country had legally ceased to exist. But originally one-fourth of the tithe was reserved for the benefit of the poor. This gradually disappeared. The rapacity with which the Roman Church collected the tithe—it had a most extensive range—was one of the main grievances among the people. To-day, since the passing of the Commutation Act, tithe payments have shrunk considerably. But it would be a mistake to imagine that this removed the actual payment of tithe in those cases where commutation had been accomplished. The Church gave nothing. It was bought out, and that made the loss of the interest on the money expended perpetual. When a man spends £1,000 on a house he does not live rent free, he is merely adopting another form of payment for the use of the house he occupies. We are all paying perpetually the annual value of the money spent in buying out the claims of the Church.

CHURCH TAXES.—What has been said of tithes applies to Church taxes. These also have, in the main, disappeared; the claims of the Churches have been removed by payment of a lump sum. But Church taxes still exist in the City of London, and, I believe, in other places. They are still paid.

LAND.—The setting aside of land for the benefit of the Church again goes back to ancient times. But as with tithes the ownership of land involved certain duties, among these the providing of a certain number of men with equipments for the King in times of war. These obligations have completely disappeared with both the Church and laity, but the privileges and profits remain. As landlords, in both Roman Catholic and Protestant times, the Church showed itself no better than did layman. It has often been pointed out that in London the Church is the ground-landlord of some of the worst slum areas. Of course, this does not make the Church fully responsible for the slum dwellings, but no special protest has been made by the Church, and there has always been the possibility of introducing certain conditions in a lease of building land that would have made for better housing. There has always been the official reply that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have no power in the matter. Granted, but the Church has great influence—enough to have abolished the slums had it been used.

The ownership of land carries with it large sums of money from mining royalties, etc. Some time back it was reported that from Durham alone the Church took about £100,000 annually. There is not one person in a hundred who is alive to the manner in which the Church draws upon the resources of the country.

RELIEF FROM RATES AND TAXES.—It is impossible for anyone to say exactly how much the Church benefits from non-payment of rates and taxes. It must run into a colossal sum annually. If one cares to take the area of land covered by a church in any locality, and multiply it merely by the number of churches in the country he will get a faint idea of the tribute the public pays to the Church. The Rev. H. W. Clarke calculates that the freehold value of 32 City Churches to be in the neighbourhood of £3,500,000. Take the whole of the churches and the figure becomes colossal. Incidentally, this freedom from rates and taxes is also given to Nonconformists and other forms of religion. If that had not been granted there would have been a constant agitation for the cessation of what is in effect a compulsory tax to help keep the Church in existence. But it must always be borne in mind that what the Churches do not pay, others must make good.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded)

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNWRITTEN WORD

SOME weeks ago, I had occasion to visit one of the largest book stores in London with a view to obtaining a second-hand copy of a volume which I believed in all probability to be out of print. I was unsuccessful, but whilst in the building, which seemed to contain copies of every book written since man first learned to use the pen, I fell to wondering how much of the packed shelves had been devoted to Freethought literature.

As I expected, volumes falling under the head of Freethought were, in fact, confined to one section—or, as later transpired, after I had followed an assistant to the dustiest, darkest and most remote corner of the huge sales floor, to one narrow shelf. "You'll find the Freethought stuff there," he remarked casually, "there's little or no demand for it." "Thanks," I said, "so that's what British readers think of the expression of free minds?" "I'm afraid it is," he answered, and hurried back to do business on more promising ground.

I remained for a time reading off the familiar titles, selecting one or two for examination. But as I stood closed in amongst the tightly-packed shelves, it was less of those few brave volumes before me than of the vast surging potential of Freethought expression I knew must be lying behind them that caught my imagination. Joseph McCabe, I recalled, after a lifetime of prolific output, covering some of the finest popular educational works in the English language, had recently been the object of a voluntary fund to ensure in his old age some measure of comfort and happiness. Had this writer's inimitable talents been directed either to orthodox theology or popular soporific literature in which all was well; and ended well in the best of all possible worlds, he might surely have ended his days in self-satisfied affluence. Choosing, however, to lay before his readers a number of outspoken volumes, the products of untrammelled thought and learning, and scorning the cold shoulder of those who must ever read into every page some tribute to their inherent prejudices, one must seek his volumes only in obscure corners—for "there's little demand for them."

And yet, it seemed to me, the narrow bottle-neck of prejudice, which so limits the fulfilment of those who would lay before readers the fulsome fruits of untrammelled modern thought, is but a part of what all natural writers recognise as their particular frustration. A hundred years ago Charlotte and Emily Brontë, exhausted by the titanic expenditure of virtue in the deliverance of their genius—having poured it unsparingly into the manuscripts of their two first novels, suffered the torturing disappointment of having them returned time after time by short-sighted and hard-headed publishers. Happily, in both cases, their determination and belief in themselves held out long enough, else literature would have suffered no less a loss than that which the non-appearance of "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights" would have meant to 19th century readers all over the world. Could the surging imaginations, the laments and poetic vision of two simple country girls be of interest to anyone outside the privacy of Haworth parsonage? Can the insistent memory images, the self-comments, the poetic angle on the riot of life as it strikes the born writer, known or unknown—can these things which must else be lost for ever, be preserved more fully and more often, under any system which depends purely on profit for a mode of expression? Perhaps not. And yet, how much is lost.

For every dreamer capable, as was Llewellyn Powys, of crystallising in words the fleeting visions and deep sensations of his joy in nature, how many must be denied? It is well said, no doubt, that the transient ecstasy which seems to rise and fall within us, colouring the most ordinary scenes and experiences with strange passing beauty, should be allowed to trouble no one but ourselves. Who wants to know anything of the brief mystic phase which warms the poetic heart of a single traveller, caught up momentarily by the drama of some peculiar combination of scenes or sound before it melts again into nothing? And yet it is just these things which underlie all great literature and all great art. And the burning desire to catch and hand on the vision of these precious moments has, I think, much akin to ordinary unselfish and generous instinct. Here was

I, enjoying something which apparently no one round me was able even to see, and I must keep it to myself. As a detached "impression" it would interest no one provided with the complicated apparatus required to picture or express it. Without stupendous and perhaps futile labour it cannot be built into acceptable fiction or publishable poetry which is its rightful setting, and yet, should it necessarily be lost? I think not.

Literary research, and particularly the sombre task of biographers searching the yellowing sheets of their subjects' long-forgotten correspondence, suggests a way of escape.

For in letters it is possible to indulge the priceless privilege of self-expression divorced from literary ethics or the attenuating and chilling necessity to preserve form. And he is indeed unfortunate to whom no one living person means enough, nor is near enough his inner private self, to mirror with sympathy and understanding, just any spontaneous image he cares in self-release to set down.

One calls to mind in this connection the "Love Letters of Ernst Haeckel," a series of self-revealing letters between the great German biologist and Fransesca Von Altenhausen, published many years after his death. Neither party, of course, had the slightest anticipation that a word of these beautiful letters would ever be read by anyone other than the recipient—much less form the substance of a lengthy book—yet taken in their sequence, almost without the necessity for editing of any description, they are as truly literature as anything Haeckel ever wrote—and dropped in a charm more subtle and more irresistibly dramatic than romance itself.

I am aware that to the ordinary Freethinker, moments of deep poetic vision must ever be regarded as subjective, passing and unsubstantial—the unaccountable synthesis which *seems* to be something more than the sum of its constituents in the form of spiritual reaction to perception, so real to the subject—must fade and be lost. Yet it is just that dogmatism which, in the presence of so much uncertainty, I cannot bring myself to embrace. No one has yet been able completely to separate "substance" from "function"—to prove satisfactorily that the "reality" of thought and beauty is any less real than that of familiar objects, whose very "objectivity" science itself is now questioning on every side.

J. R. STURGE-WHITING.

ACID DROPS

LORD ELTON has been knocked sharply over the knuckles for the extravagant statements made by him concerning many thousands of children who did not know the name of God, except as a "swear word." The remark was made in the course of a speech in the House of Lords. The statement was, as things stand, pure nonsense. It belongs to the same category, and has its origin in the same source, as the multitudes of children who did not know what Christmas meant to Christians. It was just one of the numerous lies that are invented and circulated by the clergy when they are on the theological warpath. Lord Eldon must be a very simple-minded person. He says that his statement was qualified, and he gives just what he did say:—

"After every allowance has been made for the work of those devoted teachers who are conscientiously teaching religion, it is no exaggeration to say that to many thousands of children the name of God is known only as a swear word."

We see no substantial difference in this passage from that which was imputed to Lord Elton. But he should have known the clergy on the warpath better. Let anyone consider how many Council schools there are in the country that do not have religious lessons daily. That being the case, either the teachers must always use "God" as "Gawd blimey!" or "Gawd's struth!" or "S'elp me Gawd!"—or the children simply must get familiar with the name of God. Someone ought to write a book with the title of "A Million Lies by a Thousand Preachers."

Let us put one final question. The overwhelming majority of the men in the Army, Navy and Air Force have been trained in Council schools. Since the war began everybody

has been praising them for their intelligence, their courage, their devotion to their job, their readiness to give themselves to the cause of the country. In the various raids we have had, unstinted and deserved praise has been showered on the people—the products of Council schools—for the fine qualities they have displayed. Evidently, either the absence of a knowledge of God clears the way to a development of human nature, or the clergy responsible for these tales about Council schoolchildren are just plain, ordinary, commonplace liars. It is a pity that Lord Eldon should be so easily gulled.

The plot against the schools proceeds. On November 19, the President of the Board of Education, Mr. Chuter Ede, announced in the House of Commons that he had invited local education authorities to send teachers and others interested to a course of religious instruction which the Board would conduct early in 1942. The discussion, unless the teachers head a revolt against the schools being put under the domination of the clergy, will be, we suspect, much like the conferences that Hitler held with conquered countries. It will announce a programme that has been worked out at the wish of the clergy, and so add a lie to an injustice. If there is a spark of the old spirit of Nonconformity left the "Free Churches" should have something to say in the matter. But candidly, we have not much hope in that direction. The attempt to take advantage of the war to revolutionise our school policy in aid of the Churches is the most contemptible thing that has happened in politics for many years. It says little for the better Britain we are promised as a reward for our war effort.

Archbishop Downey, of Liverpool, says it is the duty of Catholics to play a bigger part in public life than they do. Well, we have no right nor reason for objecting to Roman Catholics playing as large a part in public as they can. The greater danger to us all is the part that Roman Catholics *privately* play in public life. When it comes to back-stair politics, the Roman Churchmen are far better, or worse, than our own ecclesiastical chiefs.

The "Downey" Downey says that if Catholics do not take a larger part in public life, affairs will fall into "less competent hands." Of course, they might be less competent, but they could hardly be more dangerous. The conduct of affairs in Spain, before and after the revolution, are not very striking commendation of Catholic influence, and whether the Catholic priest is in Spain, or England, or elsewhere, his only aim—or at least all other aims are subjugated to it—is to gain greater power for the Roman Church.

Mr. Stanley B. James, one of the principal writers in the "Catholic Herald," tells us that:—

"Divine Providence is teaching us in quite a spectacular manner another lesson on which the society of the future must rest. Can anyone look at our bombed cities and contemplate the migration to the country which the bombing has set in motion without seeing the significance of these things?"

It seems that "Divine Providence" wishes us to cultivate the country, so he, or it, bombs—or permits or incites others to bomb—London and Coventry, and other towns, for the purpose of forcing "us" to get back to agriculture. "Good God!"

Consider the matter put into scriptural language:—

"And the Lord God made the earth and he made man. But God did not teach man how to cultivate the earth—man discovered the art of agriculture for himself. But man also built towns and cities, and after many years it came to pass there were 'millions of neglected acres,' for man had taken to live in towns. Then said the Lord, 'I will teach them better,' and he caused or permitted men to rain down fiery bombs, and thousands of men and women and children were killed. *They* did not learn anything from the lesson. They were dead; but those who lived were moved by the Lord to seek safety in the country, and therein praised the Lord for his mercy and righteousness."

That seems to be the significance of the gospel of Stanley B. James. And once more we say with all emphasis, "Good God!"

The German leaders do not appear to be troubled by being proclaimed to the world as murderers of men and torturers of men, women and children. Neither are they angry at being charged with wholesale robbery. But they are seriously hurt when their enemies declare to the world that they are "godless." So the German newspaper "Nordland" publishes the following declaration to the world:—

"We National-Socialists are God-believers, because in us as German men, the veneration of the divine and faith are stamped in an indelible manner in our blood and being."

And, in true Christian style, the Germans claim to have a "mission" to rule the world!

We do not accept this divine mission of the Germans, because if anyone looks back to the time of W. E. Gladstone he will find it was widely asserted that the "mission" to lead the world was given by God to "US," and there has been no notice of its withdrawal. And further evidence that *we*—and not the Germans—are with God, is furnished daily through that organ of piety, the B.B.C. For every day we learn that German bombers, in attacking Russian cities, always drop their bombs on "non-military" buildings, while we always drop ours on military objects. Mere marksmanship cannot be responsible for two such phenomena.

There is one other fact. We have from the very opening of the war had days of national prayer, headed by George VI., who by the magic of the Coronation service became more than a mere human being. And look at the results of those prayers! After all, facts are facts!

The Rev. Dr. England says, in the course of an article in the "Christian World," that "The material resources provided by the Creator are more than sufficient for the needs of the two thousand million people who inhabit the globe." Maybe, but Dr. England forgets several important things. First, he made human beings who had not enough knowledge to know where these resources were hidden, or to develop them properly when they did know of them. Also the type of human beings he created lacked the intelligence to pool their knowledge and develop these resources for the common good. Third, is there any justification for the "Creator" planting the germs of a disease in one part of the world and an antidote for it in another part that was actually unknown to myriads of human beings for many hundreds of generations? Why did not the "Creator" himself have intelligence enough to make these resources easily accessible and create a type of human being that would be able to develop them for the common good?

The following seems *apropos* at this point. A priest ordered an overcoat to be made by a tailor who was a member of his congregation. The coat was duly delivered, charge ten guineas. The priest protested against the price. The tailor explained the coat had taken him nearly a fortnight to make. "A fortnight," said the priest, "Why, the Lord made the world in six days." "Yes," replied the tailor, "but just look how God left the world and then look at the fine finish of my overcoat!"

The Roman Catholic Church claims over 3,000,000 adherents in China. The population of China is about 400,000,000. Those who happen to have a copy of Mr. Cohen's "Foreign Missions" will have some idea of the methods by which Christians in general managed to get many of their converts. We have received many requests for a reprinting of this pamphlet, but it involved much research, and the ground would have to be gone over again. And for that the author simply has not the time.

The Moderator of the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane says he has no faith in making progress in Christianity in the schools unless it is made "a subject of the curriculum." He also wishes to see teachers "with an increased salary if need be, trained in religious teaching." We do not doubt the latter part of the statement. The first part implies that children will never grow up Christians unless that religion is drummed into them before they are old enough to resist.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- W. A. HOOLE.—Thanks for addresses. Papers are being sent.
- A. E. THOMAS.—Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.
- G. LEE.—Thanks for securing two new readers. Keep on doing it. Copies are being sent to addresses given.
- A. HATTIE.—Lieut. Everett should be editor of a Roman Catholic newspaper. Obligated for cutting.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Mrs. Shiel, 10s.
- J. PEPPER.—Very interesting. Thanks.

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.

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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 have already referred to the development of the plot to give the Churches practical control of the schools—at least, so far as religion is concerned. The Minister of Education has already announced his readiness to provide travelling expenses for parents and teachers to study religion and, one may assume, good salaries for others to teach it. And it is not extravagant to assume that when this plan is in working order there will be another unofficial bar against teachers who believe it is their duty to develop serviceable citizens instead of customers for the Churches. All is done in the name of the democracy that is to be—which looks like ending in the kind of democracy that the pillars of the Churches, professional and otherwise, and our democratic ancient nobility and newly-made millionaires would like to see in being.

In the circumstances, it is gratifying to see that "Philosopher," of that widely-circulated Sunday paper, the "People," has provided his readers with a summary of the plan—or plot. The new proposals of Mr. Butler, Minister of Education, set forth the question, not any decision or suggested programme: "Should the full-time education be continued up to the secondary schools, should there be a system of aid to enable students to proceed to the Universities?" That is the plan Mr. Butler suggests, and if it represents the views of the Government, then it is throwing dust in the eyes of the public; and if the public is dull enough to let it pass, post-war Britain will see the youth of the country selected for the higher education, not in terms of ability, but in terms of the wealth and position of their parents.

This is, of course, just the present window-dressing for the Government that is likely to be in power when the war ends, and the election manoeuvred on the strength of having won the war, so as to get another "democratic" crowd into office. "Philosopher" wisely says it is not his business to devise an educational system, but he puts the following telling questions to the devisers of the "new" scheme:—

"Should money ever be able to buy education; should not adaptability count everywhere?"

"Should education carve up the community into factions by developing caste and religious sectarianism?"

"Should any clerical tail wag the education dog?"

"Philosopher" adds a further question (which he has already answered by implication). This is: "Should religious instruction not be limited to the study of the people and simple Christian teaching?" After all, "Philosopher" is writing for a newspaper, and most of our leading papers have a rule that Christianity must not be attacked. In other circumstances, the question would have read, "Should not religious education in State schools consist in giving pupils a knowledge of the religions of the world and their origin in terms of current scientific teaching?" But when one writes for the British Press one must be very careful.

A few weeks ago the Stroud Urban Council rejected by a majority vote the opening of cinemas on Sunday. Now the decision has been rescinded by nine votes to six and a resolve to open cinemas voted. The rescinding of the earlier vote was decided by the discovery of "certain things behind the scenes." We congratulate the Stroud Council on its action. And we have no hesitation in saying that if strict enquiries were made, Stroud would not be the only place in which things are arranged behind the scenes. The opponents make it a religious question, and where religious interests are concerned few scruples are shown.

The exigencies of the war having ruled out the stories that religion was forbidden, churches closed, and those who professed religious belief imprisoned and tortured, an opposite policy is adopted. Now in the same Russia it seems that the Christians have come to life in such numbers that the Atheistic propaganda has admittedly failed. Meanwhile, the Vatican radio still enlarges to Italians on the theme that Russia is an Atheistic country and all Christians must be on their guard about it.

The facts of the situation are not that Atheism has failed in Russia, but that the necessities of the war have suspended a great deal of propaganda that was formerly carried on. No one but a fool could ever have believed that a single generation could convert 150 millions of people saturated with century-old religious traditions and superstitions.

The English public is tremendously ignorant about Russia and Russian history. They think of Russia as they think of England—a comparatively compact people with substantially identical customs and habits. If that ignorance is to be removed we must all learn to think of Russia as including people as different as England would be if it were about ten times its size and comprised communities from India, Africa, Asia and other parts of the world, each with different habits, customs, institutions and beliefs. They will then have a working idea of Russia.

It is to the credit of the "Bolshevik" Government that it appears to have interfered as little as possible with native customs and practices so long as they did not interfere with the main purpose of building up a civilisation of the type aimed at. Then it is firm with a severity that is neither known nor desired in this country. Finally, English people must accustom themselves to the fact that severity of rule was inescapable if the Russians were not to be thrown back on the bloodthirsty, vicious and degrading rule of the Czars.

The Glasgow Secular Society is making every effort to overcome difficulties of the present situation and carry on its work. Will all members and friends willing to co-operate for that purpose attend at 25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, at 2-30 p.m. to-day (Nov. 30). Mrs. J. D. Macdonald, of 149, Stanmore Road, Glasgow, S.2, is the new secretary and will be pleased to give information concerning the Branch to all interested.

Mrs. Macdonald succeeds Mrs. Whitefield as secretary. During her term of service Mrs. Whitefield did very valuable work for the Branch both as secretary and speaker on the platform. She was an attractive and informed speaker, and we hope that her services in this direction will continue both in and around Glasgow.

ON CHRONOLOGY

II.

IT is a pity that many of the very valuable articles in the "Encyclopedia Biblica" cannot be issued in separate form. Written as they are by first-class scholars, they would often act as high explosives in the Christian camp if better known. The "E.B." is a very bulky volume, even in its India paper edition, and the print is hopeless. The Churches are very lucky that such fine material is hidden away except for those scholars bent on research.

The article on Chronology is exceptionally valuable, for it makes no effort to hide the difficulties and perplexities surrounding the whole problem. It makes mince-meat of many theories, and makes also some very pathetic admissions as to the impossibility of finding any fixed grounds from which to start with any plausibility.

We rightly ridicule the "science" of Numerology as far as numbers dealing with the spelling of our names or the date of our births are concerned; but "magic" numbers appear to have played a big part in giving us some of the so-called dates in the Bible, or in eras and numbers generally, in that work. Over and over again, the "E.B." points out how "artificial" are these, how they have obviously been made up to suit certain mystical theories, and how thoroughly unreliable they are.

Scholars have ransacked ancient memorials and documents in the hope of finding some confirmation of the dates given by Biblical students to Old Testament events. Egypt should have provided plenty of these, but alas, dates were not ancient Egypt's strong point; so, as the "E.B." points out, "there is unfortunately nothing at all to be gained from Egyptology," which is, of course, what informed Freethinkers could expect. Even the famous Tell el Amarna tablets "afford nothing certain" in chronology. Nor need we be surprised to find the "E.B." admitting, "As in these tablet inscriptions the name of the Hebrews has not so far been certainly discovered, so, in the Egyptian monuments generally, we cannot find any reminiscence of a stay of Israel in Egypt or of their departure." An admission like this cuts at the very heart of the story of Israel in Egypt, but both Jews and Christians are probably very glad that it is lost in small print in a learned disquisition on chronology, and they will go on repeating the Biblical story as if there was not the slightest doubt that the whole yarn as recorded in Exodus is true in every detail. Readers will remember, perhaps, how one learned Jewish scholar managed to get many articles in the "Daily Telegraph" some years ago on this very point, and had no difficulty in "proving" not only that the Jews were slaves in Egypt, but that the plagues preceded their departure exactly as described in Holy Writ—thus proving that the Bible was true. This gentleman got a splendid reception from Christian societies, and still has a big reputation.

Some dates due to Assyriology, however, can be fixed up to a point—but only to a point. And it is remarkable that even in the case of such heroes as David and Solomon it is not possible to determine anything with certainty as to their dates or those before them. Over and over again we are told that the data of the Old Testament cannot be relied upon—though as we get nearer to the (supposed) date given for the birth of Jesus it is easier to make comparisons with secular history, and there is little point in doubting at least some of the Jewish records of their kings *after* Solomon.

When it comes to studying the chronology of the New Testament, the "E.B." informs us, "Unfortunately the task is attended with serious difficulty"—

a point never stressed, naturally, by our famous and less famous preachers. Many depressing reasons are given for this difficulty, and even when some semblance of dates can be discovered, as in Luke and Acts, we get the usual wet blanket—Luke "gives no account, however, of the means by which he obtained these data. We are, therefore, unable to check his statements." The reader is sent to a large number of German works to enable him to get through "this labyrinth"—and it is noteworthy that one of them, by Ideler, is dated as far back as 1831.

When Jesus was born is quite "uncertain" (a favourite word in the article), as is also how long his ministry lasted. And we get in the whole disquisition the large number of disagreements with other writers on the problem very carefully posited—their "assumptions without foundation," etc., a most entertaining account indeed.

But it is not only other writers on the subject who have made statements "without foundation." The writer of the article in the "E.B." seems to have very little regard for the "inspired" authors of the Gospels. He does not actually call them liars, but unhesitatingly points out where necessary that they are "mistaken." As an example, we can take the case of the famous census mentioned by Luke, whose account, we are told, "rests on a series of mistakes, and the most plausible view is that the evangelist, or the tradition which he followed, for some reason combined the birth of Jesus with the census under Quirinius, and assigned to the latter a wrong date." So much for Holy Writ being "inspired."

All the dates connected with Jesus are "uncertain" or "?"—so what about the book of Acts? Well, we are informed that "passing now to the period before 47-51 A.D., we find that Acts supplied us with far less trustworthy accounts, and is wholly without dates." And the only way to reconcile mutually destructive accounts in the New Testament is to say that here or there the writer is "mistaken." Or we get a note such as this:—

We can make nothing of the statement in Acts xxi., 38. Even were its authenticity beyond dispute, we have no means whatever of determining the year of the sedition referred to, and Wieseler's choice of 56 or 57 A.D. is devoid of any solid foundation. Nor is it possible to infer any date from the account in Acts. xxv. of Agrippa and Berenice's presence in Cæsarea at the time when Paul's case was decided.

I quote this out of a hundred similar passages to show what real scholarship has to face when untrammelled by orthodox fear. It has to admit that many of the dates accepted by our church leaders are just conjecture and are mostly without foundation.

But if it is objected that the "E.B." is at least semi-Rationalist, what does such a very religious encyclopedia such as that of Schaff-Herzog say? Dealing with the world's era it admits that it can be constructed out of the Old Testament, but "it presents difficulties which can hardly ever be overcome." And it adds:—

Every scholar who tries comes to a different result. "L'Art de verifier les dates" gives no less than 108 different views; and the two extremes differ no less than 2,000 years from each other. Julius Africanus counts from the Creation to Christ, 5,500 years; Eusebius, Bede, and the Roman Martyrologium, 5,199; Scaliger and Calvisius, 3,950; Kepler and Petavius, 3,984; Ussher, 4,004, etc.

Of course, Biblical chronology is in a hopeless muddle—we all know that. But it would prove very entertaining to show how even *our* history before, let

us say, Henry VII., is in just the same muddle. Our historical "authorities," Polydore Vergil, John Leland, Gildas, Bede, Matthew Paris, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and others seem to have been the credulous recorders of fairy tales or to have admitted dense ignorance on all sorts of, for us, accepted events in British history. But that is a story more suitable for an historical journal than "The Freethinker."

H. CUTNER.

ENGLISH JEW-BAITING

(Continued from page 528)

ONE of the major crimes of the Jew is that he believes he is one of the "Chosen Race"—and how the Christian resents this! He does not believe that God chose any special race. This is sheer impudence on the part of the Jew. Well, I would agree that it is stupid. Jews can be just as stupid as Christians on matters of theology; but if it is impudent, can it be more impudent than the Christian idea that God has a special place for Christians—that the Christian minority has been chosen by God, to the utter disregard of the teeming millions in the world who are not Christians?

They may not be the "Chosen Race," these Christians, but by heavens they are the chosen sect, to hear them talk! So what's the difference; and can the "Chosen Race" idea justify anti-Jewish feeling on any other ground than that of religious rivalry? Generally, can the effects of that idea be more anti-social than the effects of the Christian idea, which has torn the Christians themselves asunder, and put them into opposing camps, with all the disastrous social and moral consequences of inter-religious strife?

Come, come, you Jew-baiters. Let us have something sounder than that.

What's that you say? They are dirty people? Well, now, you have just said they are insular, so at least they don't impose their dirt on you, and liberty includes the right to be dirty (if you wish) so long as you don't impose your dirtiness on others who wish to be clean. But are you sure they are a dirty people? That means all of them, doesn't it?

Not all of them, you say. Then that means they are a varied lot, like the Christians, because I know there are many dirty Christians as well as clean ones. I see many of their homes and I know many of them too intimately for my own comfort. So again, what's the difference? I often go into people's houses, and I have seen bugs on walls, fleas on clothing and dirt on floors and furniture. But I have never yet seen a Jewish flea, nor a Jewish bug, nor Jewish dirt. I have just seen fleas, and bugs, and dirt—and people.

Another charge against the Jew is that he is a menace to business. Factually, there may be a shadow of justification for this allegation. One of my textile friends recently insisted that the Jew is a menace because he so often goes "underground" and, by means of shady transactions, skims some of the cream from the Christian trader. I agreed to accept the statement if my friend said "some Jews," and if he would answer a question honestly. My question was, "If you wanted a manager for your business, and out of several applicants the best qualified man was a Jew, would you give him the job? Answer honestly." He replied, "No, I wouldn't. I couldn't trust him." So there you are! In the words of the song, the Jew "Never had a chance."

Ostracised by the Christian employers, who are predominant in the textile trade, the Jew is driven "underground," forced to handle the doubtful materials that the Christian will gladly sell to the Jew he despises, and then condemned because he does what the Christian has enabled him to do.

This seems to apply to other trades, also, in which the Jew is tolerated solely as an industrial scavenger, or commercial ragman.

The wonder is that in face of the prejudice and forces ranged against the Jew, and in face of the determination to accept him only as a business "tag-ender," he manages to get along without providing more bad examples than he does provide.

It is alleged to-day that the Jew is prominent in the Black Market. There may be some truth in that. The racketeering Jew will no doubt be just as active as the racketeering Christian. But from my own knowledge of things that are happening to-day I am convinced that the Christian has little to learn either in resourcefulness in dodging controls, or in obtaining unfair advantages in the handling of commodities.

This Jew, however, condemned for his "underground" trading methods, sometimes pops out on top. Breaking down the barriers, he may establish a business or industry which ranks pre-eminently in its class. He may employ many people, and use large capital in the fashion of his Christian brother. From "underground" methods to big business means a change of tactics. He is now charged with creating a monopoly, with influencing the use of capital and (most wicked crime) of being a large employer, or exploiter, of Christian labour. Christians can somehow digest the idea of being wage slaves for a Christian boss, but when there is a Jewish boss they are scandalised at the exploitation of labour. Once again, what's the difference, outside of religious prejudice?

Another major crime of the Jew is that he controls capitalist high finance; that his evil influence permeates Wall Street and the City of London, etc., etc. We know the story well enough.

It has always been too much for me to swallow, this one. No doubt there are Jews in the world of high finance. One can find some Jews almost anywhere, as there are about 16,000,000 of them spread thinly about the world. But to suggest that slick Christian financiers, far outnumbering the Jewish, have allowed Jews to monopolise their racket, is rating the mentality of the Christian at an impossibly low level. How these Christians insult themselves with their compliments to Jewish ability!

I have repeatedly asked for evidence on this question, but although I have had it promised, I have never received any. The postulation is unproven. But still I have to ask, "What's the difference?" How can it be worse that Jews should control high finance (even if they did) than that Christians should control it?

High finance has certain aspects and qualities apart from the individuals who operate the machine. If the system is good, or bad, it is so irrespective of personalities. Those who are so anxious to smash "Jewish control" of finance might usefully pay more attention to the finance system and less to personalities, creeds or races.

When driven into a corner, the Jew baiter almost invariably makes his final cast. The Jew may be excused or vindicated in other respects, but he has a very low moral standard—not in a sexual sense, one is happily reassured, but in a general sense. If you ask why, the answer is often that his religion permits it, owing to its "elastic" nature.

Now for first-class stupidity that takes some beating. Presumably the "inelastic" nature of Christianity should ensure that all Christians are kept within the well defined moral limits of their creed. Are they? Our criminal courts provide the answer. Clearly, the Jew is no more subject to moral laxity on account of his religion than is the Christian subject to moral rectitude on account of his religion.

Quite recently the Editor of "The Freethinker" dealt with the question of morality and religion, and showed in the clearest manner that morality does not arise out of religious belief, but out of social custom and habit. On this perfectly sound and provable basis, then, the Jew must obviously, in matters of social morality, be influenced by social conditions; whatever his moral standard—good, bad or indifferent—the explanation of it must be sought for in the social conditions in which he lives, and has lived; factors which have "conditioned" him almost regardless of his religious belief and dogma. The attitude of the Christian has been an important factor in the conditioning of the Jew, just as the Jew has been an important factor in the conditioning of the Christian. So for the final time, "What's the difference?" And can it justify hatred and persecution, rather than understanding and an effort to put the question in proper perspective?

We could go on for a long time examining the charges made against the Jew. He is guilty of all sorts of crimes,

from having a different Sabbath, to killing his meat in a different fashion. But in none of these charges (many of them extremely stupid) can be found the slightest evidence to justify regarding the Jew as being fundamentally different from other people. He has some different habits and customs, of course, but if that were a valid reason for persecuting him, then the Jew would have a valid reason for persecuting the Christian, because the Christian is different from the Jew exactly inasmuch as the Jew is different from the Christian. So what?

So this! The more one examines the Jewish question on the safe basis of fact, the more one is driven to the conclusion that there is no solid ground for hatred of Jews; but that anti-Semitism is the product of a studied and fostered propaganda, based on a religious hatred the roots of which stretch far back into history—a hatred which, with the decline of the power of the purely religious idea among Christians, has been skilfully manoeuvred into a social or "business" hatred in order to preserve its potency.

Anyone who understands the human mind and human emotions knows how easily a thought can be made to produce an emotion, and an emotion to produce a thought, and how easy it is, when emotions and thoughts get sufficiently mixed up, to produce an idea, baseless in fact, but for which "evidence" can be found in every corner.

That is the psychology within which all racial and religious hatreds are fostered, and are enabled to survive the onslaught of the international humanitarian idea.

Holding no brief for the theological outlook of the Jew, but rather behaving as a leading advocate in the cause of world-wide humanism, the Freethinker, then, must keep his mind free from these intellectually filthy racial doctrines. He must recognise the Jew to be a man, like himself, with weaknesses and attributes, and conditioned by his environment. The Freethinker must discern, in anti-Semitic propaganda, a poisonous principle that can destroy not only Semites, if allowed, but can also be directed to the destruction of all men who choose to think or act in a "different" manner.

Not this alone—he must be prepared to oppose racial dogmas as being as useless to progressive mankind as are religious dogmas, and to keep his sword forever sharpened in defence of liberty and humanism. F. J. CORINA.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BLACK INTERNATIONAL

SIR,—F. A. Ridley strikes a note of pessimism in the final article of what all of us who have known him and his work over the years would but expect to be a series of studies, at once thoughtful and courageous. Brought, in logical consequence of my exploration during the decade, 1930-40, of the trends of national thought in Poland and in Ireland, into frequent and first-hand contact with priests of the Catholic Church, I should say that he will have rejoiced the far from confident hearts of very many of the Company of Jesus. Most certainly they do not see themselves, nor yet the Vatican, as "striding to victory." Decidedly the opposite and, in this respect, I am confident that not he, but they, are correct.

For they are precluded from an appreciation of that theory by his mastery over which the plans of these last two Popes for the conquest of Marxism and the reunion of the Slav communicants of the Schismatic (though otherwise essentially Orthodox) Church with the Universal Church have been undone by Joseph Stalin. They do not and cannot begin to think as do we Marxists of the school of Lenin, not in the terms of Idealism—such as, it seems to me, in an inverted sense tends to mark the thinking of F. A. Ridley himself—but of Dialectical Materialism. They must of necessity think of the opposite of God as being the Devil. They must continue to think, as well as to teach, that the attainment of general well-being in this life is not merely an illusion but the very attempt to attain it an error.

Naturally, there are many among the Company of Jesus who have achieved a flexibility of reasoning and a capacity to contract out of—as I like to believe in their stimulating environment, I did to contract into—the thinking of the

Catholic Church. But that is an exercise permissible to the *élite* and must not be considered as other than an indulgence *ad majorem gratiam Dei*.

With superb insight into essentials, the Vatican and its "shock brigade," the Company of Jesus, ignored the Trotsky heretics or else sought a compromise with those easy tools of "the Grey Sphinx" and the German Army, but came alert and all attention when Stalin began to put an end to peasant property in land. That was a challenge so fundamental that no time must be lost, no intrigue neglected to bring about the total overthrow of the Marxist Government in Moscow.

That plan I knew ten years ago. I learned it from those who designed it and were executing it for the Cardinal who directed me to its chief architect. It was worthy of the most brilliant of the successors of Hildebrand. But it overlooked the Marxian law of the uneven development of Capitalism. And so doing, needless to say, it came a cropper. No. F. A. Ridley does well to turn your thoughts and those of his fellow Socialists to the machinations of the Vatican. But, believe me, the Church is no match for Marx-Lenin-Stalinism.—Yours, etc.,

WALTON NEWBOLD.

BELIEF AND DISBELIEF

SIR,—In a reply to "H. S.," a correspondent in to-day's "Freethinker" says this: "There is such a thing as a bigoted unbeliever."

If that is so, then there must be such a thing as a religious Atheist! When one speaks of a bigot, one necessarily means a "believer," i.e. a person unreasonably and intolerantly devoted to a particular creed, system or party, and which, boiled down, means "fear"; the implication here being that an unbeliever is a person who is afraid of the unknown, since belief of unbelief is—lack of knowledge.

I remember back in December, 1935, challenging a statement in the "one and only," and you replied thus: "Belief and unbelief are two sides of the same thing. To say 'I believe' so-and-so implies a disbelief of its opposite. . . ." My argument against that is, that belief and unbelief are two sides of *no* thing. And to say "I do not believe" so-and-so does not imply a belief of its opposite—unless you can tell me what is opposite to no-thing. By no thing I understand to mean without essence which involves no existence.

However, I am always seeking enlightenment, and if you can show me a bigoted unbeliever, I shall be greatly indebted to you. (I am deeply indebted to you as it is.)—Yours, etc., J. HUMPHREY.

(Other letters held over till next week.)

Read the New Zealand "Rationalist." Published monthly, 4d., post free, each issue, or 5s. annually.—Write to the Editor, 315, Victoria Arcade Buildings, Shortland Street, Auckland C.I., New Zealand; or orders can be taken through "The Freethinker" office.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12-0, Mr. L. EBURY.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, J. McCABE, "Is Science to Blame?"

COUNTRY

Indoor

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

Glasgow Branch N.S.S. (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street): 3-0, General meeting of members and friends.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): 3-0, Mrs. VERA WOODWARD, "Winged Victory, Statue of a Woman."