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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Some New Year Reflections

I DO not think any apology is needed for taking Russia as the subject for my new year notes. Writing twenty years ago I said that for good or evil the Russian revolution was the greatest thing that had occurred in Europe since 1789, and might mark one of the turning points in the history of mankind. In the only sense in which nature produces anything absolutely original it was something new in history. The pity is that nineteen-twentieths of the discussions about Russia have been concerned with the goodness or badness of individuals and how far certain established interests and beliefs were threatened. It was indeed a "reevaluation of values" of the first importance. The British point of view—if it has any right to be honoured by such a phrase—has undergone of late a change. Whether that change will become permanent or not remains to be seen.

Unquestionably the outstanding incident of the past year was the entrance of Russia into the war. But for religious prejudice and financial interests it would have happened earlier. Now that it has happened the world has marvelled at the courage, the pertinacity, the fighting power of the Russian soldier and civilian. The informed and intelligent person would have expected it. The courage and readiness to fight is one of the commonest of human qualities and are amongst the most vital and valuable ones. Psychologically we have the same quality exhibited on a higher level in the fight of ideas and the contest of ideals. What a man fights for is always subordinate to the fact that he is ready to fight for anything that appears to him worth while. The abolition of war would not destroy the fighting quality of mankind; it would lift it to a higher level.

In the case of Russia there were many developed factors at work. There was an intense love of the soil greater, I think, than is felt by any other people in Europe. I have met with men and women of many nationalities. I have found Frenchmen, Britons, Italians and others who preferred another country to their own. I have never met a Russian—and in my earlier days I came into contact with many—who did not desire to return home if political and social conditions had been different from what they were. They were not willing exiles.

The fact worth noting is that the old Russia, the Russia of crude—and obscene—superstitions, of pogroms, of suppression and oppression, found

numerous friends in high places in this country, and met with all the courtesies of a standardised, hollow and dishonest diplomacy. Russia with all its evils was a Christian country. It was the new Russia, which built in the name of man and left God out, that was met with elaborate discourtesies, and was denounced by our churches from one end of the country to the other. Even the age-old story of a practising community of wives was revived for the benefit of the new Russia. Before the present war began there were many who pressed that we should come to agreement with Russia. Winston Churchill silently confessed the error of his earlier years by advising "get Russia." Even after the war began the same coolness was shown. Had Russia been treated with ordinary friendliness up to 1939, an alliance with Russia would have been in being and the world-war might have been avoided. We have paid dearly for our blunders and our bigotry.

It is said that since Russia entered the war against Hitlerism we have done what we could to help her in her struggle. That kind of statement is untrue and ungracious. We did not send guns and aeroplanes to Russia to help her, neither was the United States sending munitions to Russia merely to help. The clergy did not suspend their slanderous opposition from any desire to help Russia. I want to emphasise that word "suspend," for not all the clergy have openly recanted, and the Roman Church is as hostile as ever. It will be remembered that even when Churchill offered "help" to Russia he was led to accompany it with the assurance that he was still opposed to the Russian social system, and from the West End clubs the hope that Russia and Germany would destroy each other filtered down to the East End. The religious Press explained that we had no real alliance with Russia, only an arrangement for a special purpose. And out of England the Roman Church was and is as venomous as ever to "Atheist Russia."

We should have been honest and have said that we and America were "helping," not for the sake of Russia, but because we were fighting Germany through Russia, and the safety of England was being made more certain by the Russian fight with Germany. We are still fighting Germany through Russia, and if the people of this country can escape the toils of the Press and can remember to-morrow what they were told yesterday there may be an opportunity of Russia and Britain becoming firm friends when the war ends.

The Lesson of Russia

But the importance of the possibility of a friendly intercourse with Russia is not necessarily concerned with an adoption of Marxism, or upon the military qualities of the Russian soldier, or even upon the fact that the Russian Government avows a policy of Atheism, and will give religion no privileges whatever. All these things are subservient to, perhaps independent of, another consideration. The entry into the war of Russia as an ally has, through the Press, the cinema, lectures and books worked a revolution in public opinion. The Russia which the Churches, the Press and politicians placed before us was a world of

nearly two hundred millions cowering in terror before a mere handful of Atheistic tyrants, where no one was allowed to read the Bible or attend a Church, a people ignorant and ill-clad, finding their only release from an intolerable tyranny in death.

That Russia has given way to a people who take an unbreakable pride in the country they have helped to create. It is a country of newly built cities and towns which stand where once stood fever-breeding marshes. Huge factories have been built which the people feel are theirs, where an 80 per cent. illiterate public has been converted into a nation of readers of the millions of books that are at their disposal, where health has become the care of the government, and education one of its main concerns. Russia was reborn; its people feel, rightly or wrongly, that the land is theirs in a sense that had no existence before the revolution. The Russians did not wish to escape their new government. They were willing to fight for that and their land and to die rather than submit to a foreign rule.

Now I do not care to the value of a brass button whether this is due to Marxism or not. That, I think, is not the most important aspect of the new Russia. There is a deeper and more important truth involved. For remember that this gigantic change has taken place in the course of a single generation. The truth that Russia has shown the world is not, primarily, the truth of a theory of economics, or the advantage of a particular form of government. The tremendous truth it has shown us is the great evolutionary lesson of the essential pliability of the human group. It has taught us that what slow moving nature takes many generations to accomplish, human energy and ability and knowledge may accomplish in a very brief period. It has dissipated that sacred slogan of the fool, "You cannot alter human nature," and has given us a lesson in the pliability and equality of human nature such as the world has not had since the French revolution of 1789. We need neither think with Russians nor act as Russians to realise that poverty and hunger and filth and bad governments need exist only so long as human nature tolerates them. That conception will not make "men as gods," it will make man more powerful and far better than any god has ever been. It pushes the fawning, self-insulting conception of man urged by the Christian preacher completely into the background. It gives a final reply to the "you can't alter human nature" foolishness.

'Ware the Clergy!

Of course, there are those who will do what they can to prevent mankind learning this lesson. Its complete assimilation would be more powerful in its effects than any lethal weapon designed by man. The Roman Church, for instance, must fight against warm, friendly relations between Russia and "Christian" nations. A single Christian nation might live in friendly relationship with a country such as the present Russia. But the Roman Church claims universality, it has to consider its interests all over the world, and it is part of the central teachings of Rome that these interests come first. In his just issued book, "You Can't be Too Careful," Mr. H. G. Wells says that "the most evil thing in the world to-day is the Roman Catholic Church." We have been saying this for over fifty years—and Bradlaugh was there before us.

But our own clergy will be compelled, also in its own interests, to do what it can safely do to belittle Russia. It was largely the fault of the English churches that the British public, never well informed concerning a foreign people, were so very, very ignorant of the significance of what was going on in Russia that they could swallow almost anything the clergy could say or suggest. The Russian govern-

ment, it was said, had closed the churches, they had broken up the family, children were being brought up as young savages, etc., etc. In contrast to what the British public were told concerning the influence of the Soviet rule on family life, we take the following by a distinguished Englishman and a frequent visitor to Russia before and after the revolution, Professor Pares. He says:—

"There is something particularly inspiring in these young folk of the new Russia. The young seem to count for more than anything else there. . . . Whatever else Communism has done, it has re-created Russian childhood. There are now palaces for children, as for workers and for soviets, and the buildings are palatial, as much in their art as in their dimensions. . . . I have never seen anything so absolutely and healthily joyous as a feast day of the little pioneers (ten to sixteen) in their palace close to the Anichov Bridge. . . . There was a perfect unconstraint, and they all seemed to feel like one enormous family. . . . When talking with older children I got this same impression of the open door. Perhaps I had expected a perfect repetition of propaganda. What I found was very much more self-expression, more thinking, and more independent ideas of their own than before the revolution. . . . The feeling that they imparted to us was a great zest in life and a great hope of the future."

One might overlook descriptions of the new Russia made in the heat of passion, but not one of those responsible for them have had the decency to withdraw or apologise. They now admit there are many millions of Christians in Russia—a fact that no one has ever denied. They say the Russian Government has changed its attitude towards religion and the clergy. It has done nothing of the kind. The clergy that had to be fought was one that was a product of Czarism, ignorant, dirty, drunken, the tool of the Czarist Government, and in close co-ordination with all the enemies of the revolution. Forty years ago I devoted several articles to a picture of the Russian clergy and the part they played in degrading the people. I may repeat the story some day.

But the clergy in even their qualified patronage of Russia can be neither just nor adequately plausible. Let us assume that the government of Russia at some time in the near future actually becomes religious, that it re-establishes the Church, and led by Stalin statesmen go to church. That will not alter the cardinal fact that it was not by or through the Church that Russia was reborn. It was not by the help of God that Russia became a better Russia. The regeneration of Russia was brought about by men and women who had set religion on one side and who had put the belief in gods behind them.

The clergy in this country have indicated the lines on which they will try to counteract the influence of the new Russia. They are making an attack, with the co-operation of members of the government, on the nation's schools. The clergy have had neither the courage nor the skill to make an open attack on our educational system. They wish to outflank it by seeing that the teaching of Christianity shall be an integral part of school life. The old Russian Government ruled partly through the churches. The English Christian leaders hope to secure the aid of all to whom reform is anathema.

That is an astute move—if it succeeds. But although it may succeed in some measure, yet the lessons of Russia will remain. And that essential lesson, I repeat, is not the truth of a particular social or economic theory. Do not let us be led astray by discussions on a particular theory of economics. The cardinal thing is the recognition of the fact that

human destiny lies in human hands. That human nature may be moulded in this way or that. It may blunder along the old path realising almost by chance a little benefit while hanging on to a burden of evil. Or it may boldly take its destiny in its own hands, using the power that knowledge has given us for our benefit and for that of generations to come.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CONCERNING "INTERNATIONALISM"

"A sturdy patriot of the world alone,
And friend of every country—but his own."

—CANNING: Anti-Jacobin.

THE term "internationalism" has been much in vogue, both prior to, and since, the catastrophic upheaval of the war, and chiefly in connection with "ideological" concepts (that is, visionary speculations) of some new world order which is to supersede existing methods of carrying on. Meanwhile, protagonists are in the field with their own peculiar policies in this regard to be imposed on mankind by force. But while the fierce conflict thus raised is in the balance, alike in East and West, eager doctors press in with prophylactics for these disorders after "peace" has been won, as a matter of course, for the right side. Their nostrums vary, yet turn mainly on one point—that a principal cause of conflict is egoistical nationalism and its self-seeking policy for material advantage. So in future, exclusive State sovereignty and purpose is to be subordinate to some super-power which will regulate world resources and affairs in the general interest. These prescribers, however, are not quite at one as to its actual constitution.

Rightly to appraise any proposition for remoulding the existing scheme of things entire, we must clearly have in view the genesis and sequence of these things. Also the implications that normally attach to such terms as nationality, nation, international. Here we may turn to the omniscient Oxford Dictionary. Thus, nationality: a nation, frequently a people potentially but not actually a nation. Illustrations: "It leaves the various existing nationalities of Germany unimpaired" ("Examiner," 1832). "The Saxons in Germany were still a pure nationality" (Stubbs, 1870). Nation: an extensive aggregate of persons so closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history as to form a distinct race or people, usually organised as a separate political State occupying a definite territory. In early examples the racial idea is usually stronger than the political; in recent use the notion of political unity and independence is more prominent. International implies existing, constituted, different nations, or pertaining to the relations between independent countries.

All which suggests that full nationhood is not some fortuitous aggregation of humans, drawn together by the needs of "society" and self-interest; easily resolvable under the play of Pure Reason—once accepted—into some larger union with others more conformable to an assumed, enlightened interest. . . . Rather is it an organic growth, rooted mayhap in centuries of development, trial and segregation, issuing at length in a broadly distinctive physical type, psyché and culture. Let us pursue this thesis further.

Through the mysterious alchemy of Nature, at a period when land, water and climate were distributed differently to what appears in recorded time, the human species emerges upon the organic scene. As it dispersed over the habitable globe, we find it, historically, divided into three or four distinct sub-species or races. The causes of differentiation remain obscure; but these races are now usually classed under certain distinguishing features of physique, colour of skin and nature of hair. So we have the Caucasian with white to olive skin and wavy hair; the Mongoloid, of yellowish colour and straight, lank, dark hair; the Negro and Negroid, chocolate to black, and frizzly or curling hair. Each of these races again presents separate peoples or breeds with their own peculiar variation. Some of these types may arise through commingling of different races. All this, of course, in its detailed exposition, belongs to Ethnology.*

Some form of consociation was necessary to human survival from the outset. The earliest known unit thereof is in the tribe, gens, sept; though its genesis is a question

apart. Its influence persists when a number of related ethnical units have expanded into a defined people or nationality; as the twelve tribes of Israel, the three tribes of Rome, the Highland clans. Nationality thus continues historically as the basic principle of human affinity, whether it reaches to the position of an independent State or principality, or remains subordinate to some wider sovereignty. Several European peoples have experienced each of these vicissitudes.

Closely related to nationality is the phenomenon of language. Various gregarious animals have means of communication with each other. Human association stressed this need, and forms of articulate speech grew up to meet it. Having taken initial steps in this advance, mankind has gone forward with diabolical ingenuity to produce a thousand and one phases of utterance to express or describe the same or similar feelings, wants, objects. Words multiply *pari passu* with the inception of more varied wants, implements, modes of action. As what we denote as "civilisation" emerges, ways and means of expression by writing are discovered, together with the alphabet. Here again this inventive faculty leads to the use of a variety of symbols or script, connected with a particular tongue; as Greek, Roman, Hebrew, Arabic; and one of the leading distinctions of a nationality is the possession of a separate language, though it may be a branch of a wide family of speech. Europe, excluding Russia, prior to the latest convulsions presented some 30 variations of the kind existing either as independent States or as more or less dissatisfied "minorities" under an alien rule; clinging to their traditional modes and usage after the attempted settlement of the Peace Treaties.

So the paradox that "language was given us to conceal our thoughts" may be extended to "speech exists to nullify intercourse beyond prescribed limits." The Hellenes accounted all "foreigners" they failed to understand as "barbarians," and this note is significant of the restriction of primal human sympathies within the confines of tribal association for this and other reasons. Man is a creature (there may be others) which preys on its fellows, as shown in the age-long contest for subsistence, for preserving hunting and grazing grounds from encroachment; or the resources of a settled community from cupidity incited among more barbaric neighbours. The Biblical story of the conquest of Canaan—"a land flowing with milk and honey"—by Israel affords a naive illustration of a general sedulous enterprise pursued by all manner of peoples under diverse circumstance.

These conditions have reacted on the expansion into larger aggregates, for attack or defence, of nations, kingdoms, empires. Some have been ephemeral in their constitution and fortunes; others have for long preserved a continuing sequence. In more recent times the organic Nation State, as defined above, enters on the scene as a weighty factor in human affairs. AUSTEN VERNEY.

(To be continued)

* In the great work of Keane and Haddon, "Man, Past and Present" (Cambridge, 1920), which embodies the knowledge of the subject to date, there are lucid tables on the distinguishing features of each division of the species as above indicated. Stature, physiognomy, cranium, temperament, culture, observed natural aptitudes, etc. To quote from two separate instances. Of the African negro it states: Stature usually tall, 5ft. 10in. Temperament sensuous, indolent, improvident, fitful, passionate and cruel, though often affectionate and faithful; little sense of dignity and slight self-consciousness, hence easy acceptance of yoke of slavery; musical. Culture low; no perceptible progress anywhere except under the influence of higher races. . . .

The Northern Mongols: Stature usually short (below 5ft. 6in.), with exceptions. . . . Temperament of all true Mongols and many Mongoloids dull, reserved, somewhat sullen and apathetic, but in some groups (Finns, Japanese) active and energetic; nearly all brave, warlike, even fierce and capable of great atrocities, though not normally cruel. Culture rude and barbaric rather than savage amongst the more primitive. Exceptions with Japanese or Finns.

Which may be left to the sciolist to dispute who finds "national (or racial) character an illusion," and sees no difference "'twixt Cæsar and Pompey, 'specially Pompey."

THE UPAS TREE

A FEARFUL respect for the poisonous sap of a certain tree in forests of Java led the inhabitants, by a kind of protective instinct, to believe that the tree exercised a malignant influence on all who came beneath its boughs. The fable of the Upas Tree has passed into English metaphor. Only God, we have been quaintly reminded, can make a tree—be it Upas or apple—and I suppose that by a nice extension one should ascribe to Him the manufacture of the monstrous but metaphorical Upas Tree under which I fancifully see Western Civilisation—the epithet is typical rather than geographical—now living. Let me therefore preface with a “By your leave” these few critical notes on my imaginary Upas, the vital sap whereof I call Superiority Lust, the wood, Nationalism and the fruit, War.

What I describe, rather loosely perhaps, for want of a more definitive term, as Superiority Lust, covers a gallinaufry of human activity and behaviour: the common factor is the desire to dominate your neighbour. We of the West, individually and collectively, are shot thro’ and thro’ with it. And it will surely poison the main-stream of human evolution if we cannot escape its influence. In its simplest and seemingly most innocuous form you find it inculcated in our school sports and examination system; either child is set against child, or team against team, or school against school. It is the very life-blood of our economic system: man shall strive to be over man, company over company, our interest over your interest. In our social lives the behaviour stimuli are the three P.s; prestige and possessions and privilege. I here hasten to add that my thesis is not that these are things wholly to be depreciated: it is indeed difficult to visualise material progress and an achievement sense in their absence: what I do suggest is that Superiority Lust is slowly becoming the dominant factor in the human relationship and has already developed far beyond the limits of safety compatible with a full satisfactory civilised life. And I do not need attention drawn to the fact that there are no records of such a life before modern times: the important point is that we must always have that goal in front of us, no matter how apparently remote. It is a dangerous possibility that retrogressive trends might become so strongly marked that numberless intelligent men and women will lose faith in the future of *homo sapiens*.

The most retrogressive trend that has developed in our civilisation is unquestionably Nationalism which, Upasically speaking, depends for its existence on the poisonous sap that is Superiority Lust; in this context it is the collective brand. Nationalism is something more than patriotism, it is militant, aggressive patriotism: it bids us cry not simply “I love my Country” in itself a dubious sentiment—but “My Country, Right or Wrong” which, as I think Chesterton once remarked, bears favourable comparison with “My Mother, Drunk or Sober.”

Nationalism appeals, and successfully appeals, to the strong human desire to immerse personality into directive mass effort. The direction? It is at once the danger and the tragedy of the phenomenon that that is of secondary importance. Who has not experienced the intoxication of feeling himself part of an excited crowd, the *satisfaction* of knowing himself to be an unimportant unit in a multitude? And how sensitively can a crowd be swayed by music or by singing or by oratory! Observe, too, that it doesn’t much matter what the songs and the speeches are

about—the former are as certainly not required to be sensible as are the latter to be logical—but they must be what is significantly termed *stirring*. What is rationalism to a crowd? Who will prefer Brutus to Antony? What German will be attentive to logic when, in company with a thousand others, he drinks in the terrible fiery cadences of a Hitler speech? Extend the principles of crowd psychology to a scattered population, compensate with propaganda the inevitable dilution of enthusiasm that the scatter introduces, attach stigmata to unresponsiveness, teach the very children that partisanship *qua* partisanship is laudible, and the stage is set for Nationalism.

Seeking occasional escape from competitive individualism into a purposeful mass movement, the citizen finds awaiting his discipleship, O irony, his Country’s Cause, neatly decked out in the guise of something noble and worthy. His individualism is subordinated but competitiveness is carried over and becomes additive. Those territorially homogenous peoples having common associations, traditions and language—can anyone define a “nation” without reference to a political map?—which earliest achieved, and more or less retained, sovereignty soon became accustomed to it. Only on occasion and in part (a reflection of contemporary difficulties of communication of ideas) could they be persuaded to forsake a vague patriotism for Nationalism. But the nineteenth-century sovereignties were incepted, with the patronising aid of the older ones, on Nationalistic principles. They came to high estate aflame with chauvinism, ambition and envy. In reaction the rest of the world became defensively chauvinistic too.

“Truly ye come of The Blood; slower to bless than to ban” sang Kipling to the astonished but impressed British. All foreigners became contemptible: ignorance of their affairs became almost commendable. A not obscure member of the British Government once publically declared:—

“I am no authority on foreign politics. I cannot speak their languages. I don’t want to. I don’t know their politicians. I don’t like them. I don’t want alliances with European States.”

The whole wretched business is just another phase of the ancient conflict between the rational and the emotional departments of the human mind, but to-day it is enormously complicated by the immense powers of applied science—itsself a product of reason. Must we again and again see the rise and fall of the influence of Plato and Confucius, of Averroes and Bacon, of the Encyclopaedists and Paine, against a backcloth of egregious folly and stupidity? Must we resign ourselves to accept as our most popular fungle-men the Napoleons and the Kiplings, the Mussolinis and the Vansittarts? Will the task of the reformers and the rationalists forever be that of Sisyphus? Pregnant, unanswerable questions!

Not yet, however, have we despaired. At the immediate present I think I discern in the air something more than a freset of hope from the intermingling of things Russian with things American and British. The Soviet people live quite near the outskirts of the shadows under the patulous boughs of the Upas tree. The fusion of two sets of ideals and ideas, the exchange of two sets of experience and the sharing of two sets of problems; from such a unique blend what indeed may we not hope for?

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

The devil loves nothing better than the intolerance of reformers, and dreads nothing so much as their charity and patience.—LOWELL.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SPIRITUALISM

I ENDEAVOUR to keep an open and receptive mind on all things, and try hard not to let prejudice overcome reason, but I am intolerant of this fairly modern cult known as Spiritualism.

In all ideas, however imaginative and erroneous, there is usually a grain of truth. Palmistry is patently a fraud; if it were not the bookmakers would go out of business. But here is the grain of truth: A person's character is very largely controlled by his physical condition, and the human hands, under the eye of a physician, reveal much of a person's physical condition. Astrology is largely rct. Check up over a long period and see for yourself how wrong are the prophecies of any given astrologer. But the grain of truth again: When we consider the manifold influences of the sun, the power of the moon in connection with the tides, the coincidence of sunspots and earthquakes, the benefits of the ultra-violet ray—and the sun is 93,000,000 miles away; when we take into account the revelations of the spectrum in relation to the stars and planets, then, surely, it is reasonable to suppose that certain juxtapositions of the planets—the stars even—may have some physical effect on human beings, according to the season of their birth, and physical condition largely governs character, and character largely governs destiny. The grain of truth in the spiritualists' claims is far harder to demonstrate. I fail to do so.

The whole case must rest on the premise that individual personality survives the disintegration of the body; therefore, it postulates the existence of a "soul." In other words, there is within us a dual existence—something apart from the brain, the mind, and *independent* of it—if it is to survive somewhere when the worms are crawling through the eye-sockets of the skull. But there is no scientific evidence of the existence of anything independent of the functioning of the brain. On the contrary, it is only since the idea of this dual existence was scrapped that any progress has been made in the cure of insanity—mental disease. With the Anglican Church established and Bishops and Archbishops in the House of Lords; with the superstition of the mob still stronger than reason, and with Universities largely controlled by the Church and the B.B.C. by "Sir John Reiths" and their ilk, scientists must prevaricate and the medical profession go to church. But physiology and psychology have no evidence to offer for "Life after Death."

And that is all there need be said on the subject if it were not for the fact that the exponents of spiritualism provide the best evidence of its falsity.

If life continued after death then surely the most dominant personalities in *this* life would dominate the next. Surely the most intellectual, the best informed, the highest characters in *this* life would be to the fore in the next. Historians, benefactors, philanthropists, philosophers, saints and seers would surely, with the advantage of a second life, influence for good the affairs of the world they tried to improve whilst in it. But have the mediums ever claimed to be possessed by Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Moses, Solomon, Jesus Christ, Lord Rosebery, Woodrow Wilson or Woodbine Willie? And if the *great* spirits came through, would they be likely to rock tables, smash plates, play postman's knock and give signals in morse code? And how, pray, did a Red Indian chief ever come by modern morse code?

Of course, Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge gave the game a good leg up, but that's not evidence. Einstein probably couldn't make pea-soup or play "Robin's Return" on the piano, and the Archbishop of Canterbury probably has no conception of Boyle's Law or Sir Montague Norman of geology.

Anyway, mental hospitals have many inmates who have got University degrees. Because grief affects the mental stability of a prominent author and a scientist, don't let's all go bats.

C. H. DARBY.

ACID DROPS

UNDETERRED by our own experience, President Roosevelt has fixed January 1 for the date of a day of national prayer. Step by step he has led the American public to realise the threat to world welfare by the development of German Nazism—thanks partly to the help given by the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments. It is a pity the President did not note the consequences of our own attempts in the same direction. Every time we prayed God did something, but it was always the wrong thing or a very limited expression of divine favour. Now it looks as though Roosevelt contemplates a private message to God that America is now in the war, and thinks that the Lord will not neglect an official request by the U.S.A. Anyway, let us hope we can get over the day of prayer without any very great disaster following.

We feel strengthened in offering the above explanation of Roosevelt's suggestion of day of prayer, because the Archbishop of Canterbury—artful dog—has ordered a day of prayer for the same date. If anything favourable to the Allies occurs the Archbishop will claim that his side did the trick. If not, he can blame the U.S.A. for interfering. Meanwhile, Russia has not bothered God—and seems to be doing as well as may be expected.

It reminds one of an old Eastern story. A certain Caliph visited a prison. He questioned a number of the inmates, each of whom said he was innocent of offence of any kind—all save one. He confessed that he had been guilty of quite a number of crimes. "You," said the Caliph, "are discharged. You are not fit to live in the company of so many good and righteous men."

A rare daredevil set the Wanstead and Woodford Borough Council must be. After a fight that has lasted since July as to whether cinemas shall be permitted on Sunday, at last the daredevils have had their way, and Wanstead and Woodford are to line up with Leyton, Leytonstone and Stratford.

We congratulate England. Mr. Duff-Cooper is to have a resident office in the East. We shall pay for it, but perhaps it is all for the best.

Miss Dorothy Sayers, who made a reputation writing detective stories, probably felt that if she could track down murderers, why not Saviour Gods? We see no reason why she should not be as good at one game as the other, because she knows before the crime is committed who is going to do the "bloody deed" and how he will be caught, and in the case of tracing God she is told beforehand all about him. She finds Jesus Christ because he has been put there for her to find, and she was told when and where to look.

Miss Sayers, therefore, is now setting out to explain to people how to find Jesus, and she is working through the medium of the B.B.C. The play is to last for months and months and months, and we prophesy there will be all the foolery and dishonesties that usually appear in such circumstances. Of course, we are not accusing Miss Sayers of dishonesty, but one may act dishonestly without being at all alive to what one is doing. For all that Miss Sayers can do is to repeat the fables and fantasies of centuries as though they were indisputable historic happenings, and we have noted that Miss Sayers never puts herself in a situation where she can be answered. Probably as an advocate she feels safer when the other fellow is muzzled.

These are queer times! There is nothing startlingly new in saying this, because probably the "times" always were queer. But here is the "Sunday Times," meditating on the Russian defeat of the German forces, thus: "The Power of Darkness is being rolled in the snow"; the German nation, like Jeshurun, forsook the God which made him." But for more than 20 years the British public was assured by its spiritual leaders that it was Russia that was the Power of Darkness and "forsook God." Besides, the Germans never did forsake God, while the Russian Government publicly did so.

There is an evident mistake somewhere. Either our religious leaders got all mixed up or God got tangled up and could not decide who was on his side and who was not. As "Alice" would have said, things get "curioser and curioser." Parsons praise Atheists and thank God for the existence of men who say that the enemy of progress is religion!

In a broadcast recently to America, the Rev. Dr. Heenan tried to explain why Ireland looked upon England "with some suspicion." It appears that one of the reasons—and possibly the chief one—is that a section of the Irish population "does not believe that Britain is animated by Christian motives" in conducting this war against Hitler. In fact, he has even heard "cynical" remarks from "both statesmen and clerics" who are "quite unimpressed by the Christianity of the United States and of England." This must be an awful blow to Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill, who both took particular care to show how thoroughly Christian they were at the recent meeting by joining most solemnly and reverently in a church parade on board a battleship, the two together (we mean, of course, the battleship and Christianity) proving conclusively how fervently Christian were, and are, England and the U.S.A.

But to the Irish and Dr. Heenan, the Christianity of the two statesmen is not and could not be "true" Christianity, and therefore it is "small wonder that these Irishmen express grave doubts that the Democracies are fighting for Christianity." And we must confess for once we are in agreement with our religious Irish. The Democracies are *not* fighting for Christianity—they are fighting for *freedom*, a word almost without meaning to those who lead the Vatican. In fact, Dr. Heenan admits almost as much when he pointed out that towards Protestant Ulster "the feeling of Catholic Irishmen is one of unqualified bitterness." Woe to anybody who ventures to differ from the hierarchy! Dr. Heenan claimed that "the one big grievance in Eire was that a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant country should be tolerated in any area, however small, where there is a large majority of Catholic citizens." In the golden days of Catholicism we have an idea that these Protestants would have been exterminated if they had insisted on ruling themselves. What a lesson in freedom and toleration has been provided by the Rev. Dr. Heenan!

Just before Japan attacked the British and the U.S.A., the Roman Catholics, at the instigation of Cardinal Hinsley, put up a week's prayer for the Allies. The answer came in the shape of the destruction of two of our finest warships, with other damages, and a successful attack on American ships and possessions. Something ought to be done to stop these forerunners of disaster.

This prayer was much too much even for the "Daily Express," which gives us the following:—

"When God sent the weather to the help of English seamen who were already beating the Armada it was one thing, and Queen Elizabeth was grateful.

"But to have to rely from the outset on God's weather as the chief protection in modern sea battle is a new thing for the British Navy.

"Even the close-fisted Elizabeth never demanded that of her seamen."

We agree that it is waste of time to place dependence on God's help. But how is it that the "Daily Express" comes to such a conclusion where God is concerned? And what will the clergy think of the "Daily Express"?

We wonder whether the Bishop of Winchester has been reading "The Freethinker"? In his diocesan leaflet for December he says: "War is always a fertile field for every kind of superstition." We have said this, scores of times, but we hardly expected the Bishop of Winchester to repeat our lesson. It is probable that the Bishop does not regard his religion as superstition—it is only the other fellow who is superstitious. And the other fellow returns the compliment.

The Brighton Town Council recently had before it a recommendation of the Sunday Entertainment Committee to increase the gangster "rake-off" from cinemas that are open on Sunday, from £1,000 to £1,500 annually. One of the Councillors roundly and accurately denounced this as blackmail. That is the only accurate description of this legal "rake off." The robbery of cinemas was created by the House of Commons, and its authors must have studied closely the methods of the Chicago gangsters. It must be remembered that no industry is faced with this kind of punishment for carrying on its services from Monday morning to Saturday evening. It is in the case of Sunday entertainment only that this legal robbery is adopted.

Once more we say that, in our opinion, if the cinema proprietors ignore the Act which imposes these regulations altogether, there is a way of setting these bigots at defiance. Let them open their doors, reserving a small number of seats free, with a charge on all other seats as reserved. The imposition of a special Sunday tax is little better than robbery in the interests of Sabbatarianism.

Some of the members of the Cardiff Town Council must have a lively sense of humour. It has just appointed two of its members, both Roman Catholics, to be chairman and vice-chairman of the Cardiff Mentally Deficient Committee. One Catholic and one Protestant would have shared the honours—and the insinuation. But two of the same breed filling the same office looks rather suspicious.

We have said many times that when this war comes to an end we must be prepared for an obstructive policy by the Christian Churches. In this half-concealed offensive the Roman Church will play a prominent if disguised part. Directly and indirectly they will be assisted by the Protestant Churches, and between them we shall find religious interests conflicting, directly or indirectly with the creation of conditions that will make for world peace. These two great sections of Christianity could not prevent the world war emerging, and it is certain they will not willingly agree to a friendly understanding with a nation the Government of which is avowedly Atheistic.

To the illustrations in support of this conclusion we have already given we must add a quotation from the parish paper issued by St. Andrew's Church, Worthing. An article, apparently by the vicar, reminds readers that Russia "helped to murder Poland (an obvious lie as events have turned out) and also other nations, and is now being robbed in turn." The article ends by saying, "Our prayers for Russia surely must be that SOS means not 'Save Our Soviets,' but 'Save Our Souls.'" This is one of the straws which shows the direction of the stream. Indeed, in sheer self-defence the English clergy will be forced to form an avowed, or unavowed, alliance with others to guard against close and friendly relations with Russia, or with any government that has nothing to do with gods and ghosts and which openly declares that human salvation is dependent upon human effort, and upon human effort alone.

It would be unfair, after what we have so often said of the general character of our Press where religion is concerned, not to mention the spirited reply to the particular instance just given, not to acknowledge a reply that is made by one of the regular staff of the "Worthing Gazette." This critic well says:—

"The vital fact that emerges from the world struggle to day is that 'barbarous Russia' has of a surety eased the burden on 'Christian' England—a fact for which we should be overwhelmingly grateful."

British Christians called on God, prayed to him for protection, and the raids went on, the bombing went on and the dumb dead mounted in numbers, and "God" was considering the matter. Then Russia, the Russia that our clergy had pictured as unfit for a Christian to associate with, hit back at Germany, and the comparative peace that God did not give to the people of these islands the action of Russia secured. There seems something here that Christians might think about.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

For distributing "The Freethinker": M. Ray, 5s.

D. HOGG.—Pleased to learn that you are interested in "Almost an Autobiography." There is a very limited number left, with no early chance of reprinting.

F. H. THOMAS (Cape Town).—Thanks for cutting; it will be useful. All over the civilised world religion is on the decline. What we are witnessing on the part of professional religionists and the "There-must-be-a-God" type of mind is an attempt to express Christianity in philosophic terms. One might as reasonably attribute civilisation to the wearing of trousers as to make social development depend upon religious beliefs.

C. N. CAMPION.—We are not impressed and are without any wish to offend or misrepresent those who hold that the world must be governed by "Christian principles." Put in precise and understandable language, there are no such things as Christian principles. There are principles in science and in other directions. "Christian principles" means whatever anyone likes to set up in the name of Christianity.

T. OWEN.—Thanks for copy of the Rev. Ronald Selby Wright's letter. It is typical of a certain group of preacher and particularly so of B.B.C. policy where religion is concerned. That policy is riddled with dishonesty and hypocrisy.

E. SMEDLEY.—We have very definite opinions on many subjects that do not come within the scope of "The Freethinker." One should always keep an argument to the points that are the subject of the discussion in hand. Pleased to know that you find this paper as enjoyable as ever.

C. R. THOMAS.—When the President of the Board of Education tries to hide his playing into the hands of the clergy in the matter of the schools, apologises for his action by saying that a "teacher must be able to deal reverently, sympathetically and courageously in the deep knowledge that perplexes the child," he abuses his office and is talking clotted bosh. If he has only moderate intelligence he must be aware of it.

J. HANSON.—Thanks for season's greeting. We must be hopeful in these times when so many things are incalculable, and cheerfulness is indispensable at all times. It is only a relative term anyway. So the best of luck to you in 1942.

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 connection 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. 3d.

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WE have to acknowledge here the many letters we have received with seasonable greetings and warm expressions of congratulation and appreciation. The year has been a trying one, but so far—thanks to the ready, helpful co-operation of those on the spot and those scattered through this country and abroad, difficulties, if not annihilated, have been met and so far overcome. It is this goodwill and readiness to respond to any call that is made which enables us to meet dangers with a smile and with a surety that they will be, if not quite overcome, at least robbed of their greatest danger.

Our greatest trouble has been the paper shortage. That seems to get from bad to worse. We have saved all the paper possible, and although "The Freethinker" has decreased in size, the different arrangements made take little or nothing away from the readers. There is almost as much reading matter as in the full-sized paper. It may be possible that in the course of a few months we may find it helpful to alter the size of the pages of "The Freethinker," but this again will, we think, involve no loss of reading space. This is not a Freethinking version of the New Testament loaves and fishes trick; it is a matter of rearrangement. In any case, whatever way circumstances compel us to turn, we are always assured of the support of readers.

One way in which we have been hit is in the production of books and pamphlets. The blitz of last May wiped out completely many of the publications, and want of paper and the impossibility of getting enough to reprint—to say nothing of new publications—has held up their replacement. We may get a few more reprinted in the near future, but nothing is certain in that direction. The great thing is that "The Freethinker" is as safe as conditions allow it to be made.

Another direction in which our movement has suffered has been in the National Secular Society's propaganda. The difficulty of securing halls—most likely ones have been taken for national service—the removal of members from areas in which active work was carried out—Freethought speakers lack the immunity of the clergy—the call to service in the Army, Navy and Air Force, has held up our meetings in many towns and cities. Of course, the propaganda goes on, but in a less effective manner. The good sign here is that the membership of the Society, as the circulation of "The Freethinker," remains unaffected.

Our general secretary, Mr. Rosetti, has been writing round to branch members, suggesting that until the difficulty of hiring halls is overcome, members might hold gatherings of local friends in their houses, a different member offering hospitality every month, or more frequently. We think the suggestion is worth adopting. There is very much good work to be done in this way. The common enemy—the army of superstition—is working harder than ever to re-establish themselves under cover of the war, and we should not be lacking in whatever can be done to counteract their influence. Any help that can be given from headquarters will be given readily.

How long the war will last it is impossible to say. We had hoped that the end might come some time in 1942. The entrance of Japan into the war, while it cannot affect the end, may yet put that end further away. But if we can check the operations of financial and social and religious interests, practice the same "scorched earth" that China taught Russia and which Russia has handed on to the rest of the Allies, we might yet see the complete downfall of the enemy before we reach 1943. The "common man" has done well during this war. If all others imitate him then the end may come more rapidly and in a better form than it will come otherwise.

So to all: Good health, good resolutions, good fighting for worthy ends, and an assured conquest of all our enemies during 1942.

A section of the House of Commons is in justifiable revolt against the power of the Home Secretary to imprison a man while refusing to give any reasons for his doing so, other than that in his opinion he thought it would be better for the country that he should be in prison. This is as great an inroad on public liberty, and as great a threat to liberty as there exists anywhere in the world. Mr. Morrison threatens to resign if he is not given a continuance of this power. That does not weaken the offence—it only aggravates it. After all, the country cannot be so poor that another Home Secretary cannot be found!

The Commons discussion arose on the B.B.C. cancelling an arranged talk on the famous Regulation 18b clause at the order of the Ministry. In the course of a brief note,

the "News-Chronicle" said: "The B.B.C. long ago ceased to be a medium for free exchange on controversial subjects unhampered by the Government." That is true, and we are pleased to see the "News-Chronicle" repeating what we have said for so many years. We hope the "News-Chronicle" will continue the attack—and strengthen it.

For the B.B.C. behaves with regard to *all* subjects "discussed" the same dishonest and lying policy. It is true that it has what are called "discussions," but any school-boy could observe that the heretical side is never properly and fully presented. The B.B.C. selects the subject and the speaker. It does not ask that the "other side" shall be heard through a representative of that side; it picks out some tame rabbit who will say exactly what is set down for him to say, or knowing what the B.B.C. will pass, sets only that down. It is a close relation to the liberty of discussion permitted by Germany. In all the discussions on religion, never has an avowed representative of the non-religious school been permitted to say what he would have said had he been quite free to say it. It is a cowardly, a contemptible policy. But it was set going by Reith, who inquired of all applying for a post. "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

But we do not think that the "News-Chronicle" is really qualified to throw stones at the B.B.C. There has been plenty of talks on religion in the "News-Chronicle." In how many cases has it permitted the other side to be heard? It has opened set discussions on religion; how many who really attack religion has it allowed to put their case? We agree that the policy of the B.B.C. is mean, contemptible and unfair. We do not say it is un-British, because it is really very British; it is the policy of almost every newspaper in the land. The "News-Chronicle" loves freedom of discussion when it agrees with the "other side." So does Hitler!

The world is not more at war than it was—it has merely taken on a new phase. And for our own part we feel more certain of the result than ever. Our chief concern is what will happen with the "peace" when all those in positions, and whose mouths are at present closed, will begin to speak. We helped to create the war in the Pacific when our representatives at Geneva encouraged the Japanese to go ahead in Manchuria.

The Blackburn Branch N.S.S. is meeting with difficulty in obtaining suitable halls for Freethought lectures, but whenever possible, lectures will be arranged and local members and friends of the movement are asked to keep an eye on our "Lecture Notices" column for Blackburn announcements. The branch officials are keen and alert and deserve the encouragement of full support from all Freethinkers in the area.

The South London Branch N.S.S. is arranging lectures in the Labour Party Hall, 95, Grove Vale, East Dulwich, S.E. 22, and a general meeting of members and friends of the movement will be held there on January 4 at 3 p.m. The importance of our work to-day cannot be too often stressed, and South London Freethinkers must see to it that the branch efforts receive every encouragement. On January 11 Mr. L. Ebury will speak at 3 p.m.

Turning over some of the papers for December, preparatory to putting them with other "waste," we came across a statement by the Rev. R. S. C. Thompson in the "Daily Telegraph" for December 1 that may be worth noting. "The influence of Christ has declined, is declining and, humanly speaking, will decline in this country, and the reason is the general and culpable neglect of organised religion." The only comfort we can offer Mr. Thompson is that we have a Minister of Education who appears determined to cram as much religion into children as is possible before they are old enough to understand what is being done. That is the only way to make good Christians and good Nazis.

TESTIMONY OF TACITUS CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

(Continued from page 577)

III. Sextus Aurelius Victor: This man wrote a work entitled "De Cæsaribus," which he finished in A.D. 360, as I have elsewhere shown.* From his way of thinking and his manner of expression, it seems probable that he had studied the works of Tacitus. But all he says about the matter in hand is that Nero, rendered more cruel by various conspiracies against him, "had resolved to destroy the city by fire, the common people by wild beasts sent in mass, and the Senate by a befitting death." (V.) Suetonius (43) mentions this design of burning the city and of sending wild beasts among the populace, but he connects it with Nero's preparations to suppress a revolt in Gaul, not long before his death. Apparently the former conflagration had not sufficed him! It is doubtful whether this Sextus Aurelius Victor is the man of that name from whose works was made an "Epitome of the Lives of the Roman Emperors," ending with Theodosius the Great, who died A.D. 395. Anyhow, on examining the "Life of Nero," therein contained, I find nothing at all about either the fire or the Christians.

IV. Flavius Eutropius: His work is entitled "Breviarium Historiæ Romanæ." Therein he mentions having been with the Emperor Julian in the Persian campaign [A.D. 364]. What he has to tell of Nero, and the fire in the present connection is:—

"The city of Rome he set ablaze that he might behold the image of the spectacle when captured Troy formerly burned" (vii. 8).

Tacitus and Suetonius both mention that Nero, with histrionic accessories, likened the conflagration of Rome to the burning of Troy.

SECTION SECOND

CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

I. Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus: This man, despite his pompous name, was but of humble parentage. His birth occurred at Carthage near the middle of the second century. He was brought up a Pagan and is supposed to have practised law as an advocate, his way of writing being strongly supportive of that supposition as it displays all the worst manners of the Bar. After embracing Christianity he became a presbyter. About A.D. 202, persecution of his fellow believers by the Roman authorities moved him to write in their defence a work addressed to the magistrates of the province. Afterwards he left the Catholic Church for the Montanist Sect, and then bespattered his former co-religionists with filthy abuse. He was indubitably a sadist, for he wished to strip women of their finery, and flattered himself with the prospect of being about to witness the torments inflicted upon the damned. His death, which need not have occasioned any regret, took place in A.D. 230. He left behind him numerous works, but the only one of interest to the present inquiry is his "Apology Against the Nations for the Christians."† Here, addressing the Romans and speaking of the Christians, he says:—

"Search your commentaries. There you will find Nero the first *one* to have raged with the Cæsarian sword against this sect" (v.).

The word *commentarios* above employed is the accusative plural of a noun meaning commemorative notes such as registers, diaries, etc. A register was called *commentariensis*. Tacitus has the phrase "commentaries" of the Senate,‡ which is equivalent to "Parliamentary Records"§ and he refers to the "commentaries of the Princes," i.e. of the Emperors.¶ The same word is also used of memoirs. Tacitus says that he consulted those of Agrippina, mother of Nero,|| whilst Suetonius declares that those of Tiberius were the sole reading of Domitian.¶ Even the immortal "Com-

* "Marcus Aurelius Antoninus: His Life and Times." Appendix.

† Apologeticus Adversus Gentes Pro Christianis; E. F. Leopold's Edition; Leipzig, 1839.

‡ Reperio in commentariis Senatus. *Ann.*, XV. 74.

§ Commentariorum principum. *Hist.*, IV. 40.

|| *Ann.*, IV. 53.

¶ *Dom.*, XX.

mentaries" of Julius Cæsar are regarded as only a miscellaneous collection of facts intended for use in the making of a regular work upon his life. Tertullian himself, in another book,** presuming doubtless that no one would trouble to test his statement, had the impudence to boast that the *Romana archiva* still guarded the document registering the birth of Christ! Hence it is most probable that when using the word "commentaries" in the above reference to the Neronian persecution, Tertullian employs it in the sense of public records, and not in that of historical compositions, such as the "Annals" of Tacitus, where characters, events and causes are elaborately described, and a systematic perspective is carefully provided. It is indisputable that Tertullian was acquainted with the writings of Tacitus, for in his 16th chapter he names him, and reports from him statements about the Jews made in the fifth book of his "Histories," a work that preceded his "Annals." Naming Tacitus again in the same part, Tertullian calls him "that most loquacious of liars." This opprobrious designation may have been evoked by the fact of his being aware that Tacitus had severely censured the Christians. In this case he probably deemed it safer to discredit Tacitus in a general way than to give his strictures further publicity by adducing them for refutation.

II. Eusebius Pamphili, born at Cæsareæ, in Palestine, about A.D. 264; became bishop of his native city in A.D. 315, and died about A.D. 340. He wrote a Chronicle which for centuries was a standard work and which is still highly valued. There speaking of Nero's reign, he says that in its ninth year there were "many fires at Rome," and that in its tenth year Nero slew numerous persons, including his wife Octavia. But Tacitus (*Ann.*, XIV. 48) puts Octavia's death within the consulate of C. Marius and L. Asinius, which Liebenham equates with A.D. 62, two years before the great conflagration. Later, Eusebius declares that, in the 13th year, "Nero, to his other crimes, adjoined also the first persecution of the Christians, in which evidently†† the apostles Peter and Paul consummated martyrdom at Rome."††

In a still more famous work, his "Ecclesiastical History," Eusebius relates that Nero, after putting to death, without any just cause, innumerable people, including his mother, his brothers, his wife and many other kinsfolk, all the victims being regarded by him either as political or as private enemies, then completed what he was short of in wickedness by becoming the first of the Emperors to attack the divine religion. In support of this statement he quotes from the "Apology" of Tertullian the passage hereinbefore quoted, and proceeds to accuse Nero of decapitating Paul and crucifying Peter.‡‡ The evidence of Eusebius is of great importance, because, when composing his book, he had every opportunity for making researches and collecting the whole of the ascertainable facts. The statements of Eusebius flatly contradict those made in the famous Passage of Tacitus; but this does not prove that Eusebius was unaware of the Passage, for he might ignore it because he preferred to follow some other source or sources of information, believing it or them to outweigh Tacitus in authority. Here it is worth noting that Tacitus, as his account of Tiberius shows, had a strong predilection for tracing motives and for providing occurrences with causes. His unrivaled facility in these directions led him at times to draw false inferences and to make spurious combinations. Moreover, every man advanced in years knows how easy it is to forget the precise temporal and causal relationships of events which happened in his childhood, especially if conflicting reports were afterwards made to him by witnesses of those events. The reader has already seen that as regards the fire, Tacitus refuses to decide whether Nero was, or was not, responsible; whereas Suetonius, who wrote near the time when Tacitus wrote, distinctly says that Nero was responsible. It is therefore quite possible that, although Tacitus connected the persecution with the fire,

other persons knew, or believed, that the two events were disconnected with respect to both time and cause. But it is also possible that, after the persecution had begun, it was embittered by a suggestion that, besides the offences wherewith they were charged, the victims had also been guilty of the conflagration. Weighing the above considerations and recalling that Tacitus spent more than the first half of his life amid stirring and sometimes tragical events; that he was at least 55 to 60 years of age when he wrote his "Annals"; and that he probably derived many facts for the work from oral communications afterwards remembered, we see how easily he might have become confused over such a point as the one in question. The alternative is that Eusebius, although fully agreeing with the testimony of Tacitus that the Neronian persecution was started by a false charge of arson, might nevertheless suppress it, either fearing lest some people should imagine the Christians to have been really guilty, or else apprehending that the severe judgment upon the Christians and their creed, passed by Tacitus, might, as the verdict of such a wise and good man, do great harm to Christianity. If for one or both those reasons, or for any other reason, Eusebius, whilst believing like Tacitus, that the persecution followed close upon the fire and was due to the aforesaid charge, thought fit to suppress these facts, he has also tampered with chronology by trying to make it appear that some few years intervened between the fire and the persecution.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be continued)

A PLEA FOR THE LITTLE FOLK

STRONG attempts are being made by the Churches to strengthen the religious ties between school and pupil. Credulity grows amongst the seeds of war and the Churches are quick to seize their opportunity, especially as the greater part of the male population are away in the Services (and so cannot be at hand to guard the welfare of their families), while the clergy, immune from conscription, hope to foist their religious beliefs on the children.

The servants of God know well that at a tender age everything a child is taught, if repeated often enough, is indelibly etched on the brain; as the potter shapes his clay whilst it is soft, so the clergy hope to mould the mind of the child whilst it is yet pliable. They know also that much can be accomplished in the school atmosphere, where the child soon learns that it has only to repeat parrot-wise the biblical sentences given previously by the teacher as the lesson for the morrow, to be classed as a "clever" Bible scholar.

Religion as taught in schools merely becomes routine. Hymns the children enjoy only for the communal delight in the music; nothing to them is lost even if the whole is sung to "la!" Words to a child mean little; movement and colour—everything. Gabbled prayers can be rolled off the tongue while the child-mind dreams of more exciting things. God to a child can mean only one thing—fear; fear of that stern Father with his thou-shalt-nots and his floods, famines and savage revenges. The unforgivable sin is for an adult to instil fear into the child where the opportunity is given to sow the seeds of courage and freedom, and qualities like those can only be bred in schools entirely devoted to secular education.

Instead of airy speculations about gods, devils, angels, ghosts and all the phantasmagoria of the religious world, children should be assisted to see the *real* world they live in, taken out to view the flowers, the trees, the birds and beasts dwelling on the earth's surface. The mountains, plains and valleys, the oceans and the sky with the endless variety of colours, clouds and stars.

Money previously collected from children for Church funds should be saved in order that they might travel in foreign lands to observe the lives of other peoples with the chance of learning to be more broad-minded, more international and peace-loving, while grown-ups should turn their Church donations to the healthy housing of children, clearing away the pitiful sights of sumptuous cathedrals in spacious grounds, surrounded by miserable, insanitary hovels, enclosing in their darkness children who should only know the light.

Let the wealth flowing into the coffers of the Church be spent on freeing the children from fears, taboos and super-

** *Adversus Marcion*, IV. 7.

†† *Videlicet*. The word may mean easy to see, evidently, to wit, or namely.

‡‡ *Eusebii Pamphili Chroniconum Canonum Libri Duo* xxx. *Angelus Maius et Johannes Zohrabus* xxx. *Mediolani* xx. 1818.

‡‡ *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Dindorf's Edition. Leipzig. MDCCCXC. II. 28. Priority confirmed III. 17 and IV. 26.

stitutions, keeping them in health and better clothing, seeing that they are allowed to form their own opinions on religion as upon all other subjects, letting the "God idea" come to them only when they are able to think it out for themselves.

Some people think the Atheistic outlook is a little dreary. Let them take up the banner emblazoned with the words "Freedom for the Little Folk," and they will find they are immersed in a cheery battle against religion which commences on the day a baby is born. Baptism, Sunday school, confirmation, Bible lessons, church and radio—all combine in a great effort to teach the little ones that *some* day they will depart from this world and soar into the heavens. Our quest shall be to sweep away those misty realms of fancy and reveal to the wee folk that instead of being *some* day "angels of the sky," they are *to-day*, here and now and forever—children of the Earth.

IAN YULE.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

EIGHTEEN hundred and ninety-eight years ago, if we are to believe the Gospel, a number of astrologers came from a wide region called "the east" to Judea. They were led thither by a wonderful star, which apparently accommodated itself to their rate of locomotion, and descended low enough to journey visibly over the earth's surface. This bit of celestial pyrotechny was of course the star of some great person's nativity, and on arriving at a house in Bethlehem, over which it rested, they learned that an uncrowned and unanointed King of the Jews had just been born in a stable and was cradled in a manger. After giving him the presents they had considerably brought with them, they returned to "the east," and were never heard of afterwards. What is still more curious, they were never mentioned in the whole course of that wonderful child's career, although their visit to Bethlehem, and the subsequent massacre of the innocents, should have kept them fresh in the memory of every inhabitant of Palestine.

It is also recorded in the New Testament that the birth of this wonderful child was marked by the appearance of angels to some nameless shepherds in an unknown place. These angelic visitors proclaimed peace on earth and goodwill towards men, or peace among the restricted class of men in whom the Lord "is well pleased," as the Revised Version expresses it.

Accordingly, it has been the custom of Christian scribes and preachers to celebrate the astral herald of Christ's nativity as the morning star of a new day. Every fresh Christmas sees this threadbare theme new-worn. Pulpiters and pious journalists expatiate *ad nauseam* on the immorality and brutality of pre-Christian civilisation, and the goodness and tenderness which have gradually crept over the world as Christianity has advanced. Fortunately for these professional apologists, they can presume on the most utter ignorance of their readers and hearers, and, neglecting history and the logic of facts, they are able to give a free rein to their cheap and tawdry rhetoric. Nor does it in the least interfere with their periodical jubiliations that while they praise their perfect system, which has had eighteen centuries to produce its perfect fruit, they are obliged to bewail the ghastly diseases of Christian civilisation; its chronic pauperism, its rampant vices, its widespread drunkenness, its criminality, its costly military systems, outvieing anything which even Rome ever witnessed, and the frightful scale of its wars, as well as its warlike preparations, which are a strange commentary on the gospel of peace. True, there are some dissonant voices in this well-practised chorus, but they are nearly lost in the swelling volume of sound. A Shelley sings of "the Galilean serpent," and a Swinburne of "the poison of the crucifix." Such voices, however, are only audible to discriminating ears, and so the sweet songsters of orthodoxy keep the concert pretty much to themselves.

Glancing back over eighteen centuries of history with a free and fearless eye, who can truthfully assert that the Star of Bethlehem *was* the herald of a better day? It is quite obvious to the candid student that Christianity wrought no practical improvement on the great body of the Roman Empire, either before or after it secured the patronage of Constantine. The early Christian emperors

were not a whit more moral than the Pagan Cæsars. They were simply pale copies of great originals; and if their vices were less flagrant and monstrous than those of a Nero or a Caligula, their virtues were insignificant beside those of an Augustus or an Antoninus. Nor is it easy to see in what respect the gladiatorial shows at Rome were worse than the faction-fights at Constantinople. Still less is it easy to see how the burning and torturing of Christians by Pagans were any worse than the burnings and torturings of heretics by their fellow Christians.

Intellectually, Christianity merely substituted a new and vigorous superstition for an old and dying one, which was gradually being supplanted among the educated classes by a prudent, though spirited, philosophy. The gods of Olympus gave place to the Trinity and the Devil, who wielded all the arbitrary power of their predecessors without exhibiting any of their grace or *bonhomie*. The national religions succumbed to one of universal pretensions, and their spirit of mutual toleration was succeeded by a malignant fanaticism which regarded every difference of opinion as a crime. And while the national religions were always more or less subservient to temporal welfare, the new religion dwarfed this world into the mere vestibule of heaven or hell.

Borrowing the bigotry of Judaism, exalting faith as the supreme virtue and denouncing unbelief as the blackest sin, Christianity did its best to obscure and degrade morality. At the same time it arrested intellectual progress, which always follows mental dissatisfaction and the restless spirit of inquiry. The proof of this can be given in a sentence. During six or seven centuries of undisputed supremacy, Christianity could not point to a single new discovery in science, or to a single new book of the least importance to literature. What more damning impeachment than this could be conceived? Nor can it be answered by pointing to what Christendom has since produced, for there was no sign of improvement until Arabian science flashed its light upon the darkness of Europe. Even then the Church intercepted its rays as far as possible, and she might have succeeded in restoring the old darkness had it not been for the Renaissance, which was simply the revelation of the classic art, literature and philosophy of Greece and Rome, and the political reconstruction of Europe, which, by inducing quarrels between princes and popes, led to the so-called Reformation.

Since the Reformation the progress of Europe has been wonderful, but it has not been inspired by Christianity. The leading minds in every branch of intellectual activity have been accounted heretics by their own generation, and the nearer we approach to our own day the more distinct is the line of separation between the Churches and the great discoverers and thinkers. It is now impossible to give an accurate list of the chief scientists and writers in Christendom without including three sceptics for every believer.

But while the progressive movement is wholly inspired by scepticism, and mainly conducted by Freethinkers, the Government—that is, the organised forces of society—is in the hands of orthodoxy, which rules in our legislative halls, our courts of justice, our universities, our schools and in every department of the public service. Obviously, therefore, it is orthodoxy that must bear the responsibility for the chronic evils and the low tone of society. Let us look into these phenomena and see what that responsibility amounts to.

What has the Gospel of Peace brought us to? Europe has now more than ten times as many soldiers as sufficed to preserve the peace and integrity of the Roman Empire when it was surrounded by hostile and predatory barbarians. Europe is, in fact, an armed camp, not for the repulsion of barbarians, but for internecine war among Christian states. After eighteen centuries of the Gospel of Peace, Christendom is darkened by the shadow of the sword, and the highest honours are paid to successful generals who are skilled in the art of slaughter.

Treating man as a spiritual instead of a material entity, Christianity has no remedy for the vices it perfunctorily reprobates. Drunkenness is not diminished by sermons, nor are the grosser forms of vice lessened by unctuous texts, while families crowd in single rooms, while filth breeds fever and promiscuous herding destroys modesty and self-respect. Not by futile appeals to the will, but by wise political and social changes can this state of things be

altered. Christianity wastes its breath in preaching "righteousness," while Freethought strives for practical reform.

Hypocrisy, which is one of the meanest vices, is essentially a Christian product. Orthodox travellers tell us that they find very little of it in the heathen world, but when they return to Christendom they find it circulating in the very atmosphere. The reason of this melancholy fact is not remote. The evil is entirely due to the exaltation of belief over conduct, and the erection of false and impossible standards which are openly revered and privately neglected. Theophrastus gives us one Character of a Hypocrite, and not a particularly offensive one. The literature of Christendom gives us scores of the most disgusting type.

The benefits of Christianity appear in the apologies of its professional champions, its evils are written large on the pages of impartial history. What real good has it ever achieved? Deny it the right to appropriate all the improvement of the secular intellect and the natural growth of humanity, and how much has it to boast of its own? But the miseries it has inflicted on mankind are appalling in their magnitude and number. It has shed oceans of blood, and bitter tears have rolled from myriads of eyes under its iron tyranny. It closed every thinker's lips. It kept men in darkness and slavery. It made men bow at the foot of the altar and the throne. It preached poverty to the poor and took its share of the wealth of the rich. It invented the rack, the thumbscrew and the wheel. It illustrated its love of man with the flames of a thousand stakes. It has been a curse rather than a blessing. And its star of Bethlehem was not the herald of a glad new day, but the portent of a long and dismal and disastrous night.

G. W. FOOTE.

(Reprinted)

CORRESPONDENCE

"MARCH OF TIME"

SIR.—I am surprised that "S. H." should contribute another letter to "The Freethinker" without elaborating his theory that those who give up religion have a mental vacuum. He now asserts that the "intellectuals" are moving towards something in the nature of orthodox theology, and that there is, in consequence, a steady trickle of thoughtful people to the religious fold. All the evidence is against this view, for the frantic efforts of the Churches to revive the interest in Christianity, and the efforts of the present Government to make religious teaching compulsory in all schools, prove conclusively that the mass of the people have fallen away from religion.

"S. H." admits by implication that the mentality of the clergy is not respectable enough for thoughtful people. The clergy, I am sure, would not appreciate this statement.

The whole tendency of modern theologians is to whittle down orthodoxy as much as possible to adapt it to present social conditions. This attitude has been forced upon them by the steady growth of rational thought and the pioneer work of Freethinkers. Take the question of the existence of hell and eternal torment, the temptation of Adam and Eve, redemption through a blood sacrifice, the universal flood, Jonah's sojourn in the belly of a whale and suchlike absurdities; these are scarcely ever mentioned in polite society and are consigned by most people to the realms of mythology.

If "S. H." will study the advances made in social progress during the past 50 years, or 100 years (the period he speaks of), he will find that Freethinkers have been in the forefront of the fight for improvement of the condition of the masses.

As a Freethinker who is proud of association with the National Secular Society for the past 50 years, I am confident that any effort to turn the Society into a kind of religious cult of mental vacuists would be doomed to failure. "S. H." writes, "Time marches on," but his articles prove that he is "looking backward."

The concluding paragraph may be a touch of sly humour on the part of "S. H." If so, as they say, "we can take it!"

H. R. CLIFTON.

SEEKING THE TRUTH

SIR.—When will man accept the truth? You may deceive all the people part of the time, and part of the people all the time, but not all the people all the time. Do the Churches realise that the religion racket is finished? Religion is the opium of the people. The action of this potent drug is to cloud the mind and dull the senses. To escape from their troubles some take to drink, others embrace religion. It is at least a comfortable existence with the dope on tap all the time. Godism as opposed to Atheism is an exploded fallacy, as neither has existed at any time except in the imagination of man.

In his masterly writings, Sir James Frazer has exposed superstition and tracked down these myths to their origin. Science now invites us to look into space through the 200in. telescope and explore vast regions containing countless stars reaching to infinity. That each one of these possible worlds requires to be saved by a bloody sacrifice is absurd. Why should this planet be the exception? Man must get away from these primitive ideas and cultivate those more in keeping with the progress of knowledge, so keep on sticking barbs of truth in the thick hide of ignorance with all the skill and intelligence you possess. This is bound to have its effect sooner or later, and no effort for truth is ever lost. Truth is mighty and must prevail. JUDEX.

CRUSH THE INFAMOUS

The strange and sinister method of assault upon religion which we of a later day watch with wondering eyes, and which consists in wearing the shield and device of a faith, and industriously shouting the cry of a church, the more effectually to reduce the faith to a vague futility, and its outward ordering to a piece of ingeniously reticulated pretence; this method of attack might make even the champions of prevailing beliefs long for the shrewd thrusts, the flashing scorn, the relentless fire, the downright grapples, with which the hated Voltaire pushed on his work of "crushing the Infamous." If he was bitter he was still direct. If he was often a mocker in form, he was always serious in meaning and laborious in matter. If he was unflinching against theology, he always paid religion respect enough to treat it as the most important of all subjects. The contest was real, and not our present pantomimic stage-plays, in which muffled phantoms of debate are made to gesticulate inexpressible things in portentously significant silence. The battle was demoralised by its virulence. True; but is this worse than to have it demoralised by cowardice of heart and understanding, when each controversial man-at-arms is eager to have it thought that he wears the colours of the other side, when the theologian would fain pass for a rationalist, and the free-thinker for a person with his own orthodoxies if you only knew them, and when philosophic candour and intelligence are supposed to have hit their final climax in the doctrine that everything is both true and false at the same time?—JOHN MORLEY, "Voltaire," chap. i.

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

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COUNTRY

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