

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Education Plot

WE are just now hearing a great deal about education. Much of it is sheer camouflage. It owes its existence to the desire to weaken criticism of a plot that has been hatched by leading Churchmen and certain members of the Government. The essence of the plot is to give to the churches a greater control over elementary education than they have had for well over a century. It must be admitted that there is a certain logic in the protest against a continuation of the 1870 compromise. This kept religion in the schools, but the religion that was taught must not be that of any of the sects. It was a compromise which had no principle behind it. It fitted none and it satisfied none. But the alternative—Secular Education—frightened both Nonconformists and Churchmen. There might have been some hope in the compromise if the State had taken over all schools. But it did not. It left the sectarians—Established Church and Nonconformists—free to open schools of their own, to teach their own forms of Christianity, and to receive a cash subsidy provided the secular education given reached a certain level.

An inevitable consequence of this was not merely that the education given in the sectarian schools was poorer than that given in the State schools, but it incited the sectarian schools to keep the level of education as low as possible. The better and the more costly the education given in the State schools, the greater the financial strain on the sectarian establishments. The inevitable consequence of this was that improvement in education was opposed all round. Of course, improvements went on, but these were a mere shadow of what they might have been, and ought to have been, had the State taken a bold and sound course from the onset.

The Churches and the Nation

A common danger drew Nonconformists and the State Church near to each other. Circumstances were demonstrating the fact that the sects must hang together if they were not to hang separately. For years before the war the two Christian bodies—neither of which cared a damn for each other or for rights of the non-Christian public—had been meeting to see what sort of a plan could be hammered out to meet the competition of the State schools. Not a great

deal of progress was made, but some legislative triumphs were secured. Then came the war, and that gave the Churches their chance, and the success of Nazism incited to fresh manœuvres. Nazism had learned much from the history of the Christian Church, the Church in turn was to gain inspiration from Nazism. All that we have read of the youth of Germany emphasises the truth that when this war is over, the greatest difficulty which faces the Allies will be that of undoing the spirit of blind obedience which has been cultivated in the younger German generation. St. Paul's "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him satisfied," was equated in the Nazi "I am determined not to know anything save Hitler and his commands." Hitlerism was doing—with a great measure of success—exactly what the Churches have been striving to achieve for many generations.

So long as the social and intellectual conditions did not obviously run against Christian teaching, the Church—Catholic or Protestant—showed little interest in education, as we moderns understand the term. There were always plenty of discussions, but these turned upon a correct interpretation of the Bible or of Christian doctrines. It is only within the past century and a half with the development of science generally and the growing secularisation of life that the Churches began to take an interest in the education of the people. The Churches were brought to realise that their safety depended upon seeing the developing desire for education was controlled by them. The sciences can wait upon the development of the individual. The only hope of the Churches was then and is now to see that certain things are not learned by the young unless under their guidance. The safety of religion depends upon the creation of an artificial environment within that larger social environment with which religion is always more or less at war. Even the prevailing sentimental attachment to Christianity depends upon the conquest of the child. Christians are made in the nursery; they decay rapidly in the free air of science.

The Black Army

The war gave the Churches their chance of regaining some of their old control over education. Again the method adopted ran on Nazi lines. The Churches saw there would be no change in the government during the war. They also recognised that the government was a conservative one, and no one could be sure that it would be succeeded, after the war, by a government of the same colour. So while other sections of society were willing to cease their internal quarrels for the purpose of winning the war, the Churches saw in the war only an opportunity of securing religious control of the schools. I doubt whether under normal conditions the Churches would have dared to make the claims they now make.

The attack opened in a manner worthy of Goebbels. Unknown parsons reported that among the evacuated children were a large number that knew nothing about Christianity, were not familiar with the name of Jesus, and did not even know the significance of Christmas. It was a terrible state of things—so far as the clergy were concerned. No place was given

where these children could be found, and it was forgotten that all of them had been attending schools where religious lessons were given every day. "The Times" led the way in accentuating this statement, and referred for authority to an unnamed clergyman. No name of anyone who would champion such a statement has been yet given. It was a first-class Goebbels-cum-Hitler-cum-parsonic move. If only our statesmen had been as quick as the clergy in understanding the Nazi method and the uses to which it could be put we might have avoided the world-war.

So soon as the plan of the three Archbishops of Canterbury, York and Wales, backed by a number of Nonconformists, was made known, I said that no such piece of impudence would have been made public if the promoters of the plan, or plot, had not received promises of support from members of the Government. Ample evidence in support of this has now been furnished. The late Minister of Education expressed his sympathy with the desire to see religion taught to all children by the State, and expressed his great interest in religious instruction. No one can have any objection to any Minister of State being interested in religion; but it is not his place to make it manifest in connection with his office. Honour sits very lightly on a man's shoulders where religion is concerned.

But this has been overshadowed by Mr. Chuter Ede, the present Minister of Education. He has been circulating semi-private circulars, and has publicly announced that he intends, as Minister of Education, to set up machinery that will provide teachers and parents with the opportunities to study the art of giving religious instruction, and to pay travelling expenses for parents and teachers to visit these centres if necessary. Before the war no Minister would have dared to take such a step. I am not certain whether the step taken is not illegal, probably not, and in any case we are living more under orders than under law, or, to put it in another way, we are living in conditions when orders rank as laws, and anything may be done. The only thing I am certain of is that prior to the war no government would have dared to take such a step, and openly to minister to the impudent requests or orders of the clergy.

A certain amount of camouflage is being exercised. The plan is being superficially smoothed over by holding out what looks like "plums" to the people as a whole. One of the "plums" offered is the development of a plan that all young people shall spend three months each year in huge camps, where those from the council schools will mix with boys from public schools, and even students from universities. Another "plum" is offered by the Archbishop of York, who wishes to see an extension of the public school system that will "include a large number of boys from secondary schools," and also that secondary education should be universal, "at least up to the age of 16."

Archbishop Temple is kind, but it will not do, and the education camps are not very fascinating to those who are wide-awake. But it will not do, or knowing the nature of the British public, perhaps we had better say it should not do. An extension of mere scholarships which carries young people into higher schools—an offer which many parents cannot accept owing to the inevitable expenses incurred—is good enough, so far as it goes. But it does not go far enough, because it does not touch the fundamental flaw in our secondary and public school system, and in the difficulties of entering one of our universities.

The faults, if not the scandal, of the system may be put very briefly. It is possible for a boy—at some cost to his parents—to go from the elementary school to the secondary school. He may go on winning prizes that may take him to one of the public schools and even to the Universities. Make the terms of elevation

more numerous than they are, and still it will not do. We not only need more children rising step by step up the educational ladder, we must have the conditions of that rise the same for all. We know that all are not worthy of a public school education or a university training. Differences of native ability are always before us. But this variation is the same with all classes of society. If we are going, as a nation, to make all we can of the material we have, then the terms on which a youth enters a public school or a university must be the same for all, for the child of a labourer as for the son of an earl. The full development of a child must not be dependent upon the length of the parent's pockets. The number of scholarships to be gained must be unlimited. Promotion must be for he, or she, who earns it, and there should be every encouragement for all who can to mount the highest rungs of the educational ladder. When we can create that educational ladder which stretches from the elementary school to the university, and when we can abolish the financial barrier that prevents our making the best of the material we have, and saddles us with so many incompetents in high office, then we shall have acquired the right to call ourselves a democracy.

To Freethinkers

A final word to Freethinkers and to those who object to the State teaching of religion. Mr. Chuter Ede, the President of the Board of Education, said in a recent speech that there were very few people who withdraw their children from religious education, and inferred from this that parliament might amend the present education act without disconcerting or displeasing many. Superficially the statement may be accepted as correct—so far as numbers are concerned—withdrawals are a small proportion to those who object altogether to religion being in the State schools. There are large numbers of Christians who take up this position. They say with the Freethinker that it should not be a function of the modern State to teach religion, and so by implication to decide what is truth in religion and what is falsity. It is both idiotic and unjust for the State to boil down the different Christian views to something which is said represents essential Christianity. The present government has made great play of its devotion to what it calls the democratic principle. Even Lord Halifax has tried to show that he too is a good democrat by drinking in public out of a bottle—an unconscious illustration of what he understands by democracy. But it is most curious of all to find a Minister of Education who knows so little of the feelings and beliefs of people in the country that he counts the non-withdrawal of their children from religious instruction as evidence that they have no objection to religion being taught in the schools.

Mr. Ede must know that the unwillingness of a large number of parents to withdraw their children from religious instruction is due to their expressed wish not to expose their children to petty persecution while in school. It was a former Minister of Education, Mr. Augustine Birrell, who said that children would sooner be wicked than singular, and that applies to both child and adult.

I am not agreeing with those Freethinkers who do not withdraw their children. I have said over and over again, and I am appealing to both Freethinkers and others, that if they desire genuine freedom they should show their disgust with the political-religious plot by giving notice that they are withdrawing children from religious instruction. Nothing need be said to the head teacher beyond the plain notice. No reason should be asked for and none should be given. It is the legal right of every citizen. Those

Freethinkers who have been remiss and have not already done so, should act without delay. Mr. Ede and the Churches are counting upon their plot going through without any substantial difficulty. The Press has been largely bought over already. Only here and there is there a paper that has raised a protest. But the total number of papers that dare, or care, to offend the Churches is small, and in this matter the London Press is the worst of all. It is left for the individual to act. Freethinkers, at least, should not be slow in taking the advice given.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE EMPTY CHURCHES

Why?

THE Archbishop of Canterbury, in a recent address, deplored the dwindling congregations, saying that "most of the churches are half empty."

The last available edition of the "Church of England Year Book" tells of the erosion that is taking place, despite the alleged "Spiritual Revival" in England.

Confirmations declined 38,369.

Easter Day Communion by 77,268 communicants. Sunday schools and Bible classes declined 15,637 in membership. Sunday school teachers by 11,146—this notwithstanding the increase of population, the feverish activity of its 12,000 clergy and the great wealth of the Churches.

A recent Church census of the Home Counties around London indicated that only 9 per cent. of the people attended church—at many places attendances did not reach 5 per cent. At Sittingbourne, where in olden days Chaucer's knights and nuns rested, journeying to and from old London Town, the percentage of churchgoers only reached 2 per cent., or one in 50 of the people and, curiously, Sittingbourne had the lowest record for crime in the county, which proves that with 98 per cent. of the population staying away from church, the morals of the community do not worsen.

Dr. Percy Gardiner, writing in "Historic View," says, "The cultured laity are ceasing to look for religion in the churches."

There seems to be a great danger that the public worship of Christianity may be left to the clergy, the women and the uneducated.

Dean Inge, in "Outspoken Essays," writes, "When traditional orthodoxy provokes the moral indignation of the enlightened conscience, and when it outrages our sense of truth and honesty by demanding our assent to scientific errors which were exploded centuries ago—then indeed the Church is in danger, and not all its well disciplined battalions will save it from disaster."

The Rev. Dr. J. M. Laird, executive of the New Zealand propaganda services, including the Crusader Movement, the Scripture Union and the Inter-University Evangelical Union, returning from an extensive survey abroad, makes dismal moan regarding church-going in Britain. He states:

"There has been a considerable falling-off in church attendance, and a corresponding increase in paganism; in London not more than 8 per cent. of the people are churchgoers."

Many excuses are made by the professional Christians as to the cause of the decline of church-going. The blame is attributed to the motor-car, the cinema and the increase of open-air games such as golf, tennis and particularly, in the case of youth, the cult of hiking and tramping on the sacred Sabbath.

In Britain hundreds of tramping clubs have been formed, and on Sundays crowds of boys and girls in their teens may be met on the country roads and hillsides happily singing their way to health after the week's work in factory and office.

To stem this "paganism" the Churches have arranged special services for trampers, but an outcry has been raised by the orthodox against the "disgraceful dress" of the hikers who attend church.

The London "Sketch" thus quotes the Rev. Harold Marley's protest: "To come to church without stockings is a gross indecency." "The girl who thrusts her unclothed flesh, whether a leg or other part of the body that is

normally clothed, before the attention—frequently the close attention—of the male sex in the pew, is doing a cattish trick. The male mind being what it is, is bound to be distracted from God."

It is easy offending some parsons. Really, they are born a generation too late—their place was the Victorian era, sitting on horse-hair sofas, talking with ancient virgins!

Life is too strong for them—and their ideal Christian God is a reflection of themselves.

Did not the Bible tell them that the "Sons of God," seeing that the daughters of men were fair, fell for them?

The London "Daily Telegraph" reports the Rev. Robert Irons, vicar of St. Paul's, Isle of Wight, has launched an attack in his parish on "beach undressing." He states, "that the cult of the body is a modern mania and the cause of the present world-wide dementia and its orgy of lust and passion."

The Rev. Robert Irons would like girls to bathe in Victorian nightgowns, as some convents compel their girl boarders to use, for fear they should become interested in the beauty of their own bodies.

And the "English Church Magazine," in a burst of eloquence, says: "We say quite frankly that any man who does not come to church and say his prayers has the intellect of a rabbit and the emotions of a caterpillar."

Dearie me! How dreadfully doleful—and these parson preachers claim they are divinely inspired by the Christian God!

Poor Jehovah! who has to "listen-in" to the tiresome lamentation of His chosen! No wonder he gets "angry," as the Bible says, and throws an earthquake or a tornado at his human microbes.

Yes, the cinema is blamed, too, for the paucity of people in the pews.

Perhaps the average man and woman, and children too, prefer the bright screen of the cinema to the droning pulpit!

Well, last year—1940—29,775,254 New Zealanders paid an average (adults and children) of 1s. 2½d. each to see the movies, and practically half the population attends the cinema every week.

Why do the people pay 15 pence each to go to the cinema, when they can go to church for threepence or less?

The cinema only offers the mundane things of everyday life—romance, laughter, forgetfulness—with a stage as wide as life itself, whilst the Churches offer, with the sure and certain hope of Resurrection, eternal life, an insurance against purgatory and hell, with the glorious admission to the Christian heaven, where in ceaseless hosannahs and praise, they will be for ever in the Presence of their God.

Why don't the people rush to worship, and accept the religious bait the Churches offer?

Because the great majority of the people do not believe in the promises of the Churches or in the creeds in which these glowing offers are made.

They are wise enough to reject the Churches' trading of their promissory notes payable in their hypothetic Next World for the realities of this life.

They do not believe! That is the cold, naked refrigerated truth! Neither do the common folk credit that the clergy themselves believe in what they offer, or they would not cling as feverishly as we do to life.

Despite all their prayers and faith wrapped in their ceremonies and litanies, despite their alleged divino inspiration, with its whispering, heavenly voice—from across the dark Styx comes no answer save the echoes of their own hopes and fears.

H. J. HAYWARD.

THIS FREEDOM

IT has been truly said that harassing most of us at one time or another in some degree or another, either often or at rare intervals, there lurks some idiosyncrasy or "phobia" which may take any form from a chronic dread of open spaces to the revulsion some women feel for mice. The causes of these impediments to complete freedom are often immensely complicated and obscure, but they are what one would expect to find in a modern personality, having regard

to the riot of forces inherent in its slow and arduous shaping at the hands of environment.

In terms of social values and tendencies, as distinct from the purely personal and physical, such inherent "prejudices" may manifestly be either good or bad—in essence, ethically neutral, they may be directed either with or against the interests of the good life of the subject or others. Thus it may not be a pure coincidence that the writer, who suffers to some slight extent from mild claustrophobia (making, for instance, the climbing of a ship's mast from the *inside* a sweat-producing torture), gets something of the same feeling on the announcement of any form of new *compulsion* in connection with the war effort. And I am not so sure that the designation "Spiritual Claustrophobia" would be too wide of the mark as descriptive of that chilling trauma which strikes with ever mounting force against those of us especially who, since the last war, have sacrificed good incomes and—alas—so often security for others, that we may be free.

In 1939, when National Registration was first made compulsory, long before there were any shortages or obvious restraints on liberty, it began to be borne home on us that for some great cause the rugged individuality which had kept us for years at our own typewriters, in our own personal businesses—often working longer hours than any trade unionist, though under no one's orders—that it was all to end.

The sweeping powers announced over the wireless, though happily in no way implemented at first, served to confirm our fears, and it was only by means of a conscious vision of the cause itself that many of us were able to retain a balance and a belief in the future.

As the early part of the war dragged on, with calling-up proceeding slowly and civil opportunities still available, the early shocks tended to soften, and hope revive. And I think perhaps it was the Order which virtually conscripted Civil Defence workers in their originally voluntary employment, which came with the greatest force to those concerned, and called for no little courage in the retention of the enthusiasm and devotion to duty given so willingly a few months before.

And since then, with stabbing frequency, one liberty after another has been torn from us—either through official channels, wrapping its stern message in a cloud of official words on a roneo'd sheet handed from the office, or dropping euphemistically from the lips of a dulcet-voiced woman announcer. To the German subject—steeped throughout his whole life in an atmosphere of "Achtungs!" and "Verbotens!"—it must all have come as naturally as the rising of the sun, but to the average Englishman it has called for courage and resignation, whilst to some of us it is a cross indeed.

Here and there one meets misguided people affecting a bravado quite out of keeping with what one knows them to be. They are not to be ordered here, there and everywhere—the authorities can do as they like, etc. Such people unhappily miss the whole issue. For however hard it may be to relinquish the cherished freedoms of a lifetime in what must eventually resemble a minor totalitarianism, the alternative is unthinkable—defeat!

"Conscription for all—men up to 50, women up to 30"—ugly but necessary words, if our ultimate freedom is to be assured. There is only one consolation—the greatness and urgency of the disaster which waits only the tardy laziness of half-measures in a world at grips with tyranny and death. But let there be no mistake about it, if after the last vestige of personal freedom has been wrested from us in the urgency of the moment—if after so many of us have burned our boats beyond all recall, relinquished the plans and achievements of a lifetime—if in the end there is anyone who, having the power, is base enough to withhold the prize, or dally with compromise in the hour of victory—Hell, then, will know no fury like freemen scorned!

We know our war aims, we have heard the Atlantic Charter and we have entered the contract. It behoves all those who will eventually have the peace proposals and programme in hand to search their souls in earnest, lest they are asked to face in the persons of those who now support them to the last sacrifice, a force more formidable than any which now stalks the battlefields of Europe—the mighty army of the betrayed.

J. R. STURGE WHITING.

A REPLY TO "S. H."

"EVERY schoolboy knows"—or my understanding of Euclid is very, very rusty—that parallel lines never meet. The more advanced mathematicians, I admit, do tell us that such lines meet at infinity, but I have never been there, and as it is the home of so many queer happenings, I prefer to leave such Wellsian adventures to those more venturesome than myself.

It appears evident from "S. H.'s" last contribution (Nov. 16) that, at any rate, we are travelling along parallel paths. It is, I believe, equally evident that in order that those paths may meet before reaching that hypothetical infinity (I haven't the patience to wait that long), one or both must be deflected, and that inwards. The greater the deflection, the sooner we meet, so perhaps if we both make an effort we shall find firm footing on common ground.

But what, and where, is this common ground to be? We are, both of us, not quite happy with the position of the Freethought movement as it exists to-day. So far then, we move parallel, but dissatisfaction alone affords no common platform where there is no common outlook.

Can this common outlook be in Left Wing sympathies, as, no doubt? "S. H." infers such sympathies from my article. The trouble here is that Left Wing covers a very wide field and a multitude of sins, and the words could, at a pinch, include even Mr. Winston Churchill. In the past, both Hitler and Mussolini could quite accurately be classed as Left Wingers, and in the future many "leaders" now of the Left persuasion will undoubtedly turn out to be "have beens." I can already see, very faintly, the word "Sold" on the backs of many former prominent Lefties.

So, "S. H.," cast off those wings lest they be used for flight to the region of lost souls. Be more concerned with principles and ideals, and even if such do not take the place of religion, why worry? Who said they should, anyway? And honestly, wouldn't "S. H." agree that in a sanely ordered world there would be quite enough to "seize the imagination of man"?

Perhaps I should explain at this juncture what I mean by a sanely ordered world, lest I be accused of mere idle word-spinning. I mean, in fact, a world organisation—a World Commonwealth—in which money does not exist, a world in which goods are produced for use and free distribution. Only in such a world would the phrase "the greatest good for the greatest number" have any real meaning; only under World Commonwealth conditions would the primary problems of humanity be solved, and freedom attain its highest form. If the possibilities inherent in such a world are not enough to seize the imagination, well—I have none.

The fact that "the world is what it is" I would not deny, and what a world it is to be sure! In times of "peace," poverty side by side with plenty, and in war, bombs and black-outs.

But what sort of world would we like it to be? That is the question. Perhaps the possibilities of a sanely ordered world as above described have been overlooked by many Left Wingers—yes, including Mr. Stalin. Or can one believe, with Mr. Cohen, that some super-League of Nations will solve the world's problems? Personally, I doubt it.

If men do not want to see the world in the light of Rationalism, it is, I believe, because they are not concerned with Rationalism. What they are concerned with is bread and butter, with food, clothing, shelter and the minor luxuries, made possible by the elasticity or otherwise of an already overworked pay packet. If church on Sunday makes little or no appeal, and if they are not particularly worried about an after life, I feel sure it is not because they read "The Freethinker." It is environment in its widest sense, the changed material conditions of life, which has slowly wrought that change in human ideas.

As it concerns your "vital issue," let me emphasise this one point. Men do not want to see the world in the light of Rationalism, but the world as they perhaps dimly see it; a sanely ordered world will undoubtedly be Freethought in outlook. A world in which all men have free access to the products of Mother Nature would not be amenable to a divided personality. In my opinion, religious ideals must necessarily conflict with World Commonwealth

ideals, the ideals of man in a world without money, wherein goods are produced for use and for free distribution. It will be such a world that will give man everything he needs. That, Rationalism or Freethought will not and cannot give him, and if such a world results in the death of the Freethought movement (and I believe it will), it will surely not have died in vain.

If man wants some "thing" in which to believe, he will, in the World Commonwealth, have it. He will have himself to believe in, and the immense potentialities lying therein, for the creation of a better and still better world.

Remember the words of Charles Chaplin in "The Great Dictator": "You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure." In such a world, religion, accurately defined, must and surely will, rapidly decay. J. PHILLIPS.

THIS PERPLEXING WORLD

THE world is in a very queer state—on that, all thoughtful people are agreed, whether Theists or Atheists, whether Freethinkers or Christians. Recent years have seen a revival of cruelty and oppression on a scale which has not been seen since the far-off days of the Spanish Inquisition. Mr. D. R. Davies, a thought-provoking clergyman, who wrote two books, disturbing alike to believers and heretics, attributed this development to the innate sinfulness of man. In fact, Mr. Davies states, roundly and without equivocation, that man is an essentially evil creature, only kept within bounds by the restraining hand of religion.

Unfortunately for this theory—superficially quite plausible to the unthinking—man's behaviour was no more reliable during the "Ages of Faith" than it is to-day. It is only more apparent at the present time because technical and scientific advances have put greater power in man's hands. The technique of oppression and cruelty, that is to say, has advanced tremendously, but there has been little or no moral advance which will serve to hold these technical advances in check and enable men to improve their material status in accordance with the advances which science has made possible.

This perplexing world, in which so many things are happening which progressives of a generation ago would have thought impossibly barbarous, does indeed present us all with paradoxes seemingly insoluble.

As Freethinkers, we must all be agreed that the "strange new world" of to-day lacks most of the attributes which should belong to any type of genuine civilisation. Only by real reforms (not merely the pseudo-changes apparently introduced after the last war by the existence of the League of Nations) can the world become an entirely better place within anything like a reasonable time. And there is something to be said for the orthodox Christian conception that this can be done only by the method of individual conversion. Political, social and economic changes, such as those advocated by followers of Karl Marx and Henry George, can do much to improve the material lot of mankind, but unless the process of individual conversion proceeds at an accelerating speed, these reforms will not take place, nor will they produce the desired results.

Even in the world of Freethought the rule still holds. Mass conversion to the ideals held dear by Freethinkers is not satisfactory. In the U.S.S.R., for example, if we can believe the testimony of reliable observers, people have flocked to the churches during the conflict with Nazi Germany—and this in spite of the fact that every possible political and economic measure to deal with the illusions of the orthodox has been taken during the past 20 years or so. Mankind is still pitifully weak, still, it would appear, unable to stand upon its own feet. Mankind still needs some kind of supernatural prop which will give support in this perplexing modern world.

"On to Orthodoxy," the challenging title of one of Mr. Davies' books (referred to above), may be some people's solution of this dilemma of the modern civilised man. Those of us who have grown beyond such supernaturalism still have to make up our minds what we are going to do in the face of a situation which is, to all intents and purposes, unique.

One last word—or one last word for this week, at any rate: We do not alter a situation by pretending that it does not exist!

S. H.

ACID DROPS

WE believe that there are still a number of Freethinkers who regard a frontal attack on the Church as a mistake, the Church being, in their opinion, almost knocked out. Well, it may be in some places, but it seems pretty powerful in America. Roman Catholics there objected to see Greta Garbo in her latest film dressed in a swimming suit only, and at once headed a big "moral" protest. The result is that the big film corporation, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, has had to withdraw the film for "revision," and if it again does not come up to what the Church's celibate priests consider right and proper, it may have to be scrapped altogether. The point to note is that in a country which is predominantly Presbyterian, and therefore anti-Catholic, the Catholic Church can impose its will with the aid of a little agitation; and the bulk of Protestant citizens submit almost without a protest.

Generally the Roman Catholic Church boasts of its growth. We are usually suspicious of the truth of these statements, and now and again an incautious but over zealous priest lets the cat out of the bag. For example, in the "Universe" for December 5, Archbishop McDonald laments:—

"A generation ago a family rosary was common, or at least prayers in the home, with some sort of little altar, pious pictures and reminders of God and the saints were almost universal. Now for the most part they have died out entirely."

When one remembers how diligently the Roman Catholic priest follows up the members of a Catholic family, the cajolements that are used and the threats that are made, this admission of the Archbishop is very significant.

Archbishop McDonald seems to be not merely more truthful than the average priest, but also bolder in what he says. Thus:—

"It is a recognised fact that the simple lessons in religion taught to the child at its mother's knee, before it comes to the use of reason, sink deeper and deeper into the mind, cling more tenaciously than the fuller and perhaps more enlightened teaching received in schools and elsewhere."

We believe that this mother's knee business has a great deal of mere sentimental bosh in it, but we agree with the Archbishop in what he says, without perhaps realising what he implies. This is that the one way to get people to stick to Christianity is to pump it into them before they are old enough to understand what is being done or what they are being told. We have been saying this for years; and it is more than a crime against the child—it is a crime against society as a whole.

Arising out of this, as they say in Parliament, we would like to ask anyone, "How many men or women are known who have been brought up in a decent home without Christian teaching, have received a good education, remained sane and have then become a Christian in their mature years?" We think that is a question worthy of attention.

The "Sunday Chronicle" announces that 1,000 copies of the Bible have been sent from America to Stalin for the Russian people. They are sent by the National Prophecy Conference Committee. Stalin has accepted the gift, and says they will be placed in the libraries of the collective-farms and factories among the other great works of literature.

What strikes one about such a gift is the childish assumption that a knowledge of the Bible will bring people over, or back, to Christianity. Men and women do not become Freethinkers because the Bible is kept from them, but because they are not only familiar with the Bible—they also understand it. Those who wish to see what the Bible really is should consult—amid many other works—Frazer's "Folk-Lore in the Old Testament." None but a fool could doubt the true nature of the foundations on which the Christian religion rests.

The entry of America into the field of positive warfare with the Axis countries will be rather awkward for the Roman Catholics in America. These formed the strongest single element against help for Russia and, of course, completely ignored how much Russia had helped the civilised world, and particularly Britain. The certain thing is that history will record that the first decisive step to winning the war against Germany was taken by Russia. Our own immunity from air raids since the entrance of Russia into the war is due to this, and nothing has done more to weaken the legend of the invincibility of German forces than the serious setback they have received at the hands of Russia.

But this has not weakened the Roman Catholic hatred of the Soviet Union—it has rather intensified it. It is this opposition which President Roosevelt had to overcome, and with over 20,000,000 Roman Catholics to deal with the task was not an easy one. Roman Catholic priests have availed themselves of the freedom of the air—we have not yet reached that stage—and have shrieked against America having any association with an anti-Christian Government. One of these star radio priests, according to the "Daily Express," was demanding only a few weeks ago that Russia should be helped only on condition that it gave up the Soviet system. Now we take it they will have to be silent. But the plotting will still continue with the underhand pertinacity for which the Roman Church is historically famous.

What a price we are paying for the MacDonald, the Baldwin and the Chamberlain Governments! Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain, Munich and Albania were steps in the preparation for the world war, and all were winked at by our leading statesmen in the hope that Germany could keep from the rest of Europe the influence of the Soviet Union. Hitler was converted into a guardian angel of the Churches, and no traffic with an Atheistic nation became the rule of practice. This opposition has been beaten to silence, partly to acquiescence, but it is still there, and we shall be fortunate if it does not show itself again when the world war ceases. We are not afraid that the Allies will win the war—we are less certain that they will win the peace.

The relations of the Vatican radio to Italians and Germans are peculiar. The Vatican denounces the Nazis as "godless," the Germans perpetually protest that they believe in God, even though it may not be the one represented by the Pope. The Italians appear to jam the Vatican radio, and so offered the Vatican a fine opportunity for proving that God was on their side; for a miracle might have been perpetrated by paralysing the hands of those who attempted to thwart the Papal broadcast, or God might have side-stepped the wave-lengths. As it is, the Vatican is reduced to the commonplace method of adopting a slightly different wave-length, just as though it was merely our own B.B.C. unconsciously advertising the foolishness of one of its pet parsons.

Father Owen Dudley objects to the popular ideas of heaven, which he says consists of "picking daisies, harp-playing and saints sitting on clouds." But what else, what of any real human interest is there in the Christian heaven? Some great Christian teachers have said that one form of enjoyment in the Christian heaven would be leaning over the battlements and watching the torments of the damned in the Christian hell, but somehow one cannot picture even the most confirmed of worshippers of God finding pleasure for long in that direction. Human nature is, after all, not the poor, miserable, weak thing that Christian theology and B.B.C. preachers have pictured it.

What is there in the Christian heaven for decent people to do? One never hears of books being there. There are no theatrical performances to attend, unless we add the noisy gathering round the throne of one of these. There is not the excitement of doing something wrong, because all are perfect. There is no work to be done, for one never reads of such a thing in heaven, and although Christian

angels would never go about in the nude, one never even hears of tailors or costumiers plying their trade. There seems nothing to discover. There are no discussions, since on high authority everything will be made plain. There will be no birthday parties, for there are no birthdays in heaven. What is it that people do there to kill the time? But there is not even time to kill, for heaven is timeless and, shall we add, senseless. It hasn't even the interest that one might find in hell—hunting for a spot that is relatively cool.

There is trouble in High Bank Top Church, Yorks. It appears from complaints made at the Bradford Diocesan Conference that the clergymen who are sent to Bank Top are opposed to an appointed parson absolutely. Bank Top has had three clergymen "of completely different views from anything held" in the district, and they are "Anglo-Catholics" (which means a body with all the tricks and ceremonial idiocies of the Roman Catholics, but with "Roman" left out). In addition to these complaints, the congregation of Horton Bank Top "is now about ten," and the clerical authorities take no notice of the complaints made. Perhaps they think the sooner this congregation of ten are blotted out the better.

We wonder what secret promises have been made to the Roman Catholics to induce them to back the promise of the Government to do what it can to establish definite Christian teaching in the schools in such a way that the whole of the school time will be saturated with Christian teaching. It is quite certain that the Roman Catholics will not permit their children to attend such schools if it can possibly be prevented. We venture the suspicion that there is a secret understanding to give the Roman Church a more complete control over its schools, with all expenses paid.

We are getting on, religiously, and the more we get on, religiously, the nearer we approach the Fascist ideal. Here is the Rev. F. G. Herod, who welcomes the saturation of the State schools with definitely Christian teaching, and partly because thousands of parents are without religious faith. That would seem a good reason for not forcing upon the children of the parents in question sectarian Christian teaching. No, is the virtual retort of Mr. Herod, if the parents are not Christians, then we must do what we can to force religion on the children, whether the parents want it or not. It occurs to us that there was once another Herod, who has come down to us charged with having ordered a massacre of the innocents. Of course, the massacre of the innocents is pure myth, but it carries with it a significance in view of the existing situation.

An American Roman Catholic dignitary, Mgr. Sheen, of the United States, is alarmed lest, if Germany is victorious, Hitler may clear the Pope out of the Vatican and put a Nazi in his place. Maybe, but Rome has had all sorts of Popes—good and bad, learned and foolish, honest and dishonest—and more than one of the Popes has been under suspicion of not believing in Christianity at all. So Mgr. Sheen warns Hitler that if anyone tries that game, it will be the end of him. We beg to differ. We are of opinion that Hitler would make a capital Pope, and the men behind him in Germany might very well play the part of the group of cardinals who have so often been pulling the strings that governed the movements of a puppet Pope.

Here is another curious thing. The "Church Times" laments the shortage of chaplains in the Army. Of course, we have heard of this shortage, but the complaint does not come from the men. The men may complain of the food, of button-polishing, of too few drinks or too few days of leave, but we never heard from the Army the cry of "Send us more clergymen!" The call comes from clerical circles. In "The Mikado," Katisha sings, "There will be too much of me in the coming by and by." The parsons looking at the tendency of things repeat the line, but it runs, "There will be too few of me." The less demand there is for the clergy the more they insist upon the need for an increase in their numbers.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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W. FARRER.—Paper is being sent. Pleased to know that you have so much enjoyment in reading "The Freethinker." Books and pamphlets have been sent.

J. C.—Thanks for cutting.

J. C.—See "Acid Drops."

J. H.—Thanks for season's greetings. We shall continue to do our best for "The best of causes."

W. RAWLINGS.—We have a number of things waiting to be reprinted, but paper and other difficulties are holding them up.

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SUGAR PLUMS

WE call the special attention of our readers to two pamphlets just issued by the Secular Society, Limited. One is "The Mother of God," by G. W. Foote. The essay is enough to make the hair of Catholics stand on end and Protestants feel very uneasy, for whether one is a Catholic or a Protestant there must arise in the mind of the reader a consciousness of the stark primitivism on which Christianity rests. The essay has all the features of wit, learning and fine writing that was characteristic of G. W. Foote. There is a brief introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price 3d., by post 4d.

The other issue is Ingersoll's famous "Mistakes of Moses." None of Ingersoll's writings has had the circulation of this one, and the time is peculiarly suitable for this new edition. We are hearing a lot from Christians about "Back to the Bible," and here is one that takes Christians and others back to the real Bible. There are smiles on every page, with sound humanism and trenchant criticism running right through the work. The price of this booklet, which is being issued by the Secular Society Limited, is also 3d., by post 4d.

One of our readers, now with the troops stationed at Coddendam, near Ipswich, would like to get into touch with some Freethinkers in that district. We shall be pleased to hear from any of our readers in that area.

We have received a lengthy and interesting letter in which the writer asks whether we are not disappointed at the slowness of progress? On the contrary, we are rather surprised at its rapidity. We quite appreciate the impatience with which some who have seen a larger truth, and the falsity of many accepted ideas, face the difficulty one has in getting others to agree. But, if we may enlarge a saying of our old favourite, Sir Thomas Browne, it is not given to everyone either to see truth or to become its worthy advocate. Consider that it is less than a century since the theory of evolution was brought before the general public and seriously discussed by non-specialists. It is not very much longer since the significance of the buried civilisations of Egypt and the East was resurrected for us.

Little more than that time and the Christian religion stood with at least an apparently solid front. Without taking into consideration the political and educational advances, there is something to marvel that so many advances have been made in so short a time.

Of course, the number who appreciate the significance of these discoveries are comparatively few. But what can one expect? The great majority of the people move, mentally, along familiar paths, and always will. When the Christian minister stands up and repeats the same things that have been said for centuries, the mental responses are there ready made and they work automatically. The man who attacks them is speaking in a foreign tongue, and the ears of his listeners have to become accustomed to unfamiliar phrases, and their brains to unfamiliar sentences. No, looking at what has been done we are rather inclined to be surprised at the amount. And there is more to come.

One of our readers does not think we ought to be so hard on politicians. Really we are not hard on them. What we object to is their being regarded as the leaders and teachers of the people. Teaching and leading calls for a type of mind that is different from that operating with those who hope to take a prominent part in the political game. It is very, very difficult to combine the teacher and the political leader in the same person. Ideas are made outside of Parliament; their influence is sometimes felt and sometimes acknowledged inside. That is why a free Press—which we have not—and an educated public—which we have not—are so important to progress.

We are asked to remind all members of the Glasgow Branch N.S.S. that their annual subscriptions are now due. Remittances should be sent to the Secretary, Mrs. J. D. Macdonald, 149, Stanmore Road, Glasgow, S.2.

"Pierre Laval," by Henry Torres (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.), might justly have been entitled "The History of a Scoundrel." Laval will be remembered as having induced Sir Samuel Hoare, then a member of the Baldwin Cabinet, to join with him in a plan to hand the larger and the better part of Abyssinia to Mussolini. The outcry against this was so great in this country that Baldwin was obliged to "sack" Sir Samuel, only to reappoint him to another office soon after. The hero of the book before us provides a tale of unbroken lying, treachery, and suspected robbery. No one appears to have trusted him, but many imagined they were using him, only to find that in the long run they were being swindled themselves in a larger or smaller degree. The book casts a strong light on the political life of France prior to its collapse during the present war.

PROTESTANTS AND THE BIBLE

Jack had provided a fair copy of his father's will, engrossed in form upon a large skin of parchment; and resolving to act the part of a most dutiful son, he became the fondest creature of it imaginable. For although, as I have often told the reader, it consisted wholly in certain plain, easy directions, about the management and wearing of their coats, with legacies and penalties in case of obedience or neglect, yet he began to entertain a fancy that the matter was deeper and darker, and therefore must needs have a great deal more of mystery at the bottom. "Gentlemen," said he, "I will prove this very skin of parchment to be meat, drink, and cloth, to be the philosopher's stone and the universal medicine." In consequence of which raptures, he resolved to make use of it in the necessary as well as the most paltry occasions of life. He had a way of working it into any shape he pleased; so that it served him for a nightcap when he went to bed, and for an umbrella in rainy weather. He would lap a piece of it about a sore toe, or, when he had fits, burn two inches under his nose; or, if anything lay heavy on his stomach, scrape off and swallow as much of the powder as would lie on a silver penny; they were all infallible remedies. With analogy to these refinements, his common talk and conversation ran wholly in the phrase of his will, and he circumscribed the utmost of his eloquence within that compass, not daring to let slip a syllable without authority from that.—SWIFT, "Tale of a Tub."

TESTIMONY OF TACITUS CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

SECTION THIRD

Igitur primo conrepti, qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum, multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii quam odium humani generis convicti sunt.

Therefore, first they were brought to trial who were confessing; then, by their indication, a great multitude, not so much on charge of the fire as for hatred of the human race were convicted.

The verb *conripere*, of which *conrepti* is the participle, means primarily "to seize," but it is frequently used by Tacitus in the sense of "to seize upon with accusations, or bring to trial, accuse, inform against," and a reference to the present passage is among the examples of that use furnished by the dictionary herein followed.* "Brought to trial" seems in this place to be the best rendering of *conrepti*. Who were the persons brought up? The answer is supplied by the relative clause *qui fatebantur*. Of these two words, the first is the nominative plural of a relative pronoun meaning "who," whilst the other is the third person plural of the imperfect tense of the verb *fateri*, which means "to confess, own, acknowledge," and which has not the force of *profiteri*, namely, "to openly confess or profess." Cicero makes this distinction plain, for he has "not only to confess, but to profess," and "I confess and even profess."† Supposing, however, that here *conrepti* signifies arrest and not prosecution, the fact remains, that the persons in question were confessing before their arrest. What was the thing confessed? Was it arson, or was it Christianity? Regarding the fire, Tacitus distinctly says that they whom Nero accused of it were counterfeited criminals. These would certainly not be confessing to arson before they were arrested as incendiaries. Upon the other hand, after Nero suggested that the Christians had raised the fire, persons known to practise Christian rites, even unobtrusively, would be regarded as confessing Christianity, and therefore as liable to arrest. The word *indicio* now claims attention. This is the ablative case of the noun *indicium*, which means "a notice, information, discovery, disclosure"—in short, an indication. Thus it is evident that the Christians who were arrested betrayed a great number of their fellow believers. The indicators are not affirmed to have given their indication under torture, but the fact that only the indicated are said to have been convicted suggests that the indicators received pardon as the price of their treachery. For the stilling of doubts which might arise from the phrase *multitudo ingens* applied to the persons arrested, it is well to recall that the Christians of those days were divided into two parties, which, for the sake of convenience, may be termed Petrine and Pauline respectively. The first regarded Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, whose mission had been divinely attested by his alleged resurrection; whilst the second regarded him as the world's redeemer, the acceptance of whose sacrificial death had also received the above attestation. The Pauline Party, which developed into the Catholic Church, was then small in comparison with the Petrine Party. This held to Jewish observances, which in foreign lands would inevitably lead to its getting confused by the populace with real Judaism, especially where anti-Semitic prejudices existed. It is worth noting that before Nero's reign the Jews had been once or twice turned out of Rome, and that Tacitus accuses them, as he does the Christians, of depraved superstition and "hostile hatred" to all other peoples (Hist. v. 5-13). Nero had one or two Jewish friends, but he was very unreliable, and there was strong enmity to the Jews in some sections of Roman society. Hence there is ground for supposing that other Jews, besides Jewish Christians, may have perished in the vengeance over the fire. The fourth and last point in this section is the statement that the "great multitude" arrested and convicted received conviction less on charge of the fire than for their hatred of mankind, whereas it does not appear that misanthropy has ever been regarded as an indictable offence.

* Latin-English Lexicon xxx. By E. A. Andrews, LL.D. New Edition; London, 1859.

† Non solum fateri sed etiam profiteri (Caecin ix. 24); fateri atque etiam profiteor (Rab. perd. v. 17).

SECTION FOURTH

Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis conrecti, laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus adfixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat, et circense ludicrum edebat, habitu aurigae permixtus plebi, vel curriculo insistens.

And to the perishing were added mockeries, so that some with the skins of wild beasts covered, by the worrying of dogs died. Others were either to crosses affixed, or made fit to be inflamed, and then when the daylight should have ceased, for the use of a nocturnal light they would be burned. His gardens for that spectacle Nero had offered; and a circus-show he was exhibiting in the garb of a charioteer mingled with the common people, or on the race-course careering.

The horrors above described look more like modes of indiscriminate persecution than inflictions judicially imposed. Beyond doubt, the Romans tortured accused persons to get confession or submission and gave to those convicted severe punishments, including cruel deaths; but, nevertheless, they observed some conventional restrictions touching both the administration and the execution of justice. In the present case, however, we must remember the loss of life and property caused by the devastating fire; the wrath of the sufferers at the thought of this being due to malice; the readiness they would display in accepting as the incendiaries people whom they already abhorred; and lastly, the ferocious delight given them by witnessing the agony of the victims sacrificed to their credulity and vengeance. The reputation of Nero is stained with private and public crimes of the worst sort. He was popular with the thoughtless and the dissolute, but the wise and the virtuous secretly hoped for his fall. If he were either rightly or wrongly suspected of causing the fire, he had strong reasons for diverting the suspicion, and would certainly have no scruples about transferring it to the innocent; whilst as regards the abominations put upon the inculpated, they might well have been forecast from a man of his sadistic disposition.

SECTION FIFTH

Unde, quamque adversus sotes et novissima exempla meritos, miseratio, oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publicae sed in saevitiam unius absumerentur.

Out of which severities, although exercised against persons guilty and deserving the newest punishments, pity was becoming visible, as if, not from the utility of the public, but for the cruelty of one man the condemned were being slain.

Our nature is so constituted that if those whom we detest suffer beyond a certain measure, the knowledge of this fact causes us to regard them with pity. It is only the gods and the glorified whose malice never yields to compassion. Besides this, as the lust of vengeance subsided, and relaxed excitement permitted the use of reason, the spectators would be increasingly disposed to reflect that occasions might easily arise when they themselves would have to suffer under the same ruthless despot of whose proficiency in excoagitated torments they were having such an impressive demonstration.

II. The connection of the above passage with the passages immediately before and after it.

Let A stand for what precedes the passage; B for the passage itself; and C for what succeeds the passage. A ends with the assertion that neither the donations of "the prince," nor the attempted propitiation of the gods, sufficed to stay the belief that the fire had been ordered. Then, says B, that to abolish the rumour Nero falsely charged the fire upon the Christians and, after describing what the Christians were, who had founded them, and how greatly they suffered upon the present occasion, it ends by saying that their sufferings finally excited commiseration, because they seemed to be inflicted less for the public good than to gratify the ferocity of the inflictor. Thereupon, C begins by relating that "meanwhile" (*interea*) the whole of Italy, the provinces and other territories, were subjected to

ruinous extortion for the purpose or on the pretext of raising funds to rebuild Rome. Temples were spoiled, treasures and trophies were seized and the very images of the gods themselves were not spared. The rest of the chapter describes the misdeeds of Nero's agents in Asia and Achaia, and the suffering endured by Seneca, the philosopher. The above account shows that there is nothing either in A or in C which would have prevented their direct connection, and that the intervention of B between these two parts merely augments the narrative without disrupting it. Therefore, the position of the present passage supports rather than opposes its authenticity.

PART SECOND

Statements of Pagan and Christian Authors Respecting the Fire and the Persecution compared with the Narrative of Tacitus.

SECTION FIRST

PAGAN AUTHORS

Although it is known that some pagan writers mention the fire at Rome in the reign of Nero, it is not claimed that any pagan writer mentions Nero's having accused the Christians of the conflagration, much less his having had them punished on this account.

I. Caius Suetonius Tranquillus. This author is justly celebrated for his "Lives of the First Twelve Cæsars,"* which appeared not long after the "Annals" of Tacitus, who was his senior by some ten years. Both were intimate friends of Plinius Secundus, who was born in A.D. 61 and who, in the period A.D. 103-105, whilst Proprætor of Bithynia, corresponded with his master, the Emperor Trajan, as to how the Christians of that province were to be treated. Suetonius is much briefer than Tacitus in his account of the fire and of the events following upon it. This occupies the less than 30 lines containing, in the present edition, the 38th chapter of his "Life of Nero" in his aforesaid work on the first twelve Cæsars. Therein he declares that Nero set fire to Rome, as if disgusted with its old buildings and its narrow winding streets; but he does not say that Nero took any notice of what the people might be thinking about his conduct in connection with the disaster. On the contrary, he represents Nero as aggravating the misfortunes of the sufferers by defrauding them of belongings saved from the flames, and also as afflicting his subjects in general with exorbitant taxes for reconstructive operations at the metropolis. This account implies that Nero's guilt was well known, and it never even hints that he attempted to screen himself by accusing others of his crime. Nor does it mention the slightest effort on his part to conciliate the people by donations or any other means, as Tacitus represents him to have done; whilst it adds to the extortion, likewise reported by Tacitus, the plundering inflicted upon the survivors of the fire. Suetonius who, on the above occasion, never refers to the Christians, mentions them previously (Chapter XVI.) in quite an incidental way, saying that under Nero "were afflicted with punishments (*suppliciiis*) the Christians, a kind of men of a superstition new and malific," the last word having the primary meaning of "wicked," and the secondary sense of "dealing in magic." Thus, whilst agreeing with Tacitus that Nero subjected the Christians to punishment, Suetonius fails to confirm him as regards the time and the occasion of the subjection. Here, however, it should be carefully noted that whereas chronological order is habitually aimed at by Tacitus, factual order is often adopted by Suetonius, his purpose on such occasions being to group together things which in some way or another have a common, if remote, resemblance.

II. Dion Cassius. This man, the son of a Roman senator, was born A.D. 155 at Nicæa, in Bithynia. He was twice Consul and held other important offices of State. He wrote a large history of Rome, from the arrival of Aeneas in Italy to A.D. 229. Gibbon, in the 16th chapter of his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,"† says that Dion, in his account of Nero, mentions the conflagration at Rome; but, as he also says that Xipilin, abridger of Dion, could not,

in spite of all his diligence, find any reference to the Christians in Dion's whole "History," it is evident that the part thereof concerning Nero leaves them completely out of account. This silence is all the more remarkable because the Christians were well known and severely persecuted under Marcus Aurelius in the youth and early manhood of Dion; and under Septimus Severus, when Dion was at the prime of life.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be continued)

ON TEACHING RELIGION TO THE YOUNG

THE controversial subject of religious education in provided schools, and the agitation aroused by it in ecclesiastical and, to some extent, in political circles, is again much to the fore; and, as usual, the practical aspects of the question either obstruct the view or deaden the vision altogether of the far deeper issues which the question opens up.

History can be taught as history, geography as geography, arithmetic as numbers, and even glimmerings of science as science, but the dogma of religion is *thought*. It takes different shapes in different minds, and there are many forms of it in one and the same religion. Who can settle what particular version of it is to be handed on to the unquestioning mind of childhood? It must also be borne in mind that children in their early stages *believe* what adults tell them. This is a terrible responsibility when we consider that the adult has power not only over the body but the mind of the child. The immature mind of childhood is, to begin with, incapable of grasping anything beyond concrete surroundings and their associations, or of drawing distinctions between abstract thought and things. To take one instance of this limitation: the fatherhood of God is probably the most popular Christian doctrine. But the child can only conceive of the man father, however strong the teacher's belief may be in a mystical fatherhood.

The wide divergencies in religious beliefs among teachers who take their religion *seriously* should surely rule out the impartment of religion in State provided schools. Parents who pay for education and select their own schools can make their own choice and give their instructions. But in schools which are, in a way, public property, teaching should be limited to secular subjects and religion left to the Churches and their schools which exist for that purpose, and to the clergy of all denominations who have, as it were, made religion their profession and have their own premises for use.* I am of opinion that definite religious instruction should not be handled by the teacher of secular subjects. If it is, where is the line to be drawn between the two? But though children are quite unfit to grapple with religion, they soon begin to observe their surroundings and evidences of religion and its varying beliefs are thick on the ground. Its architecture alone, varying from the Conventicle to the Cathedral, meets us everywhere, and it has been the inspiration of the best in the world. It is also possible that the more intelligent will begin to ask questions; in fact, if children are educated at all, religion has ultimately to come in somewhere.

Here I must indulge in a digression. In many cases, and especially among what we call the upper classes, children have Bible lessons, given probably as ancient history in Kings I. and II., or told more or less as stories.† They accompany their elders to a Sunday service, just as a part of the ordinary routine of life without going any deeper into it all than that. (This is what must have happened in my own case until I began to think for myself, and got into touch with the modern thought of the time through the writings of Huxley and others, which circulated

* It is, no doubt, *possible* for parents of children in elementary or secondary State-provided or State-assisted schools to object to the impartment of religion in a day school.

† But children can be critical, and the Deity of the Old Testament may fall below the child's idea of right and wrong. I can recall the following remark: "But God would not do that, God would want to make people good." This probably referred to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus, chapter x.). It may be noted that the morality of the fairy tale is usually sound.

* C. Suetonii Tranquilli Vitæ Duodecim Cæsarum. xxx. Tauchnitz Edition. Leipzig, 1882.

† Bohn's Edition; London, 1854; Vol. II., p. 99; note.

freely in many circles.) And there must be many *adults* who go through life and fill their right places without facing or wanting to face the problems of thought and religion. They just fall in with what is going in their own circles, so long as it does not encroach too much upon legitimate freedom, as in times past when orthodoxy claimed and exercised not only spiritual but temporal power.

The present agitation, however, centres round the teaching of religion in State schools. This subject has led to such a colossal correspondence, often from most influential quarters, and has for months filled so many columns in "The Times," that the topic of religious education has been brought to the notice of thousands who would otherwise have missed it altogether.

Religion can, however, be taught not as a dogma or theology, but as what is termed "comparative religion." Probably most Rationalists and Freethinkers would approach the subject from this point of view, which brings it within the lines of *history*, and puts no bar to the intellectual freedom of years of discretion. For the student, or even for the general reader who dips into the subject, Sir James Frazer has opened up a vision which as regards the origins and history of religious beliefs and practices must leave little ground uncovered. With regard to the outlook of children it might be difficult even now to better some of the books written many years ago (now perhaps mostly out of print) by Edward Clodd. One of them, "The Childhood of Religions," is before me now. It was written in 1891 and translated into four other languages.

Bible education as a part of general culture need not apparently be excluded by the non-orthodox so long as it is treated as history or records, often inaccurate, of bygone ages and not as a revelation of theology and dogma.

To sum up a position just roughly outlined here. It must be admitted that the teaching of religion to the young must always be something of a problem, which adults may often feel disposed to shirk altogether. I have merely made a few suggestions towards meeting questions which may force themselves to the front, even to some extent in connection with the sound educational work of the Ethical Societies which leave theology out altogether.

Mr. Amery, speaking at Manchester on November 19, alluded to the "loose thinking" often indulged in about problems in India. Could there be a more striking instance of the aptitude for escaping plain issues than that which meets us in connection with religious education and scientific revelation?

Sooner or later, however, education must include the subject of religion. Happily for the young, they need no longer be terrorised by its penalties—hell fire and the like—which were calculated, both as regards young and old,

"So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls."

LADY (ROBERT) SIMON.

OF THE WORD STICKS

IN dealing with the subject of *sticks*, the printer should have pride of place!

His composing *stick* is mightier than the sword! In it he composes or arranges type by the *stickful*—*sticks* type! A *stickful* is as much as a *stick* will hold. The matter is then lifted and placed on the galley. For locking up matter in a chase or galley, furniture, known according to position as *head-stick*, *foot-stick*, *side-stick*, or *gutter-stick* (the latter being between the pages), is made use of.

Without these *sticks* the printer's craft would be seriously handicapped.

For the printer's *sticks*, therefore, we must be prodigal of thanks!

The word *stick* used as a noun may mean a stupid, obstinate person; a small branch of a tree; or piece of wood—a rod, a wand, a walking-stick—or anything resembling a *stick*, e.g., a *stick* of sealing wax.

But whether the word *stick* be used as a noun or a verb, there is no mistaking its meaning. For instance: We learn from the Bible:—

How "bones that are not seen may *stick* out" (Job xxiv. 2);

How "the scales of Leviathan are joined to one another, they *stick* together" (Job xli. 17);

How the arrows of the Lord *stick* fast in David (Ps. xxxviii. 2);

How the Lord put hooks in the jaws of Pharaoh, and caused the fish of his rivers to *stick* to his scales (Ezek. xxix. 4);

How a magnetic *stick* drew an axe head from the bottom of a river (2 Kings vi. 5-6);

How one's skin may become withered like a *stick* (Lam. iv. 8);

Why the prophet wrote upon *sticks* the names of certain tribes (Ezek. xxxvii. 16-20);

The fate of the man who gathered *sticks* on the Sabbath day (Num. xv. 32-36);

How a widow woman went gathering two *sticks*, before she died, met the prophet Elijah, and lived happy ever after (1 Kings xvii. 10-16);

How a viper protested against Paul laying a bundle of *sticks* on the fire (Acts xxviii. 3).

Stick-slings were the first and earliest form of sling. A *stick* was split at one end to form a notch, in which it was placed.

Stick-and-groove: One of the simplest machines for producing fire—a blunt-pointed *stick* is run along a groove of its own making in a piece of wood lying on the ground.

Darwin says that the very light wood, *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, was alone used for the purpose in Tahiti. A native would produce fire in a few seconds (Tylor Early Hist. Mankind (Ed. 1878), P. 237).

Gods, whether of mental or material construction, according to the Bible, can be but idols (See Isa. xl. 18-26; Ps. l. 21; Romans xi. 33-34).

Thoreau tells of the Pacific Islander who, in a few minutes, can make a god out of a piece of wood which often frightens him out of his wits. Just as many civilised men make gods out of their own wooden heads!

The Trinity finds representation as a stem with three branches—all *sticks*—the stem not accounted for.

Darwin tells how stones and *sticks* are made use of by animals as implements and weapons ("Descent of Man," Chapter iii).

Knotched *sticks* were once used as memory aids:—

Women, when pregnant, in Northumbria, kept *nick-sticks*, marking them monthly, when they remembered!

Knotched sticks, message sticks in Africa and Australia; also used for reckoning, they were current late in the 19th century as tallies for Exchequer Accounts, such tallies, representing in the Excise £136,422, were burned in the 1834 Fire of London.

To *stick* expresses more than to *cleave*. When the Psalmist asked the Lord to let his tongue *cleave* to the roof of his mouth (Ps. cxxxvii. 6), he used the verb discriminately. That which *cleaves* is easily separable, while that which *sticks* is so joined as to render the bodies inseparable.

Finally: When militancy becomes chronic, the civil part of Society becomes merely the commissariat supplying the wants of the militant part, and is subjected to the same discipline (vide Spencer).

In short, the dominant retrogressive forces are now digging trenches, which they are expected ultimately to occupy for three years, until torpidity manifests itself sufficiently to make traditional government again possible.

The future hides in it trouble for reformers.

It is, therefore, the duty of Freethinkers to buckle on the full armour of vigilance, and, having done all, to "stand up, and *stick* up!" GEORGE WALLACE

MUSIC AND PICTURES

MUSIC and pictures are two of the mediums which man has employed during his long process of evolution to express his emotional reactions to what he has seen and heard around him. Men of the Stone Age made crude drawings of animals and humans on the nearby rocks, and ever since then those with artistic minds have recorded their impressions, pictorially, in one way or another. Music came into being in much the same way and for the same reason—to enable the observant and emotional to set down, in some permanent form, their response to those things which came within their ken.

And we of the modern world have benefited enormously in consequence. We respond—emotionally—to a piece of music or to a picture according to our light and understanding, and what it means to us. If we are, comparatively speaking, undeveloped musically—with little or no ear for good music, in other words—we shall not enjoy Bach's Passions or a Beethoven Symphony, but will prefer jazz or ragtime stuff. Similarly, if we have no eye for art a picture by (say) Michelangelo or Rembrandt will not appeal

to us, but the "flicks" will. It is all a matter of our mental and emotional make-up. But, provided we are not altogether cold and undemonstrative, we can get a great deal of pleasure from both music and pictures—if we try as we should.

Appreciation of art of any sort does not come in response to a card invitation, so to speak, but is, generally speaking, a matter of slow growth. Prodigies make their appearance now and then, and they are not all born of musical parents or the fairly well-to-do; but they merely go to prove the general rule, which is, that to be appreciative one's ear must be trained to good music, just as one's eye must be educated to appreciate pictorial art in its highest form.

By watching the reactions of an audience to a programme of music and pictures one can make a rough estimate of the different types of people present: they will respond to the various items according to their individual artistic development. For instance, if it is a cinema show and there is a love scene with soft, haunting music, the young couples—or some of them—will be sure to nestle up to each other; if, on the other hand, cowboys appear and give an exhibition of fine horsemanship and sharpshooting, the youths present will, as likely as not, become excited and—mentally at any rate—take part in the show.

It is precisely the same anywhere—no matter whether it is, for example, a promenade concert or an exhibition of paintings or sketches by some of the most famous artists of the day; we react to what we see and hear in accordance with our mental and emotional development. In other words, our emotional responses betray our character, no matter what we may do to hide our feelings. Sooner or later we "give ourselves away." We amateur artists do this, in fact, by such a simple act as putting a favourite record on the gramophone or hanging a picture on the wall. We do either or both of these things because they mean something to us—recall someone or some pleasant experience to us—and we react emotionally to them in consequence.

Of course, the clever propagandist knows all this, and he fashions his speech and actions accordingly. No matter who or what he is, or what he has to sell—be it pills or potions or some particular brand of religious, political or economic philosophy—he plays upon the emotions of the people—or he does not meet with much success. He puts his story across to suit his purpose, with as much eloquence and as dramatically and as *musically* as he can, and he warns his listeners of the dangers they run if they do not accept his advice, or as someone—the writer believes it was G. R. Sims—once said:—

"He softens them down and smoothes them, and then when they are ripe for seed.

He paints them an awful picture—the end of their evil deed. . . ."

Hitler has been a past-master at the game. He and his publicity manager, Goebbels, have used these cultural instruments—music and pictures—not for the benefit of the people but for their enslavement, with the dreadful results the whole world knows.

But the prostitution of any art—no matter whether it is music or pictures, sculpture, singing, dancing or any other form—cannot go on for ever, as a good many know to their cost. The more enlightened a people become the less likely are they to permit those forms of emotional expression which they value highly to become debased—a lesson which theatre managers and film producers have had to learn. We may—any one of us—at times be momentarily attracted by the crude and inartistic, and (if we are honest with ourselves we have to admit this) we may even laugh at it, but we only respond—and can only respond—unreservedly to the best. Which is not an expression of snobbery, but a revelation of human nature, a statement of fact.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE LATE G. W. FOOTE

SIR,—I have been commissioned by the Rationalist Press Association to write a life of the late G. W. Foote. I shall be very grateful if any readers of "The Freethinker" who possess letters, etc., of G. W. Foote will be so good as to lend them to me for use in this connection. They will be copied and promptly returned. My address is 5, Frenchay Road, Oxford.—Yours, etc., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

"FATHER DOGMA"

"You are old, Father Dogma," the thinker said.
"Men once looked to you for the Light;
But you lied, and made reason stand on her head—
Do you think at your age it was right?"

"In our youth," the Church Father replied to his "Son,"
"We feared that Mankind had a brain;
But now that we're perfectly sure he has none,
Why, we fool him again and again!"

"You are old," said the youth, "as I've mentioned before,
And have grown most repulsively fat,
Yet you kick common sense right out at the door—
Pray, what is the reason in that?"

"In our youth," said the priest, "we took many knocks,
And kept superstition quite supple
By the use of indulgences—sold by the box—
Allow me to sell you a couple!"

"You are old," said the youth, "and your creed is too
weak

To stand any question into it;
Yet you preach it at least one day in each week—
Pray, how do you manage to do it?"

"In our youth at Nicea, we made it the law,
We argued each point with much strife;
And the muscular strength it gave to our jaw,
Has lasted the rest of our life."

"You are old," said the youth, "one would hardly suppose
Your creed, as successful as ever;
Original sin now, that's one of its woes,
Scientifically—not very clever!"

"I have answered three questions, and that is enough,"
Said the Father, "don't give yourself airs!

We've bluffed for two thousand years on such stuff—
The Church says—so question, who dares."

(With no apologies to Lewis Carroll—he'd enjoy it!)

D. LE ROY.

A BIT TOUGH!

Two ignorant loafers went to a revivalist meeting and heard the preacher nearly strangle himself in telling the story of the terrible trial and sufferings of Jesus Christ. The untutored men were overwhelmed with grief and left the meeting almost in despair. Outside they met a harmless Jew and immediately set about him. They gave him an awful wallop and, when nearly half-dead, bruised and bleeding from every pore, the Jew at last managed to stagger to his feet, he gasped: "What is this for—what have I done to deserve this?" One of the hooligans then asked: "Are you the bloke who killed Christ?" "Not at all, sirs," pleaded the Jew, "that happened nearly 2,000 years ago." "Oh, well," said one of the toughs, "it's the first we've heard of it."

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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, Professor G. E. G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D., "The Philosophy of the Transient."

COUNTRY

Indoor

Accrington (King's Hall Cinema): 6-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON, "Science, Religion and the New Order."

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

Burnley (Barden Club): 11-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON, "An Old Story."

Glasgow Branch N.S.S. (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street): 3-0, Mr. A. COPLAND, "Christ's Teachings."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate): 3-0, Dr. C. A. SMITH, a Lecture.

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