

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

Vol. LXI.—No. 52

Sunday, December 28, 1941

Price Threepence

CONTENTS

Views and Opinions—The Editor...	581
Absurdities of the Oath—C. G. L. DuCann ...	583
Acid Drops ...	583
Sugar Plums ...	585
Badgering Our Soldiers—H. Cutner ...	586
Just William—R. H. Rosetti ...	587
"The Chosen People"—F. J. Corina ...	587
Sunday Lecture Notices ...	588

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

All in War

AMONG the earliest articles I contributed to this journal—it must be over forty years ago—was one dealing with the nature of war. It was partly a protest against hiding the real character of war by the artificial division of a people into combatants and non-combatants. The division was always a misleading one; to-day it has become criminally false. An army at war is a nation or a people at war. Even in the most primitive forms of warfare the whole of a tribe is at war, not a section of it. The soldier is the civilian who uses a bow and arrow, or who shoulders a gun, or a pike, rides a horse, sails a battleship or drives an aeroplane. The development of modern warfare does not destroy this generalisation; it merely emphasises it. Germany invented nothing new when it declared totalitarian war; without intending to do so, she simply stripped war of all camouflage. To-day an army is more obviously a part of the civilian population than it ever was. If Germany could paralyse our workshops it would win the war. The man behind the gun is the one who fires the shot, but the man behind the man behind the gun is an essential part of the shooting. If we may be permitted an apparent paradox we may say that the essential fighting front is behind.

This is now so obviously true that further demonstration is unnecessary. All that is needful is to indicate the fact. And the latest conscription measures have done this. It has not only conscripted the whole of the male population, it has started on the female half. In the days when the majority of the people of this country—led by all the Churches—engaged in blackguarding Russia, scorn and contempt was poured upon the Soviet for enlisting women. It was an example of the terrible excesses to which a godless government would go. To-day we are imitating Russia, recognising that war is an "all in" matter. If we proclaim to "high heaven" the essentially evil character of war it is not because war has suddenly developed a new character; it has not. It is only because war has—in terms of modern equipments—become more deadly. We are aghast at the number killed, not at the nature or quality of the killing. Generally we have yet to recognise that killing can never be collective. It must always be as individual as birth.

War and the Churches

In the discussion that took place in the House of Lords on the latest measures of conscription, the Archbishop of Canterbury was in a very gracious mood. He might, of course, have said nothing and have justified his silence by saying that we were all God's children, and it was not his business, as God's chief bugler in this country, to help one lot of God's children kill another lot. But he was in gracious mood, and he informed the House that he was prepared to consider, if proposals were put before him, permitting a certain number of his clergy taking part in the war to the extent of giving some of their time to office work or to work on the land. And not one of the Lords present had the courage to damn his impudence. For the impertinence of it was supreme. Males almost up to seventy are open to conscription. Girls and women are also liable to be taken as part of the war machine. Homes are being broken up, and businesses ruined—provided they are not very large concerns. Students have their careers stopped, and perhaps ruined. The people generally are surrendering liberties it has taken hard and long fighting to secure; the chief of the largest and best paid of the Ju-ju army calmly announces that he is prepared to consider a proposal permitting a limited number of priests to spend a few hours weekly at a desk or to take part in agricultural work. But the proposal must not seriously interfere with the business of which he is the managing director. We have a State within the State, and the chief of that State will not permit any of his army to be seriously interfered with. His recruits must be permitted to finish their training at whatever cost to the rest of the community.

Why may not the clergy be subject to the same responsibilities that face other sections of the community? There are plenty of elderly clergymen about; why may not all others up to, say, forty, be subject to the same duties that apply to citizens in general? Or why cannot the churches, as we have already suggested, be rationed as food and clothing, as freedom of movement and action are rationed, for the duration? We have one law for the clergy and another for the citizen. That is a very old principle, it must be admitted. It dates to the most primitive forms of human society, to a time when the medicine man really did something, when he was in touch with the tribal Ju-ju, and brought food and success to the tribe, warded off illness, and made himself generally useful. To-day, so far as a high priest is concerned he is as useful as a deflated balloon. No one is the better for his being where he is, and certainly no one would suffer from his absence. Can anyone tell the world what it is that men such as the Archbishops do which cannot be done by men who do not speak in the name of God?

Why are not the clergy, so far as military service is concerned, subjected to the same obligations as other men? It cannot be because the Church forbids war. It does not. Never in the whole history of the Church has it branded war as sinful. It has glorified it and moralised it. Its cathedral has in it the effigies of more soldiers—officers—than it has effigies of saints. It is true it praises peace, but so does the

soldier. It preaches kindness, but so does the soldier. It talks of love and brotherhood, but so does the man in the street. Ancient Rome had a temple devoted to the god of war and another devoted to the god of peace, but when a war was on the Romans had the decency to close the temple of peace. Christianity had only one god; he played both parts—and the Christian priesthood took double pay. If anyone is curious enough to note how many wars this Christian nation has been engaged in—big wars and little wars during the past century and a half he will be astonished at the rarity of peace. It is true that most of these were little wars, but big or little, good or bad, justifiable or unjustifiable, they have all been blessed by the Church. Even our hymns are filled with military figures of speech. It was not without justification that Brigadier-General Crozier, who did good service in the last war, said: "The Christian Churches are the finest blood-lust creators we have, and of them we made free use." The small tradesman may appeal for exemption in vain, and the little business he has built up by years of labour may be ruined, but the clergy claim exemption from military service—and get it. Why?

It cannot be because the clergy really believe in the power of non-resistance. That idea is repudiated by all the clergy save a mere handful. Certainly the New Testament has such teachings as non-resistance to evil, and we are counselled to turn one cheek when the other is smitten. We are also told that they who live by the sword shall perish by the sword, which is decidedly not true. Many who wield the sword may perish by it, but most of those who live by it suffer the least from its consequences. That teaching is true neither in theory nor practice. The only Christian sect that has practised a modified non-resistance is the Quakers, and they have always been a small and are now a declining body. Christian communities have never been distinguished by an exercise of that meekness which overcomes hatred.

The Christian Church has never even attempted the ethical and philosophical heights that were reached by Buddhism. In its purity Buddhism deliberately sets the gods on one side. It knows nothing of their being or of their activities. It asserts unflinchingly that consequences follow conduct, and that from these consequences there is no escape. It will have nothing to do with the miserable figure of the "sinner" whining his way into salvation at the last moment.

But it is of the very essence of Christianity that though your sins be as scarlet yet an act of mere belief will make your character as white as snow. The catechisms and confessions of faith are full of this. They lay it down categorically that just as the thief on the cross accompanied Jesus to heaven merely because he believed in Jesus, so a lifetime of villainy may be wiped out by a death-bed repentance and an act of faith. The story of the thief on the cross is a direct denial of causation in conduct, and it touches the lowest level of ethical teaching. To-day apologetic Christianity is lavish in the use of the language of ethics, but while it remains true to itself it cannot rise higher than the ethics of the thieves' kitchen.

Why then this claim for the immunity of Christian preachers from military service? Well, there are two reasons for it. The first is that a separation of the Ju-ju man from the ordinary people is very ancient. It takes us straight back to the jungle. In a way it is a defence measure, just as the ceremonial approach to a king is a survival from the time when the king was an incarnation of the tribal god, and contact with him involved danger to the ordinary man. As Frazer

has somewhere put it, the priest and the king are "live wires" and need insulating before they can be touched with profane hands. The king is still a "sacred" person, so is the priest.

But war and the medicine-man are very closely associated in primitive warfare. A spear may kill, but it is the "Mana" in the spear that does the damage. A man may fight, but again it is the "spiritual" preparation that is all important. Even to-day we have the flags of regiments consecrated, and battleships are blessed at the launching. We have travelled a long way from the primitive savage in many directions, but there are many tracks that lead us back direct to him. Cost of costume is the only fundamental difference between the robes and wand of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the make-up of the primitive priest. Take the following from the indispensable Frazer:—

Warriors are conceived by the savage in an atmosphere of spiritual danger that constrains them to practise a variety of superstitious observances quite different in their nature from those rational precautions against foes of flesh and blood. . . . When the Maoris went out on the war-path they were sacred and taboo in the highest degree. . . . When the Israelites marched forth to war they were bound by certain rules of ceremonial purity identical with rules observed by Maoris and Australian black-fellows on the war-path.

There are pages of similar descriptive matter taken from many parts of the world, and all pointing the moral upon the survival of which our existing medicine men live. In the museums of the future models of the Bishops, Archbishops, and common ministers of religion will certainly occupy the same sections that are occupied by Australian black-fellows, primitive Red Indians, and the native medicine men of the South Sea Islands.

But in these (culturally) far off days the gods appeared to do something, they were indeed indispensable. To-day the official representatives of the gods are changed in their attitude and in their language. They tell us that we are suffering because we have forgotten God. But men do not mislay gods while they believe in them, neither do they ignore gods while they appear to be doing something. Gods die of inactivity, and their place is taken by other forces that for good or evil "get there." But whether we ignore God, or forget God, makes little material difference. We do not depend upon him. Of course, the professionally interested in God continue to "do their stuff," they order days of national prayer, or days of humiliation, they insist that victory depends upon God, while Beaverbrook and Bevin and Churchill shriek that this war will be won in the workshops. Even the religious primitiveness of Lord Halifax joins in the chorus. And meanwhile the first ray of decisive hope that came to us was through Atheistic Russia, which broke the tradition of German invincibility. Russia which has officially ignored God altogether, and a nation which was being denounced only the other day by all the Churches in the country as one with which we British people could not associate on terms of equality.

What I have said may explain the impudence of the Archbishop of Canterbury demanding that his army shall be relieved from a form of service to which all others are subject. Mark, I say "explains," not justifies. The impertinence remains. But the Archbishop knew the Lords, and the Lords knew the Archbishop.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ABSURDITIES OF THE OATH

SOME years ago I wrote an article in a Christian newspaper, the "Challenge," entitled, "I Swear by Almighty God," in which I pointed out the folly and wrongness of the religious oath as administered in Courts of Law. Both from the Christian and Atheistic standpoints, the exacting of an oath is to be condemned.

If Christians really and whole-heartedly believed in the God they profess as the Ineffable and Omnipotent Being, would they insult "His Holy Name" by using it over trifles as they do daily in Courts of Justice? Would they swear upon a Holy Book which contains the adjuration, "Swear not"? Would they say, "I swear by Almighty God that I will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" (the usual Court formula), when no man knows, and no man can tell, "the whole truth" about the simplest set of circumstances? In any event, the rules of evidence will not allow the Christian (or any other) witness to tell the "whole" truth. In short, the oath as it stands is in Disraelian phrase, "an organised hypocrisy." Only lack of thought or fear of convention makes any honest, or any honourable or any really religious man, submit to it. Only a cynical contempt for what, to him, is mere meaningless mumbo-jumbo would induce an Atheist to "take the oath."

Indeed no Atheist need. For the law of England provides that if a man has no religious belief, or if a man's religious belief is opposed to oath-taking, he need not take any oath. He can "affirm" instead. That is to say, instead of repeating the foolish oath-formula (which is monstrous to real religionists and nonsensical to Atheists), he merely says "solemnly and sincerely" that he will speak the truth.

Fancy a sincere Christian or a sincere Jew calling upon his Almighty God when as a witness in Court he is about to make some such trifling statement as the following:—

"I saw the plaintiff's car. It was driven slowly—between 15 and 20 miles per hour. It was on its correct side of the road and quite close to the kerb. Defendant's car was doing between 40 and 50 miles an hour, zig-zagging well over the crown of the road, and appeared to be out of control. There was a collision. After the crash the plaintiff said to the defendant: 'You damned fool! You must be mad to drive like that. It was all your fault.' The defendant, who was unsteady and swaying when he got out of his car, said, 'Go to hell!' and kept repeating it. His speech was slurred, he smelt strongly of drink and began to vomit. A policeman came, and as he was helped to the police van the defendant began to sing: 'Another Little Drink Wouldn't Do Us Any Harm.'"

Yes, fancy a Christian finding it necessary that his fellow-Christian should bring their own Almighty Lord of the Universe into such a trifling recital! Before he can be trusted to speak the truth! Now a mere Atheist needs no oath. Even a Christian Judge and jury will take his mere word for it.

Even more ironical circumstances surround daily oath-taking in Court. The God the Father of the Christians and the God of the Jews is the same Being—according to Christians at least. Yet this same God likes a Jew to swear with a hat on his head and a Christian to swear in a hatless condition. If God were conceived as a Mad Hatter, one could understand that. As it is, with God conceived as the greatest of all Beings, what is one to make of this ridiculous and infantile play-acting?

Apparently, too, Almighty God likes womankind also to be hatted, like Jewish witnesses. But if he could see some women witnesses' headgear! As one who has sat in Court on innumerable occasions and looked with astonished eyes on thousands of women witnesses' hats, I can testify—without an oath—that there is no contrivance so ludicrous or so extraordinary that some woman will not wear it upon her head. A woman will wear a thing that will make a cat laugh, or a strong man weep, or beholders call upon the Deity, in perfect unconsciousness of its effect. She will wear a hat that looks like an inkpot or an octopus, or a leg of mutton, or a bird's nest, or nothing on the earth below or in the heavens above or in the waters under

the earth; and any such hat renders her and her oath acceptable to her God and the Court of Law. Any hat will do. What her God (and the English Court) cannot accept is female hatlessness. Yet for my part I cannot help thinking that most women look better in diamond tiaras or in their own hair than in many—if not most—hats.

Consider the rules of oath-taking: hats for women and Jews, hatlessness for male Christians, and see what sense there is in it. Consider, too, the oath formula: "The whole truth and nothing but the truth," and consider what sense there is in that also. Reflect that if you, having taken that devastating oath, try to talk the "whole truth" you will be promptly stopped and sharply rebuked either by the presiding Judge or magistrate, or by learned counsel, who will say: "Don't go on—answer the question," or "That's not evidence: we can't have that and don't want it," or "You are not asked about that. Only answer the questions." For in English Courts a witness may not give his evidence spontaneously and tell "the whole truth" (in spite of his oath). He must give it responsively, i.e. in answer to questions.

A cynical Atheist once urged that the oath in Courts of Law was necessary to frighten Christians into telling the truth! Certainly it does not stop Christians, or pseudo-Christians, from committing perjury. For it is notorious that perjury is rampant in all our Courts. I suggest, however, that the oath is utterly unnecessary and might well be abolished. In the circumstances of giving evidence it is a blasphemy if you believe in God and it is nonsense if you disbelieve in God. Yet how few witnesses have the courage to say: "I claim the right to affirm." Not one in a thousand, in my experience (which is a pretty extensive experience of all sorts of Courts—civil, criminal, military, first-instance, appellate and others less easily classified).

And why are English witnesses so chary of affirming instead of swearing? Merely because the oath is the conventional procedure. They are afraid of being different (the Englishman's bug-bear). They are anxious to do what is "the done thing." ("It's not done," as public school-boys used to say, and probably still say, for all I know to the contrary.) They do not like to appear cranks. So the witness enters the unfamiliar witness-box like a fish out of water and is curtly adjured to "take the oath." An official shoves the Testament into his hand and says: "Repeat after me the words on the card," and hypnotised by the Court atmosphere, terrified at all eyes being upon him, conscious of a public ordeal impending, the wretched witness falls into: "I swear—by Almighty God—"

Ten seconds later he has forgotten all about Almighty God and is occupied in keeping his head by answering questions in the unfamiliar publicity of the witness-box. In another ten seconds he has also forgotten "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and only remembers for which case he is scoring, or trying to score.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

ACID DROPS

A REVOLUTION on a small scale has broken out in the English Church. The bishops are asking for greater power in removing a parson from his church. Some of the parsons have combined and are demanding that bishops should give up their palaces and be content with a salary of not more than £2,000 a year. At present the salaries of bishops run from £2,250 to £9,000. Things have looked up since the time of the alleged founder of Christianity, who had not anywhere to rest his head.

It would be very interesting and rather instructive if someone would compile a short history of the Bishops of the Church of England and their relations to what is known as the "upper classes." We fancy that it would display a fine example of the rulership of this country by a particular social group, and in return the bishops use their influence on behalf of members of the same limited group to the more important and better paid political offices. We hope that someone will take the hint. It might be a useful help to the creation of a democracy.

The "Catholic Herald" says: "One of the major scandals of so-called tolerant and liberal States has been the conscription of the clergy for fighting, a mode of action that conflicts absolutely with their spiritual calling, and there is no doubt that the British Government would never attempt to enforce so blatant an act of injustice." But the clergy do not hesitate to urge other people to go to war, and many of them have acted as recruiting agents for war. They also guarantee the complete justification of many wars. We should much like to know the ethical difference between fighting one's self and urging others to fight? We can appreciate a man who says, "I believe war to be unjustifiable and wrong in any set of circumstances" which may require a very high order of courage—but we have only contempt for the man who encourages others to war and then claims exemption for himself on "conscientious" grounds.

There is a certain type of preacher in the Christian pulpit, not quite so common as once was the case, who persistently mistakes blackguardism for argument. For the reason of its comparative scarcity to-day we note the following. The Rev. S. Ernest Conn is the minister of the Leyton Methodist Church (Mary Fletcher Memorial), with the condescending proviso that there are people interested in reform; he goes on to say:—

"A boozy, gambling, foul-mouthed, stupid fellow, however much he might argue as a reformist, was no credit to any movement, but a man with his wits sharpened and his soul uplifted by association with religion would be a credit."

We cite this because we thought this type of blackguardism was no longer to be met with, and Mr. Conn gives us all the interest that a naturalist feels when he discovers a specimen of what he believed to be an extinct species. We advise the Methodist Church of Leyton to take great care of Mr. Conn. In his way he is worth taking round for exhibition.

By what we have just said we do not mean that religious blackguardism is dead. It is not. But it takes a more polite form. The current method is to admit that in point of general behaviour non-Christians, even Atheists, may be quite admirable characters, but they owe this to their Christian environment or to the unconscious positing of the existence of God. That is, they save the non-Christian's character at the expense of his intelligence. One theory is not really intellectually better than the other, that is, but it sounds pleasanter and helps the modern preacher to avoid being classed with the type represented by Mr. Conn.

The "Sunday Times" recently printed a selection of hymns for airmen. One of our readers sends the following, which he thinks might well be added to the list:—

O God of love attune our eyes
To shoot the Nazis from the skies;
Burn them alive in fiery shrouds
While you watch o'er us in the skies.
God grant that we may smash to earth
Each enemy of Nazi birth,
To bloody pulp in freedom's aid
Those who were in your image made.

We are pleased to see that the Executive Committee of the National Education Association condemns altogether the continuation of the dual system (schools that are created for sectarian purposes but which are maintained mainly by public funds). It points out that in these schools teachers who do not belong to the religious group find posts closed to them and promotion denied them. It protests against the repeal of the Cowper-Temple Clause. We are pleased to see that some teachers are alive to this plot hatched by the clergy and the Board of Education. It would be an unjustifiable step in normal times; to take it while we are in the middle of a world war and by a Government that has no representative quality—save that of attempting to win the war—makes one fear for the beginning of a real democracy while such people rule the roost.

Stroud has decided against Sunday cinemas. There are, of course, large numbers in Stroud who do desire it, but the clergy have the last word. The Council listened to a speech from the Rev. Watson. He spoke for the Free Church Council and protested against Sunday cinemas because the F.C.C. believed that children should be brought up with a "Christian outlook," and Sunday cinemas were detrimental to the F.C.C. outlook. So the Stroudians are to remain piously miserable on Sundays.

Someone might have reminded the Council that the people of Italy, our avowed enemies, were brought up with a Christian outlook. So were the Spaniards, our enemies in fact, and they may soon be openly so. The whole of the peoples of Europe have a Christian history behind them, and look at the state of the world. But the Stroud Council takes its marching orders from the F.C.C.

Our very unctuous temperance cranks will be, we hope, more than astonished to learn the close connection the worship of "Our Lady" has with pubs. This devotion manifested itself, it appears, in many old inn signs. For example, the famous one, the "Pig and Whistle," was originally the Anglo-Saxon *Pige-Wassail*, which means the "Virgin's Greeting." The Angel's visit to Mary resulted in other inns being called "The Angel," and so on. Other pubs gave their allegiance to saints like St. George—hence we get "The George Inn" or "The George and Dragon." It's all blasphemous enough to make a good Christian forswear a mild and bitter for ever.

But the relation between stimulants, narcotics, etc., is of a much wider and more deeply important nature than that indicated. Among primitive peoples the eating of certain herbs is a common practice and is valued because of the hallucinations, or spirit of exultation, they produce. Readers will find many illustrations of this, drawn from all parts of the primitive world, in the Editor's "Religion and Sex." To these methods of gaining contact with the supernatural may be added the world-wide religious practice of fasting, solitary meditation in conditions that lead to the same end, and the unhealthy solitariness of religious celibates. Tylor, Frazer and most other anthropologists have given hundreds of illustrations to the same end. Take away these things from the history of religion, and the main operative forces disappear. The current religious drivel that passes with so many as a philosophy of religion is nothing more than an exploitation of the social qualities of man expressed in terms of religion that has lost its real foundations.

We are pleased to see that our constant assertion that there has been a plot between certain members of the Government and leaders of the Churches is attracting attention. We have noted several references to it in well-known journals, and some with reference to source. We wonder when some member of Parliament will have the courage to ask a question.

Mr. F. E. Harrison, who writes as a member of the Educational department of the Department of Education, Blackpool, says, in "Education":—

"It is astonishing to me to find members of the teaching profession who claim the right to teach Christianity according to 'heretical' rather than 'orthodox' notions. Is it not time to recognise the fact that those who speak for Christianity must have the complete right to say what is to be taught—always safeguarding the rights of minorities and freedom of conscience.

This is just hypocrisy. How can the rights of minorities and freedom of conscience exist if the law compels all people to send their children to schools that are saturated with Christian teaching and largely—officially or unofficially—under the control of the Christian clergy? How many teachers will stand out for *their* liberty of conscience? They would find it difficult to get an appointment and promotion would be out of the question. At the least, the maturing of the plot would, as we have often said, ensure a lower grade of teachers and a poorly educated people. We should always bear in mind that it is only the desperate situation in which we found ourselves that we have dropped our hostility to Russia.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

[Replies to correspondents held over till next week.]

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

IT is a pity that *all* our Army officers are not instructed that respect to a man's private opinions, at least on matters where he is legally entitled to hold and express them, should be studiously observed. Every soldier in the Army knows that this frequently is not the case where religion is concerned. From time to time we have printed accounts of the manner in which recruits are either induced to begin their career by signing a written lie or are made to suffer for it if they do not. Here is an excerpt from a letter recently to hand which may be interesting:—

"I had joined a new depot and had to go through the rigmarole again. The first job to do when joining a new depot is to report to the new entry office, and I took my turn to give all particulars, and went on until we reached "religion." I stated what I was. A hush fell on the office. "What, no religion!" said the officer. "If you are not C. of E. or R.C. you must be a Mohammedan," and he really was puzzled and sent me to his boss, who then said it did not matter a — what I was as regards religion, and I was duly entered in the books as "No religion." I asked why this was so, and I was told that the book has a heading "Religion," so I followed a previous reader's suggestion and from now on mine is "nun."

"I awaited with interest the following Sunday. I went to church parade and asked an officer to be excused church as I had a "Nun" religion. To my amazement he said I was excused. He told me to make myself scarce and read the Sunday paper. I tottered down to my messroom with my potato-peeler clean and unused!

"It is a pity that all such as myself will not state firmly their religious attitude. I have asked many why they do not and their answers run, "Once you cross the office door you are a marked man, and I won't risk it. So they submit to a ghastly C. of E. on their station cards and identity discs."

This is very amusing, but it is also scandalous. We are trumpeting our desire to restore liberty to the world, but here are religious influences and ignorance combining to rob a man of the elementary right to make a plain and honest statement of his attitude to religion. Some of the officials may be sufficiently ignorant to believe that a man must profess some religion, and their apparently weak sense of intellectual honesty ends in their insisting that some religion must be professed. That the recruit is compelled to sign a false statement does not matter.

There is another point. Making every excuse for the military officials, there remains the clergy associated with the Forces. They know quite well that the kind of thing above described goes on. They know that by religious influences many a man is forced to begging his military career. We

have never heard of a case where a preacher of any denomination has raised a protest against men being induced to make a false statement where religion is concerned. They see men robbed of their legal rights, they know that a false entry has been made, but the interests of their religion comes first, and from the B.B.C. downward—or upward—a falsity of presentation and lying in fact or in suggestion is quite permissible. It is a pity that the magnificent courage shown by men in the three Services should not be as well represented where religious freedom is concerned.

Why does not a committee of men who really do understand a question, and so are qualified to hold a class for instructing, join the B.B.C. staff? For example, on a recent Sunday a question was put why does an owl see in the dark? It commenced with Joad and went through the staff, and not one of them appeared to understand what they were being asked. The real answer is that owls do not see in absolute darkness, neither does any other animal. Some measure of light is necessary for seeing in every case. Owls are able to see in a smaller quantity of light than any other animal, or most other animals. But given absolute exclusion of light, and seeing is impossible. We believe that animals that take to dwelling in complete blackness actually lose their sight.

Another hopeless muddle that any competent psychologist could have better answered was on the nature of intelligence. This was beautifully "muffed" by Joad, and all the others were confused. We did not take down the conversation, but its quality may be gauged by Joad's contribution. He seemed to think that the amount of *knowledge* a man acquired was more or less of a fixed quantity, and that as a man got older his "mind" (spoken of as a "thing") gets packed so full of "facts" until he has no room for new ones. We wonder whether this "Brains Trust" is dominated by alien enemies who wish to hold up the English people to derision? It should be said, however, that the questions are carefully sifted, and nothing of a disturbing character is ever put before the public—and we suspect that only "safe" people are appointed to answer a question.

The Rev. K. C. Scott, Vicar of the Church of the Ascension, Balham, does not take a very cheerful view of the Christian outlook. In his parish magazine he says:—

"From our pulpit a recent preacher was reminding us that, contrary to the impression so many people have, the Church has in recent years been growing in numbers and strength at a greater pace than in any previous period of its history.

"It is important and reassuring to realise this wonderful extension of Christ's Church, because we live in the west, and in the western world the contrary is true. Around us for many years now the tide has been flowing strongly against the Church.

"Each year in this country fewer babies are baptised, fewer go to Sunday school, fewer are confirmed, fewer go to church, fewer receive any adequate instruction in the Christian faith. Seldom, if ever, has the work of evangelisation been more difficult. In many a parish where the parish priest is a gifted preacher and a faithful pastor the congregation for years has been decreasing. In this country churches are abundant, Christian ministers are everywhere, and many varying types of Christian worship—one would have thought to suit all temperaments—are available. Yet so few accept the invitation. The same is true, more or less, all over the western world."

One does not expect this straightforward description of the present-day situation, and its source makes it the more interesting.

Here is a problem worth considering. Assuming a parson never conducted a service until he was asked to do so, how many of the clergy would be in constant employment?

BADGERING OUR SOLDIERS

HOWEVER much we may criticise Church Parade, one fact stands out clearly and that is, so long as it is made compulsory by what are called "King's Regulations," so long will our soldiers be compelled to attend it. Whether there is much or little Church Parade depends very often on the officers—though it must be confessed that many of these gentlemen seem to represent a kind of fundamentalist Christianity which was very popular about the middle of last century. But it is quite a mistake to imagine that religion in the army depends on, or is circumscribed by, Church Parades. The unlucky soldier is not going to be allowed to forget that this is a Christian country and that we are fighting for "the Christian way of life."

It was much the same in the last war. Generally it was the "padre" who took the chair at our concerts or talks. It was, of course, the padre who took out small parties of us to see the local church or cathedral, and who made special endeavours for us to attend a Y.M.C.A. hut for our tea rather than the army canteen for beer. I am not going to say that he ever was a "spoil-sport"; on the contrary, very often the chaplain of any of the sects was quite a decent fellow—as a man. And it is only fair to add that he did not, as far as my own experience goes, force religion on to us. But his very presence was in a way against him; the dog-collar and black "dickey" made it impossible for him to be anything but what he was, the representative of an organised religion—and how well it is organised!

I feel I must again hand it out to them! For before me is a small pamphlet entitled "The War Within the War" (price 6d.), produced by the "Churches' Committee for Supplementing Religious Education among Men in H.M. Forces." As will be guessed, the Presidents of this august body are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, and the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council. The Chairman is Canon Barry, and he is assisted by a long line of chaplains, some "in-chiefs" and others not quite so important. And their job is to see that our soldiers get as much religion as their military duties allow. As the "Prefatory Note" says, "the Home Country seems to provide a unique opportunity for promoting" what is called "the revival of intelligent understanding and practice of the Christian religion by our people and especially by the manhood of the nation now gathered in H.M. Forces."

The booklet is designed for that end with a great deal of thoroughness. It provides a number of subjects for study with accompanying book-lists, and it gives the names of a number of speakers whose job is to "get over" the subjects. In case the army chaplain is not quite up to the mark, hints for speakers are given, and they make, of course only to such inveterate unbelievers as ourselves, very humorous reading. The speakers have to point out "the lack of a sense of God as Christians know Him" and they must try to show that God is "behind everyone and everything." This would take a bit of doing even for a trained theologian; but how the very young and perhaps quite inexperienced padre will marshal his positive proofs for something which some of the greatest Theists that ever lived have stumbled over that would be very interesting to watch.

Then—remember this is for men who have had perhaps a gruelling day training and who are, in consequence, dead tired—the speaker has to help men "to centre their life and thought on One Who is above and yet within" and to elaborate this the challenge is made, "If you take away belief in God in the world to-day, what value in anything is left, what is

there left to live for?" It is a pity that some of the more enthusiastic and even very experienced chaplains seem rarely to meet a convinced Freethinker on this point in front of a very religious commanding officer. Perhaps it is as well, for the C.O. might order the unlucky unbeliever to be shot on the spot, "King's Regulations" notwithstanding.

Thirty-five suggestions for single lectures are given—the usual kind of stuff, e.g., "Christianity and Progress," "God's plan for man," "The Christian task in the post-war world," and so on. It is specially emphasised that "the relevance of the Christian Faith and therefore of the Christian Church in every aspect of the life of men and of society to-day" must be shown as well as exactly where God and the Church come in. I have an idea that not a few padres will be unlucky, and come into contact with some Freethinkers, who will not miss the opportunity to show how easily on these matters, and even if helped by God, the Christian Church can get what is vulgarly called a sock in the neck.

Then the Committee recommend "Study Groups," e.g., "What do Christians believe?" "What is man?" "What do we mean by God?" and similar titles, with sub-headings, all designed to give an interpretation of Christianity to the unhappy soldiers which does not rise much above nonsense. Or if it does, it is exactly the kind of the balderdash we get from our female Salvation Army captains. What interested me in particular, however, was the list of books recommended to fortify the faith of our heroes. I counted the number given, and including cheap books and pamphlets, there are 272, and another 180 "Little Books on Religion" are also recommended. I think it would not be unfair to estimate their cost at nearly £100. Of course, it is not suggested that all these books are absolutely necessary—though when I used to argue with fully believing if very fundamental Christians, they always told me that the principal quality of religion of Jesus was its beautiful simplicity. Even a child of five could fully understand it, and nothing but the Bible, or at least the New Testament, was necessary added to an unlimited amount of faith and a huge capacity for prayer. I was urged always to get on my knees directly the slightest doubt of anything whatever in Christianity gripped me, and God would forthwith put everything right. That was where the superiority of Christianity was so supreme. God always talked to its believers, a thing he never did to those who were still blind in other religions. In any case, they never suggested £100 worth of books were also necessary for salvation.

It is useless to give the titles of the works recommended—they are the usual ones all about God and His Church—it is remarkable how the writers know what our Deity thinks and feels, and how sure they are that he is entirely on the side of British Christianity, mostly of an Evangelistic brand. It is only fair to add, however, that one or two Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox writers are included. After all, God's religion is not confined to one interpretation.

There is in the pamphlet a list of nearly 200 specialist speakers—including Miss Dorothy Sayers and one other lady only—and more names are promised. Very few of them would be willing, I am sure, to debate any of their pet questions with a competent Freethinker, not a soldier, in front of a mixed company of men and women in the army. The awful thought that God might desert them just when the triumph of infidelity was being proclaimed by the wretched unbeliever is enough to deter even the stoutest Christian heart.

It would prove interesting to learn exactly how much success the pretentious Committee are having with

their lectures. Are our soldiers *forced* to attend the meetings? Exactly how many unbelievers or indifferentists have been obliged to see the light? For only solid statistics in favour of the Faith can justify this perpetual religious badgering of men and women, most of whom, we are sure, would prefer, in the time away from military duties, to be left alone.

H. CUTNER.

JUST WILLIAM

AS we entered the open doorway of "The Old Head" the conversation inside almost ceased. The one dog in the room cautiously sniffed us, and we knew we were being optically sniffed and summed up by the human inmates. "The Old Head" was an inn, the only one in a delightful Devonshire village looking its very best in the summer countryside. "We" were three of "they visitors" from London way who had broken in upon the Mecca of local gossip. Our order for three pints of cider was executed with silent courtesy, but a cheery toast to Devonshire and its cider broke the spell, tongues suddenly realised they had been idle and a flood of friendly conversation filled the little room in which we were to spend many pleasant holiday evenings.

A feature of the locals' conversation was its cleanliness, and never did the lady of our party feel she ought not to be there. True there were some swear words, but they were not dragged in offensively; in fact, they acted as verbal condiments to the local vocabulary, as when Fred expressed surprise that auld Bub had taken a cowman's job. Invited to explain his surprise, Fred promptly replied that "they buggers give milk seven days a week." It was a frank, healthy and wholesome reply, and to the point.

There was one outstanding personality among the regulars at "The Old Head." A weatherbeaten son of the countryside with an impressive physique. There were no lines of mass production about his features which expressed thought, wisdom and warmth. He must have achieved full marks for attendance at the inn and had undisputed monopoly of a particular corner seat at the rough table. Everybody addressed him as William—just William—and nothing more. He had fought in the Boer War, served in the Mercantile Navy and knocked about the world generally. The result was a wealth of anecdotes and a rich tincture of that education acquired in the university of travel, experience and adventure. He was very friendly with bread, cheese, onions and cider, and was never without one or more of them.

William was an attraction to our party of three, and maybe it was mutual, for he always seemed pleased at our efforts to get to him and talk. We soon found he had no time for religion, and whenever we talked Freethought he was all eyes and ears, and it was not long before he began to add his contribution with very evident pleasure.

One of his stories concerned a recent meeting with a major, now retired, under whom he had served in the Boer War. After the usual greetings the major began to be Bible-minded. "Surely you haven't been converted to that rot?" asked William. "I have always read the Bible," replied the major, "and do you know, during my service in the Boer War I prayed to God most fervently each day, and here I am." "Well, sir," said William, "I never prayed, but I shot every bloody Boer I came across, and here I am!" That holiday, like others, came to an end, but I often think of William and the deadening lack of local companionship for his attitude towards religion. And rest assured that every village in the land has its William. With companionship in plenty for things concerning the stomach, with a tolerant hearing and some support for unconventional opinions on economics, politics and even the village preacher, but alone and apparently friendless in his Freethought views, for even if here and there thoughts run in that direction, they must be kept secret because religion is powerful and very spiteful in village life.

In the serio-comic religious turn on the radio, "Ask the Padre," the tame, back-sliding soldier was asked if he realised the benefits Christianity had conferred upon

humanity. The soldier was, of course, quite safe material and unable to ask the padre in reply if the cowardly policy of the Churches in the intellectual life of individuals and society was one of the benefits Christianity had conferred upon humanity, nor could the padre name any mental moral or social benefit to evolving humanity during Christian history which would not, and could not, have been experienced but for Christianity. R. H. ROSETTI.

"THE CHOSEN PEOPLE"

A FRIEND who claims to be a Freethinker has taken me to task because of my recent articles on Jew-baiting. He charges me, in effect, with obscuring the "real Jewish issue" by ignoring the main fault, the real fault, of the Jew; that fault which, he considers, has caused the Jew to be in the position in which he finds himself to-day, and in which he has been for so many centuries.

That fault is that the Jew, by his religious creed and outlook, "by his belief in the Chosen People idea, gives himself a position of racial superiority which causes resentment on the part of others, who dislike this assumption of superiority and do what they can to make the Jew feel inferior."

So these people resist the fault of the Jew by adopting the fault themselves!

To the point, however. I did not ignore this aspect of the question. It will be recalled that I dealt with it as one of the "major crimes" of the Jew. I admit, however, that so important an angle should not have been passed over in a few lines, for upon this fundamental of Judaism rests the real reason for Christian opposition to Jewry, and also rests the material for that basic error of anti-Semitism—the error of making a "racial" difference out of a purely religious difference.

For the sake of the point, we may grant as a fact that the Jewish creed is confined generally to people of Semitic stock or extraction. But this, as a fact, means no more than the other fact that the Christian creed is confined generally to people of European stock and extraction, the American Christians being largely from European original stock.

This general fact (of all varieties of religion) does not, however, give to creeds a "racial" quality. It only helps to explain the history and development of different creeds. There is no more a Jewish race, or Semitic race, than there is a Christian or European race, and the main difference between Jewish Semites and Christian Europeans is of language and religion—neither being a quality which denotes "racial" difference.

The one point that must be grasped in investigating anti-Semitism, as Freethinkers, and with a desire to find the real cause, is that,

in this connection there are only two things in the world—the human race and religion. There is but one human race—Homo Sapiens; there is but one religion—Belief in Gods and Devils.

Fundamentally, mankind is the same the world over; fundamentally, religion is the same the world over. The different nations, or families, of mankind are but the economic, climatic and geographic expressions of the single human race. The different religious creeds of mankind are but the economic, climatic and geographic expressions of the single religious idea. If this is how we understand mankind and religion—and it seems the scientific explanation to me—it will obviously require something much more physical than a religious "conception" to produce a racial variation, degenerate or otherwise.

Families, tribes, nations, whole continents, may develop or discard religious creeds, but biologically they still belong to Homo Sapiens, with his permanent, fundamental characteristics, common to all.

The Jew's religious idea, that he belongs to the Chosen People, and his effort to keep unbroken the line of descent from the Patriarchs, cannot make the Jew a "race superior," however much he may desire it; nor can the idea of the anti-Semite, that the Jew is less than human,

make the Jew a "race inferior," however much the wish be father to the thought.

"A man's a man, for a' that," said Burns. So he is; and until we have a case of biological inheritance of ideas it remains scientifically impossible to justify any assumption of racial differences between men on account of either ideas or social conduct.

All men are conceived in the same way, all are born in the same way. Up to the moment of separate life, Christian, Jew and Gentile-to-be are all alike, plastic human material, mouldable only by subsequent factors for which they cannot be held responsible. At the fountain of life the human race is one, with no basic difference but that of sex, with no racial inheritance except capacity to function. From birth onward differences are apparent; but these are differences of imposition, of social habit, thought and custom. They are a superstructure of cultural, social and religious inheritances added *after birth*, a garment in which the child is clad. Unhappily, it is too often a garment to which the child is fitted, and not the garment fitted to the child.

Hence, from man, society breeds its Jew, who is taught to believe he is of the Chosen People—an acquired belief, with no racial significance whatever—a belief purely religious in structure and idea. Also from man, society breeds its Christian, who is taught to believe that God sent his son, Jesus, to save him, the Christian—another acquired belief, with no racial significance, purely religious and—here is the point—as "arrogant" in conception as that of the Jew. There are others, but these will do.

From the man, society also breeds its Atheist, who is not taught to believe any of these things, but to understand them as faults in the structure of society, the only "racial" significance of the Atheist's outlook being the recognition that such beliefs divide the race against itself, and slow down the common march of progress, in which all mankind has a part to play.

The remedy for this situation? A difficult one, in all sincerity. If the Jewish idea of "Chosen People" has an anti-social effect, then injuring the people who have been taught to believe it cannot help; nor can regarding them as a special "race"; that only strengthens the idea in the minds of those who may believe it.

The Chosen People idea rests on another idea—the God idea. "Chosen" postulates a Chooser, and that Chooser must be God.

So the thing to do is to leave the ignorant "race" question alone and kill, not the Jew as a man, but the God idea on which he bases his Chosen People assumption. The whole basis of Judaism would ultimately crumble if God disappeared, and the "superior" Jew would be just an ordinary man. Grant God and the veracity of the Bible, and you actually help the Jewish assumption.

And that brings us near to the heart of the matter, near to the explanation of anti-Semitism. Just as the Jew can no longer believe God chose him if his God idea be taken away, by the same token the Christian can no longer believe he is one of the "elect." To knock the Chosen People conceit out of the Jew and leave him as a useful, secular citizen, means destroying the God idea. But as most of those who despise the Jew subscribe themselves to the God idea, to do this would mean knocking the theological conceit out of themselves. The Jewish God is so involved with the Christian God(s) that to attack the root of Jewish theology would be dangerous. So the obvious course is to destroy, not God, but those who dare to believe in him in a different way. And for that purpose the ignorant sentiments of "racial" prejudice are invoked in order that a rival sect shall perish, yet God remain.

This sounds silly and is not in accordance with the facts, you say? Let us see. To attack the Jew plainly and openly on the grounds of his religious differences at a time when we claim to afford religious toleration to all sects, would be a risky business and might cause the disinterested majority to sympathise with the Jew from a humane standpoint. So it becomes necessary to introduce artificial "racial" and "social" causes for resentment. This is cunningly done by making him responsible for our economic

and business difficulties. You know the story—high finance, price-cutting, etc.

The effect of this has been to spread the poison of anti-Semitism among normally tolerant people in the business community, people of no little influence in moulding opinion, people whose problems make them susceptible to chasing a scapegoat, rather than to examining a system of society, in their search for a solution of those problems. The better-off anti-Semites seem to regard the Jew as a constant threat to their security, and the poorer people readily accept the consequential idea that the Jews are helping to keep them poor.

The Jewish problem, it seems to me, will have to be faced in this country to a degree hitherto unknown outside the Continent. Already there is serious talk about "liquidating" the Jews after the war.

But at the end of the war, overwhelmed as we shall be by economic and social problems, if we turn to Jew-baiting as a remedy or relief from those problems, we shall succeed only in liquidating ourselves.

The grossest of all superstitions is that a man, by killing or injuring another, can improve either himself or the other.

Superstitions, not men who are Jews, are the enemies of mankind. It is those we must destroy. "In the beginning—God."
F. J. CORINA.

ATHEISM AND LIFE

To all prophecies as to the effects of Atheism on the morality of the future, there is the apt reply that they are prophecies and nothing else. In this respect it is dangerous for the Christian to appeal to history. For while the consequences of Atheism can be no more than a forecast, which may or may not be justified, the record of Christianity is before the world. And we know that the period during which the influence of Christian theism was strongest was the period when the intellectual life of civilised man was lowest, morality at its weakest and the general outlook most hopeless. Religious control gave us heresy hunts and Jew hunts, burnings for witchcraft and magic in the place of medicine. It gave us the Inquisition and the *auto da fe*, the fires of Smithfield and night of St. Bartholomew. It gave us the war of sects and helped powerfully to establish the sect of war. It gave us life without happiness and death cloaked with terror. The Christian record is before us, and it is such that every Church blames the others for its existence. Quite as certainly we cannot point to a Society that has been dominated by Freethinking ideas, but we can point to their existence in all ages, and can show that all progress is due to their presence. We can show that progressive ideas have originated with the least and have been opposed by the most religious sections of Society. What religion has done for the world we know; what Freethought will do for the world we can only guess. But we are confident that as honour is possible without the falsity of religion, as duty may be done with no other incentive than the visible consequences of actions on the people around us, so life may be lived in honour and closed in peace with no other inspiration than comes from the contemplation of the human stream from which we emerge and into which we finally go.—(Chapman Cohen in "Theism or Atheism?")

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

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

COUNTRY

Indoor

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Halls, Northgate, Blackburn): 3-0, Mr. JOSEPH McCABE, "The Papacy and Russia."

Nelson (Clover Hill Guild): Tuesday, December 30. Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.