

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

We Apologise

IN the "Freethinker" for January 11, my weekly notes dealt with Miss Sayers' play of the life of Jesus. The play is being produced in monthly instalments, and while Jesus is not actually on the stage, his voice is heard—"off-stage." There have been protests against the play by some survivals of the (cultural) Stone Age, but the play is to go on and the second person of the Trinity will actually be heard talking in a mixture of London and American slang. I pointed out the significance of what is really a survival, in kind, of the old miracle plays, and a copy of the paper, following our rule at the office, was sent to Miss Sayers.

In reply we received the following:—

"I quite understand that Freethought must not be trammelled by any slavish adherence to verifiable facts; but since you invite me to comment on your leader of January 11, 1942, I should like to point out;

(1) That the name under which I write is not 'Dorothy Sayers,' but Dorothy L. Sayers.

(2) That this is not a 'pen-name,' but my own maiden-name, since (as might easily have been ascertained by referring to 'Who's Who') my father's name was Sayers, and I was christened Dorothy Leigh.

I am so well accustomed to the inaccuracies of the Rationalist mind that I should not think this worth while mentioning, but that you appear to attach some esoteric importance to my alleged pseudonymity."

I did not invite Miss Sayers to comment on my notes, nor has she done so. I think that much will count to her for wisdom in the minds of many.

I did not know Miss Sayers' full list of names, nor was I interested in it, nor do I see that it is of any consequence to anyone. I do not rush off to find details of the birth and christening of writers, I am interested only in what they write or do. Whether I then congratulate them or not on their unknown parents depends upon what their work is like. But if she thinks I ought to apologise for not looking up "Who's Who," I will apologise.

But I was not and am not seriously interested in Miss Sayers' religious advocacy, save as one interested in sociology finds everything human that comes to his net of interest. My article hinged on,

first, the reaction to Jesus Christ presented as a man—so far as a voice went—and also to Miss Sayers' somewhat desultory religious crusade that she has been carrying on, and why the Churches have made much of her. I said that she offered good advertising material for the Churches. A successful novelist has followers, and anyone who will help the Churches nowadays is welcome. I hope Miss Sayers will not feel hurt if I point out that nowadays the Churches welcome anyone who can advertise them—converted drunkards, retired burglars, well-known cricketers or boxers, etc. It is a matter of advertising, and amongst the crowd of dishonesties connected with the modern Church there is none more contemptible than the one I have named.

If, then, I had dealt with the play instead of the religious use made of the author—it is almost certain that the play would not have been accepted from anyone but a well-known personage—I should have said only what I have been saying for about half a century, and have found support in the teachings of modern science. I could find nothing in Miss Sayers' religious contributions that displayed any knowledge of the anthropological side of religion, or the history of Church doctrines. She did not seem to be aware that the Christian religion is based upon a number of pre-Christian superstitions that are now discredited because they are understood. Christianity continues to exist by keeping these primitive superstitions in the background for the benefit of its less developed followers, and offering to the general public what the Church a century since called "mere morality," and which the creeds declared unable to save the soul of man, and quite inadequate to secure his eternal salvation. I was sorry to find Miss Sayers caught in the advertising trap, and did what I could to enlighten her. Miss Sayers will, I think, agree that I am not the first who, striving to do good to a fellow human being, has received small thanks for his efforts. It is true that Miss Sayers does not criticise anything I have said concerning Christianity. She seems to be more concerned as to my not being aware of her full and real name. My excuse must be that we are not on visiting terms. I am a very busy man.

Calling Names

But Miss Dorothy L. Sayers seems to have lost her temper over my innocent and well meant comments. Somehow I appear, quite unintentionally, to have aroused her anger. She attacks me first under one heading and then under another, with neither of them pertinent to the substance of my notes. I plead guilty to being classified with Freethinkers. But why does she say that Freethought must not be "trammelled by any slavish adherence to verifiable facts?" One set of facts I did bring forward—that when people really believed in Christianity they could accept realistic dramas in which God himself appeared on the stage. This has actually been repeated since by Miss Sayers in the "Daily Telegraph." My case was plainly stated, and I feel sure that it was not concern for my feelings that kept Miss Sayers silent. Plainly, she does not strike me as a very ardent advocate of the "turn one cheek when the other is smitten"

variety. To meet one with an implied charge of falsification without giving the slightest evidence in support of the charge is not what a Lancashire man would call "Janock." What verifiable and important facts did I ignore?

Let me try to help Miss Sayers to understanding. In her play she introduces the *voice* of Jesus. Why did she not introduce the person of Jesus? Why did she not go the whole hog and place Jesus on the stage? I am quite sure that the player who provided the voice of Jesus would also have provided as good looking a Jesus as the one who is said to have existed in Jerusalem. I feel confident that had she done so, or if she had been permitted to do so, it would have ruined the religious value of the play. But for a God in 1942 to walk on the stage and orate would be too much. A voice merely heard in solemn silence was as far as those responsible dare go. The majesty that surrounds a King can only be kept up so long as the King does not mix too freely and too literally with ordinary men. John the milkman may be a very poor character and the King a very superior one. But let them exchange places and conditions and in a year or so there will be a wonderful change of values—or of their direction. Once upon a time man-gods did mix with the people, for a time. To-day a god can exist only in seclusion. A god understood is a god dethroned.

My only interest in Miss Sayers was the manner in which she was being used by the Churches to boom their out-of-date stock. I do not feel that I have been given the real cause of my offence. Not knowing her name in full is too trivial. I can only repeat that in my judgment it was Miss Sayers—I do not know her married name—the well-known novelist the Church wanted, just as they grab at the successful politician or actor. It pays to advertise.

Wanted—Facts

Now I have a complaint to make against Miss Sayers. I have been before the Freethinking public of this country—and, of course, the Christian public also—for more than half a century. I will not say what is my standing among Freethinkers, modesty forbids. My complaint is that "Miss Sayers is not trammelled by any slavish adherence to verifiable facts." For in her closing paragraph she accuses me of sharing in the inaccuracies which is characteristic of the "Rationalistic mind." I cannot say what these alleged inaccuracies are or who is responsible for them, for Miss Sayers gives no lead. But anyone who knows me is aware that I will not call myself a Rationalist, and my reason for doing so is not because I am in violent disagreement with "Rationalists," but because it is ambiguous in its meaning and in its application. And in important instances I dislike ambiguity. The world suffers much from half-meanings and indecisive speech. Its chief representatives are parsons and politicians. I would leave them with the monopoly.

I call myself, and always have called myself, an Atheist, and I do so for the reason that an eminent Christian professor once gave. He said: "The word Atheist is a thoroughly honest unambiguous term. It means one who does not believe in God and it means neither more nor less." In this I agree with the Rev. Professor Flint. Atheism is a good, honest, direct word. It stands out as a beacon in a world which is full of false tricks, and blind endings.

I say what I have said for Miss Sayers' benefit; for I am neither alarmed nor impressed by the statement that Freethinkers and Rationalists and, I will add, Atheists, can be found making inaccurate state-

ments or slighting verifiable facts. I deny the right of Miss Sayers to claim, by inference, for the religious world in general, and for Christians in particular, a monopoly of any vice—mental, moral or physical. The ills mentioned are too common and too widely distributed for any number of people to claim collective exemption from them. But at least Freethinkers have never made inaccurate statements and the neglect of seeking verifiable facts a primary religious duty, as the historic Christian Churches have done and as the Churches still do. If I may cite Winston Churchill in a slightly changed version, "What kind of a people does Miss Sayers think we Freethinkers are?" Freethinkers may have lied, but they never made it a virtue. They never lied for the greater glory of God. I conclude that Miss Sayers must have lost her temper.

A Parting Note

If I may be a trifle irrelevant, I would like to refer to a matter which illustrates the power of Christianity to distort the minds of its followers. I remember there appeared—in the "Church Times," I think—a report of a speech given by Miss Sayers, dealing with Christianity and morality. Her main point was that desirable moral conduct was impossible without religious faith in Jesus. He was our great teacher. It is probable that we have here the source of the curious notion that non-Christians and anti-Christians must be morally worse than Christians.

We are all obviously indebted to others for the knowledge of things we have and the number of things we enjoy. It is possible, although improbable, that had it not been for certain individuals we should not have had these things. They may never have been discovered. But having been made known, certain ideas cease to be the property of their discoverer—they belong to everybody. Euclid may be proved to be a myth, but what is taught as his discoveries fall or stand on their own merits once they are known.

Now if Miss Sayers would realise this perfectly accurate and simple truth she would feel not that the salvation of us all really depends upon the deification of Jesus, but upon the humanising of man. She would not be anxious to exhibit the Christian Jesus as a God, but would be rather anxious to point out to all the capacity of human nature for good—and better; and it would certainly be better and more humanly profitable to believe and teach that the various virtues, instead of being given to human nature from without, are developed by human association from within. That would give us the direct appeal of man to man. Cackle about Jesus can only offer the promise of a probable incitement from without. The failure of that is sun-clear in the present state of the Christian world.

Still, I am somewhat confused as to why Miss Sayers writes in the tone she did, because, she says, I did not look up "Who's Who" to discover that she was not using a "pen-name." I doggedly stick to the English here because it is simple, even if not quite so showy as another term. May it be that my simple criticism came near knocking the bottom out of her play as a piece of religious propaganda? I wonder!

CHAPMAN COHEN.

What is more cheerful now, in the fall of the year, than an open wood fire? Do you hear those little chips and twitters coming out of that piece of apple-wood? Those are the ghosts of the robins and bluebirds that sang upon the bough when it was in blossom last spring. In summer, whole flocks of them come fluttering about the fruit trees under the window, so I have singing birds all the year round.—T. B. ALDRICH.

BIBLE NOTES AND NOTIONS

SINCE the war began, many new readers have been made. For them, and not, of course, for those well-tried veterans who have a good working knowledge of the case against the Bible, I want to write a few articles from time to time, which will bring to their notice some of the latest results of modern criticism, the cream, so to speak, of a large number of works written by specialists on the Bible. Most of these writers call themselves Christians, but the result of their investigations appear to me to be most damning to the Word of God.

One of the claims made by almost all orthodox defenders of the Bible is that it has withstood every infidel assault, and is now more firmly entrenched than ever. If this is taken to mean that the Bible can be bought in nearly every part of the world, and that therefore it has not been so far "out of print," the claim can be admitted. If what is meant is that the *truth* of the Bible has not been seriously and victoriously attacked, the claim is not only entirely false but ludicrous.

The belief in the Bible—and by this is meant the belief that the Bible is the Word of God, that it has been "revealed," and that the whole of its teaching is sacred and inspired—has undergone a vast change during the past centuries. Even the modern whole-hogger, the Fundamentalist, has been forced to admit certain interpretations of the Word which a hundred years ago, or even less, would have been called the rankest heresy.

To understand how far-reaching some of the changes in views of the Bible have been it will be necessary at the outset to say a few words on its composition and history. Most of these facts are, of course, well known, but are necessarily repeated here to give a clearer view of what is about to be said.

The Bible (or the Scriptures as it is often called) consists of a number of separate books bound together in one volume. For the Jews, only that part known as the Old Testament is "canonical" or really "inspired." For Protestants, and nearly all the sects which have left the Roman Catholic Church, the part known as the New Testament is added to the Old; while for Roman and Greek Catholics a number of books known as the Apocrypha are appended as they are also considered "inspired."

But though Jews, Protestants, and Catholics differ about the composition of the Bible, they are all *officially* made to assert that the part or parts they individually believe in are God's Word. Privately the members of the various sects may believe, and probably many do just what they like or what appeals only to their reason, or their taste. The fact that there are so many Christian sects is proof that they are by no means united even on fundamental points.

The Jewish Old Testament is written mostly in Hebrew, that is, Biblical Hebrew, in many ways a different language from that which is now being spoken in Palestine. Some small portions are written in Chaldeo-Aramaic. But it is quite impossible to say when the various books comprised in the Old Testament were first written, or where, or when they were put together in one "sacred" volume.

The Jewish tradition, faithfully believed without question by orthodox Jewry, is that the books were written by the authors whose names they bear, and

at the epoch described in their contents. Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, for example; Samuel of the two books bearing his name; Jeremiah his, and so on. Christians believe precisely the same—and also of the New Testament and the Apocrypha—though these, it should be noted, have come down to us written in Greek and Latin.

In England, the Bible is mostly known through a translation called the Authorised Version made in 1611. The claim made for this is that it was translated "out of the original tongues; and with the former translations diligently compared and revised." It would be safe to say that few modern Biblical scholars would agree in these days with this assertion. So many errors were found in the A.V., that a new translation was attempted in the latter part of last century, and published as the Revised Version. It has not yet superseded the A.V., and is, according to some authorities, almost as faulty. Though other versions have appeared—like that of Moffat, for instance—the A.V. still holds the field as God's Word in its least corrupted form.

The Bible, that is, the Authorised Version, has in the past received the most unstinted praise from its believers. Indeed, one might call it the purest idolatry—or Bibliolatry—but, as that well of Fundamentalism undefiled, Cassell's "Bible Dictionary" says:—

"We do not *worship* the Bible, but we do receive its books as the written voice of God, whom we worship; and we are no more at liberty to set aside one thing written by holy men of God moved by the Holy Ghost, than we are to reject the words of the mouth of God whether uttered from Mount Sinai or spoken by the Lord Jesus when on earth."

The Bible has been, in fact, claimed as "revealed," "inspired," and the veritable words of God Almighty himself. It does not actually attempt to prove the existence of God, that is taken for granted. The Universe must have had a Maker, and He must be the God of the Bible. If in its conception of Deity the Bible is not uniformly consistent, that point is usually very hastily brushed aside. The only thing that matters is that there is a God, He is the Bible God, and in the Bible will be found everything that man needs in the way of spiritual meditation, consolation, and redemption. Nothing more is needed. And so intense became the devotion to the book, that numbers of divines insisted that not only every word, but every comma and full stop in the Bible, was literally inspired; and disbelief in anything therein led to eternal perdition. It became the Protestant Rule of Faith as against the Roman Catholic Church.

The beauties of its diction and poetry were trumpeted forth in millions of books, pamphlets, and sermons. It was published in hundreds of forms, translated in almost all known languages, carried by missionaries to the furthestmost parts of the earth, and its authenticity, credibility, and morality, defended on a thousand platforms. No work the world has so far seen has ever received the publicity of the Bible—or indeed its circulation. It should, as a consequence, have conquered the world—but has it?

In truth, it has had to be defended, "apologised" for, commented upon, explained—or explained away—in fact, there seems no end to books upon the Bible mostly written to reassure the waverers and indifferentists. And even there, they have not succeeded to bring men back to the old, old Faith. Strange, is it not?

H. CUTNER.

ACID DROPS

THE first step taken to ensure that the age of private national wars shall continue was taken in London at the St. James' Palace meeting of the Allies. Greece and Yugoslavia have signed an agreement to build a joint united army for the protection of the two States. Poland is expected to follow suit, linking up with another State. In such circumstances other States, or groups of States, will follow, and "Never Again" will apparently apply to Germany only. For with these numerous alliances it will be left for each group to determine whether it shall go to war or not. The idea of an international reign of law will have to be abandoned, for the essence of law is that parties which consider themselves injured shall appeal to a superior court and abide by the result. Force is then used only for the enforcement of a legal decree. So long as there are national armies, and so long as any nation is permitted to decide its disputes with other nations with a threat of war, so long will wars continue.

The B.B.C. has started a new "Brains Trust"—a Scottish one. But it is only the old one under a new name, just as muddled, with the capacity for shunting awkward questions and mistaking foolery for wit. Two questions stand out for the foolish manner in which they were handled. The first was, "What constitutes nationality?" Anyone could have found out the answer by ten minutes' research in an ordinary public library. Our Brains Trust fumbled about, one stating that a man's nationality was settled by his parents belonging to a particular country and the child being born there. In that case, one wonders how any family could ever change its nationality.

The second question was mangled in even a worse manner. This was, "Why have the Scots taken the interest they do take in education?" Hard living seemed to get most votes, but not one came within a hundred miles of a scientific answer; and, of course, no one even hinted at the early disappearance of serfdom in Scotland and its having an earlier intimate association with France and the Continent played an important part. Of course, one must be alive to the fact that the B.B.C. would not permit a "dangerous" question, nor its discussion if one crept in, but allowing all this, the questions generally display a low level of intellectuality with the general population, and a not very high one with most of those who answer. But, as we have said, we doubt whether the B.B.C. fairly represents the quality of the questions asked.

Some of the more intelligent and less "tricky" members of the clergy are a little uncertain at what point Christianity comes in. The absurdity that all the people in the war are fighting for Christianity is too ridiculous to be taken seriously. On the other hand, if Christians are in the war for liberty in general that places Christians on a level with others, and the war is no more for the preservation of Christianity than it is for the right to push a costermonger's barrow through the streets. That reduces the Christian's share of the business to a fight for the right to express himself. So we have the "tricky" leaders of the Church, such as "Cant-u-ar," claiming that the war is to preserve Christianity and others more modestly falling back on the general claim of a fight for liberty, hoping that somehow or the other the Church may get something out of the scramble.

So we are pleased to see the Bishop of Gloucester throwing over the fight for Christianity claim and falling back on the more sensible statement that the war is not for any "ideology," but for the plain right of everyone to speak freely and act with a full freedom that does not threaten the like freedom of others.

The B.B.C. boasts, through its religious section, that more time is devoted to religion than ever. We have pointed this out many times. It is one more piece of evidence that the B.B.C. and the Government behind it have yet to learn the meaning of justice and fair play.

No time at all is given to the opposite point of view. We have a passion for fairness—of a kind.

The B.B.C. religious section has, however, shown that it is in line with the silliest aspect of Christian propaganda. It has produced an Oxford Don who has been converted from Atheism. It all depends upon what this person means by "Atheism." But while a man may never reach the stage of mental development that ends in Atheism, he simply cannot, once he gets there, ever retrace his steps. We challenge this capture—the only one it claims up to the present—to produce evidence that this person ever was an Atheist, or to have experienced those infantile troubles that a child may experience when it first discovers that fairies have no existence. We do not, of course, expect that either the person concerned or the B.B.C. will have the courage to meet this challenge. Religious courage and concern for truth are curious things.

In the United States Father Dillon, a Catholic priest, who with some millions of Roman Catholics was averse to the U.S.A. entering the war, mainly because "Atheist Russia" was one of the Allies, has now discovered that the war is a "holy war," and all Americans must join in. This priest also violently denounces "conscientious objectors," although their position is untouched by whether America is fighting in self-defence or not. For the case for non-resistance has nothing whatever to do with the "justice" of a war, but upon a process of reasoning which ends by deciding that physical force is always a bad thing. When the New Testament says turn one cheek when the other is smitten, it did not mean "if you deserved the wallop"—it meant you must not resist, whether you are deserving the smack or not. There is really a philosophy, of a kind, behind the theory of non-resistance. Father Dillon appears to be just an opportunist.

As our readers are aware, we have for long been calling attention to the tactics of the Roman Church with regard to the war. It has said no word of reproof to the Italians for their barbarities with regard to Greeks, just as it was silent with Mussolini's slaughter of women and children in Abyssinia. Also it has said no word of reproof to Spain for sending a small army of Spaniards to help Hitler in Russia. Finally, even in the English Roman Catholic papers there is a steady opposition to our maintaining an alliance with Russia after the war—and if that is not done, then good-bye to a world peace.

In the circumstances we are pleased to find Mr. Cummings, in the "News-Chronicle," following along the road we have for long been treading. When they can pluck up courage enough to defy the strongly organised Roman Catholics, with Anglo-Catholics and their kind, other papers may help in calling attention to the danger to civilisation that is there in the tactics of Roman Catholicism. We hope Mr. Cummings will keep up the attack. It really is time that some of our daily papers plucked up the courage to criticise to some purpose the real influence of religion in this country. There are plenty of their contributors who could write a very effective criticism of religion if they were permitted to do so. But professional writers for the Press do not usually ask, "What is it the public need?" but "What is it the editor wants?" And, in turn, the editor asks himself, "What is it my employer desires?" There have been several attempts to run a comparatively honest newspaper—but they did not live very long.

We see that the Polish leaders have secured from Russia an agreement that Poles in Russia shall be allowed to practise their religion. They were never, so far as we know, prevented from doing so. But we should like to see an agreement that when Poland is reinstated there shall be complete and equal freedom for all religions, non-religions and anti-religions, in Poland. The Church of Rome will have most to say in this matter.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- J. HUMPHREYS.—Next week. Obligated for addresses. Copies will be sent.
- F. W. R. SILKE (S.A.) and T. M. MORTON (Montreal).—Many thanks for good wishes for 1942. The months before us have every promise of being strenuous ones, but difficulties challenge renewed efforts.
- F. HOLLINGHAM.—For circulating "The Freethinker," £1; ATHOSO ZENOO, 15s.
- W. W. SMITH.—Pleased you found the "Autobiography" so interesting. It will be reprinted so soon as circumstances permit, but there are difficulties in the way. Will reprint the verses, which are new to us. Thanks for addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent for four weeks.
- S. WARING.—We have no intention of raising the price of "The Freethinker," although we recognise your readiness to meet whatever increase was decided on. Pleased to have your appreciation of Mr. Lissenden's articles.
- ATHOSO ZENOO.—Very pleased to hear from you again, and judge that you are in good form. Perhaps one day you may revisit us in our new quarters. Always welcome.
- IAN YULE.—We shall have a few volumes, very few, of the 1941 "Freethinker," and these we are lucky to have. Will reserve one volume for you. Our business manager will let you know when it is ready. Pleased to hear the news about your daughter. Our best wishes for her future.
- W. J. ANDERSON.—Your letter raises an interesting and important point and we will try and deal with it soon in a special article. Meanwhile, we will only say that it is not claimed that Freethought will alone provide an answer to social and other problems. It is rather the condition of solving social and other problems that arise, and will continue to arise.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—F. W. R. Silke, £1 9s. 6d.; C. F. Simpson, £2 2s.; A. Hanson, 3s.; Elizabeth Pugh, £1.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

WE were glad to see in the "Daily Telegraph" a letter from Mr. Josiah Wedgwood suggesting that it is about time we dropped the "friendly alien," to distinguish those who are with us, from the "enemy aliens" who are against us. If world peace is ever to be achieved it will be by and through a return to the spirit that, about a century and a-half ago, made common the phrase "citizen of the world." Unfortunately, the course of events served to make still stronger the feeling of a narrow nationalism that has helped considerably in nourishing the conditions that have led to the world war. Even now there are reports that the position in the Far East would not be as bad as it is at the moment if the men in charge had earlier accepted the Chinese offer to join with us in close co-operation to check the Japanese. Local attachments will still be there; indeed, it is upon the basis of local attachments that a real internationalism must be based. If the peace does not lay the foundations of this internationalism, then Germany will have won the war, even though the only Germans left alive are preserved for natural history purposes.

From one point of view we are very much disturbed by the demand for Freethought literature since the war began. That demand has steadily increased, but it is difficult to meet it. Paper is very scarce, printing is very dear—75 per cent. is, we believe, the increase given by the printing trade—and to add to this there was the complete destruction of many of our publications by the heavy raid on the city last May. But the demand for our publications has steadily increased, and our business manager—who has his heart in his job—is in a state approaching tears at the number of times he has to report to would-be customers, "out of print." He hates giving money back. The demand for our books and pamphlets is greater than it has been for years. But there are the two factors to overcome—paper and cost. We are doing our best. That is all we can say.

We are asked to call the attention of the members of the West London Branch N.S.S. that subscriptions for 1942 are now due. They should be sent to Mr. E. T. Bryant, 6, Crookham Road, Fulham.

Some weeks ago we warned our public that the copies of "Almost an Autobiography" were running out. We now give notice that all we have left of this "best seller" is a very limited number of copies with the bindings a little damaged by water. The insides are clean. The few copies remaining will be sold at 5s. instead of at 6s. Those who desire copies must write at once. We are seeing what can be done to reprint, but the work then cannot be sold under 7s. 6d., even if the other difficulties can be overcome.

From the leading article in the "Catholic Herald" for January 16:—

"Whatever may be the case as regards the national outlook, the situation from the Christian standpoint is deteriorating. We are being dragged by the logical sequence of past events into a position which differs only by degrees—though still very marked degrees—from that of the powers against which we are fighting. The alliance with Russia, despite the explicit statement of the Prime Minister when it was first formed, is exercising on our national life the subtle effects that were predicted. We are now facing a future, the determining influence in which will be that of a confessedly Atheistical government. . . . The mass of British opinion is coming round to the view that, after all, there can be nothing seriously wrong with a Power capable of the magnificent fight that Russia is putting up."

In plain language, the Catholic Church will not be able to make profit out of the war; but the lesson of Russia is that the stories as to the state of things inside Russia have been decisively proved to be a tissue of lies, and the Catholic Church will have to look round for more lies—which it will no doubt find—if it is to profit by the world war. But we must keep a sharp eye on the Churches—all of them—for all of them were telling the same lies, and not one has yet had the decency to withdraw the lies. The pretence now is that the Russians have improved.

The religious theory, shouted from the housetops by the clergy, that this war was for the preservation of Christianity has been wearing thinner and thinner since "Atheist" Russia played so important a part in the war. The Bishop of Gloucester has put the finishing touch to it. Quite plainly he rejects the stupid theory. He says:—

"We are not fighting for any ideology. We are not fighting for Democracy, or Socialism, or Imperialism. Nor are we fighting for Christianity. What we are fighting for is liberty—the right of each nation to live and organise its own life in accordance with its traditions, the right of men and women to think and act freely."

This is quite refreshing. We commend this example to the Archbishops and the rest of the clergy. Not that they are at all likely to follow his example. We are sure the B.B.C. will not.

THE HALF-WAY HOSPITAL

ABOUT half-way on the road leading from superstition to Atheism there is, it appears, a halting-place or retreat for the accommodation of such travellers as find themselves incapable of doing the journey in a single stage. Here, the weakly wayfarer may indulge all those fancies, theories, doubts, confusions and delusions which fill certain minds which, having lost by some means their faith in religion, are never quite easy till they have found something equally absurd to take its place. A few of the more mentally robust among them may gain sufficient strength to prosecute their journey to its rational conclusion; but most of them, after trying all kinds of speculative remedies and nostrums—philosophic, scientific and mystic—either suspend what they call their judgment, leaving it to oscillate in all directions, or totter back to the place they came from.

The foregoing quasi-metaphorical description of the difficulties which beset these valetudinary sceptics was suggested to me by Mr. Sturge-Whiting's account of the "Half-way House," in which, it seems, he is at present awaiting the development of a sixth sense.

In an article which appeared in "The Freethinker" a little while ago, and also recently in a letter, Mr. Sturge-Whiting gives us his reasons for choosing this abode.

In the first place he has a strong objection to the term Atheist. He thinks it denies too much. He prefers Freethinker as being "far more comprehensive." I confess I do not grasp the distinction as he phrases it. Both terms, as commonly understood, denote a negative attitude towards religious belief, but whereas the Atheist expressly denies the existence of a God, the Freethinker may go no further than the denial of what is called revealed religion. He may, for instance, be a deist, or he may indulge his lingering credulity with some form of mysticism or other speculative vagary. But whatever his positive beliefs may be, it is only in virtue of his disbeliefs that he is a Freethinker. It is obvious, therefore, that in its true sense of negation, Freethinker is less comprehensive than Atheist. In describing the difference between "what Atheist means to the ordinary reader, and to those who seek to define their own position in the world of belief or disbelief," Mr. Sturge-Whiting seems disposed to flout the dictionary as leading to "much confusion and misunderstanding." But in defining his position he must, if he wishes to be intelligible to others, use words in their generally accepted sense, and not according to some arbitrary meaning of his own. The confusion and misunderstanding he complains of are usually the result of trying to improve on the dictionary. If Atheist denies too much for him, it does not deny too much for Atheists; and that is all that is required of the term. Again, he ascribes a meaning to the word god which he may understand himself, but which I fairly confess I don't. He tells us that "it is difficult to hold that by the exercise of a higher reasoning, there may not emerge an aspect or reality behind or within phenomena eligible to be described as God." But this hypothetical something behind or within phenomena cannot be a god in the only sense in which we may use the word. We know, and we believe Mr. Sturge-Whiting knows, that the being so designated does not exist. What then can he mean by the emergence of "an aspect or reality eligible to be described as God"? Are there two kinds of gods—one that he repudiates as a myth, the other, a nondescript hereafter to emerge? The emergent god cannot be like the other, else Mr. Sturge-Whiting's rational requirements would rule him out. But if he is not, what kind of a god is he? Would belief in him be an intellectual or moral gain—would it make us wiser or better in any way? Mr. Sturge-Whiting nowhere pretends that it would. Then why all this parade of caution and suspense of judgment, as though it were a matter of profound importance?

To argue that we do not know what may be behind phenomena, is beside the point. It is only on the evidence of our senses that we know anything; and we cannot rationally believe more than that evidence proves. Whether there be something or nothing behind phenomena is a problem that admits of no solution and is, therefore, profitless to discuss. But to theorise on the nature of an assumed something, and to hesitate to follow the dictates of reason in consideration of what that something may be, strikes me

as a little fantastic. Mr. Sturge-Whiting rejects the profusely documented claims of an historic deity, yet is apparently ready to "bank" on the "reality" of a speculative shadow. He writes glibly of "the exercise of a higher reasoning"; but, here again, he is using words that stand for nothing. We have no cognition or experience of any degree of reasoning higher than that of which our faculties are capable, and by the due exercise of which we are led to the denial of a god.

The more I try to discover what Mr. Sturge-Whiting really does believe, the more I am at fault. He eludes all understanding in a cloud of words which convey no idea definite enough to be grasped. He says, for instance, that he is in full accord with the categorical denial demanded by Atheists, but "if the denial is to cover the endless and limitless embodiment of human personalities deduced by what J. W. Dunne believes is valid mathematics, then I must walk warily lest my freethought itself becomes involved." It seems to me that Mr. Sturge-Whiting's "thought," free or otherwise, is very much involved already.

This mistiness and vacuity are marked characteristics of so-called philosophic and mystical speculation, and the worst of it is that its vagueness and obscurity are advanced by its dupes as evidence of its credibility. They talk of our limited faculties and coolly tell us that what we cannot comprehend is, for that very reason, likely to be true. The result is that the wildest speculations of philosophical cranks, and the maddest flights of mystical visionaries are gravely discussed and, in many cases, accepted as highly probable hints and indications of the existence of some super-essential being or god.

We have come to such a pass that reason itself is being reasoned away—its processes denied and their places supplied by bowel-movements. Can it be that the human race generally is subject to a periodic ebb and flow of sanity? I make no claims, but when we come to consider the present world conflict and many of the ideas current in modern science and philosophy, I think the question would provide matter for as fruitful speculation as most.

A. YATES.

TESTIMONY OF TACITUS CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

(Continued from page 21)

Upon the verb *interirent*, Tacitus has a couple of short clauses, each introduced by the conjunction *aut*, the two auts meaning "either—or." This is one of the spots where his love of brevity leads him into obscurity. Sulpicius, by way of clarification, changes the first *aut* into *multi*, "many," and lets the second *aut* keep its place. Here, however, Sulpicius, whilst expressing himself much more clearly than Tacitus had done, gave the part a different meaning. For, instead of the involved phrase, *aut flammam, aut atque*, etc., he put the plain one, *aut flamma usque in id reservata, ut*, etc. Thus, whilst both writers agree that the victims were used as night lamps, Tacitus says that they were first made "fit to be inflamed," probably meaning that they were smeared with some inflammable substance before being alighted; whereas, Sulpicius merely declares that "most" of those who were burned had been reserved for the above service. It is worth noting that, according to Kennett, the Romans punished incendiaries by wrapping them in coats daubed with pitch and then set on fire. In point he quotes a line from the satirist, Juvenal.* Commenting on the same line (viii. 235), Prateus, an editor of Juvenal, says that the punishment was reserved for certain grave offences, especially arson. Here, he cites Martial, and in another place (i. 255), Seneca, as alluding to the practice.† It almost seems as if the present obscurity of Tacitus arose from the fact that he was sure of being understood; and as if the clarification made by Sulpicius was due to a misunderstanding on his part.

Shortly before describing the fire, and the persecution consequent upon it, Sulpicius declares that Peter was occupying the bishopric of Rome, and that Paul was there also, having been brought thither in virtue of his appeal!

* "Antiquities of Rome" (London, 1731; p. 147).

† "Delphini Edition" (London, 1707).

to Cæsar; then, after his description of the two calamities, he goes on to declare that the profession of Christianity was forbidden by law, and to relate the condemnation of Paul and Peter, the first to decapitation, the second to crucifixion. This chronological arrangement resembles that of Orosius, who although he says nothing about a persecution caused by the fire, nevertheless places the martyrdom of Peter and Paul at some distance from the fire. It is hard to see how Sulpicius would explain to himself the fact that Peter and Paul, though persons of the highest rank in the Christian community at Rome, escaped molestation when a multitude of their fellow believers perished miserably in Nero's famous gardens on a charge of arson supplemented by an accusation of dangerous misanthropy. Did he imagine that the two great apostles fled upon the rising of the storm, and then filled with remorse, came back ere it had spent its fury? The truth is that, whereas the sojourn of Paul at Rome in the year of the conflagration may be regarded as an historical fact, the presence of Peter in the Eternal City seems to be nothing more than an ecclesiastical fiction. *Acts*, which goes so thoroughly into the life of Paul, says that he came to Rome as a prisoner appealing unto Cæsar; that at Rome he was guarded two years in his private dwelling by a soldier, and that during this period he enjoyed the liberty of receiving numerous visits. Here the account abruptly closes. Inferences, however, from the chronological data of Paul's career show that this abrupt close coincides with the tenth year of Nero's reign, which, according to Tacitus, was the one notorious for the fire and the persecution. Luke, the alleged author of the Third Gospel and the *Acts*, displays in the former work a marked tendency to win the favour of the Romans for Christianity. He even makes more effort than any of the other three evangelists to prove that Pilate strove to save Jesus from death, and that he sacrificed him to conciliate the Jews. Such a writer, if aware that Paul's appeal had failed and that Paul himself had been executed, would naturally avoid transmitting these untoward facts to posterity. Both his works show that he was very unscrupulous in his methods. As regards Peter, *Acts* does not mention him after the Council of Jerusalem, which ratified Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, early on in his career as a preacher. It is especially remarkable that when describing Paul's arrest at Jerusalem, his imprisonment at Cæsarea, and his two years' mitigated custody at Rome, *Acts* never once represents him as having intercourse with Peter at any time. This is obviously incompatible with the assertion that Peter was Bishop of Rome when Paul arrived there to make his appeal unto Cæsar. The truth is that, both in life and after death, Paul had enemies who condemned his teaching, and denied his apostleship. In the Clementine Homilies he is disguised as Simon Magnus, a false teacher, whom Peter follows about, refuting him from city to city, and finally vanquishing him in Rome. Subsequently, after Paul had become generally recognised as an authentic apostle, the myth got changed and he, along with Peter, was represented as having come to Rome and there vanquished the real Simon Magus from Samaria, after which the two apostles were put to death by Nero, the wicked Emperor. But even then Peter is exhibited as superior to Paul in respect of his having founded the Roman See, and been its first Bishop.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be concluded)

REPLY TO F. J. CORINA

IT was a character in an old melodrama who said, "Same old street, same old house, same old picture on the wall. My God, how things have changed." Yes, Mr. Corina, how things have changed, and yet how much the same. It is so old, this plea for tolerance, as old as the hills. It has been the cry of many sects for hundreds of years, and no doubt it will continue. To plead on behalf of this much maligned people is a fine and noble thing, but you will agree it is not the prerogative of Freethinkers. But you continue, "the Jewish problem will have to be faced." Mr. Corina, I am astonished that you say such a thing.

Let me say at the outset (it is the motif of this short essay) that I do not recognise a Jewish problem as such, but I do most emphatically recognise a social one. Anti-Semitism I cannot under any circumstances regard as more

than a symptom of a diseased civilisation. Why then, for goodness sake, twiddle with the symptoms while the whole organism is crying out for cure?

In my reply to "S. H." (December 21), I stated in very definite terms that only in a World Commonwealth, a world in which goods are produced for use and free distribution and in which money no longer exists, would the primary problems of humanity be solved.

If, therefore, racial hatred, of which anti-Semitism is one manifestation, and "war" patriotism another, is one of these primary problems (and who can deny it?), why spend so much time, energy and good printer's ink, in applying the unguent of anti-Semitism? Get to the root of the trouble. Get rid of a system of society that breeds anti-Semitism, as it breeds Hitler, Al Capone and their fellow racketeers.

Perhaps I may be unduly extending the significance of Thomas Paine's words, but to plead for religious toleration in a world of intolerance is "to pity the plumage, but forget the dying bird."

Let me put the proposition in more concrete form. I have little doubt that Mr. Corina could by careful and logical argument convince quite a large number of people that anti-Semitism is wrong. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that he convinced the whole world. Would he have thus destroyed the basis of anti-Semitism—the poverty, the insecurity, the fear that dominates mankind to-day? Can it be denied that these are the elements in human environment that are the precursors of that foul thing? What are all reasoned arguments worth if they succeed only in patching up a well-worn pair of trousers when what is urgently wanted is a new pair?

So, Mr. Corina, rout out that friend of yours and tell him this. Tell him that money is the root of all evil, and that only in a world in which goods are produced for use and free distribution and in which money no longer exists, will the evils now manifest finally disappear. Tell him that in such a world there would not—because there could not—exist such monstrosities as Hitler, that power divorced from a monied world is no longer power but sheer lunacy; that there would not—because there could not—exist racial hatred and war in a world in which all humanity had free and equal access to Mother Nature's bounty, and in which all were united in the common task of satisfying the needs of mankind. If he is a Freethinker, and therefore an intelligent human being, tell him in addition that he can do far better service towards combating anti-Semitism by attacking it at the roots, by opposing the conditions that produce it, by propagating that one simple ideal—a World Commonwealth. He will be killing two birds with one stone, two superstitions with but a single voice and, like the ripples in a pond, spreading out in ever-widening circles, will bring ever nearer that day when all mankind will understand that "a man, by killing or injuring another, can improve neither himself nor the other."

It is my opinion, an opinion based on experience, that it is no more difficult to convince the mass of people of the possibility and the practicability of a World Commonwealth as above described than it is to convince them of the desirability of killing or injuring their fellow men. The results, I need hardly say, are infinitely to be preferred.

Anti-Semitism, like war, can solve none of the problems of humanity, but this must be universally appreciated before both will finally perish from this earth. Towards this end, then, should all Freethinkers' efforts be directed.

I conclude with the words of Thoreau: "In the long run, men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high."

J. PHILLIPS.

B.B.C. POLICY CONCERNING RELIGION

THE B.B.C. has a virtual monopoly of one of the most powerful instruments of propaganda with which the British public can be reached. The Press and foreign radio are not serious competitors. Moreover, it is regarded as a national institution; any effort to start a competing association would almost certainly be held up by Parliament. The general public expects and believes it to be all-inclusive and above partisan and sectarian preferences.

Christianity is not on a footing with a subject such as arithmetic, but with one such as a political theory—that is

to say, it is controversial. There are many philosophies and many religions, each of which claims to be true. Yet the B.B.C.'s broadcasts on religious problems are exclusively confined to the views of certain sections of the Christian Churches, and these are heard incessantly, several times a day, week after week, year in and year out—a policy quite as detestable as if it were a particular political theory (such as Conservatism or Fascism) which was perpetually being broadcast to the exclusion of all others.

This religion has even invaded the children's hour. A development the danger of which cannot be too highly stressed. When religion is presented in this manner, the existence of God, of an after life and similar doctrines of the supernatural, are reverently assumed as a matter of course; the child's mind swallows it with all the other things it has been taught. It is just told to accept, and any signs of doubt are actively and severely discouraged. So that in an enormous number of cases the child's mental faculties are paralysed for the rest of his life wherever religion is concerned (and this paralysis can often be extended to other issues if the cunning use religious terminology in describing their case). The Churches are fully alive to this, hence their persistent drive at the present time to secure increased religious instruction of a dogmatic character (not the comparative method—that would be far too dangerous from the Churches' point of view) in State schools.

We must fight for the right of all the excluded ones to be heard over the air on equal terms with the Church of England, the Roman Catholics and the B.B.C.'s own emotional Fundamentalism. We must insist that the B.B.C. shall be forced to permit the Spiritualists, the Christian Scientists, the Agnostics, Atheists, Determinists, Materialists and Freethinkers, the Rationalists, Buddhists, Confucians and Oxford Group to broadcast their views on religious topics. The increase in membership of some of these groups as a result of their broadcasting would doubtless to the mind of each one of us seem most unfortunate. But it is my conviction that it is immoral to prevent these views being broadcast on equal terms, whilst C. of E. and similar doctrines are thrust at us repeatedly and incessantly.

There is no question of majority demand here (and even that should not result in the exclusion of minority views); radio does not exist to maintain the status quo, but to improve on it. The majority demand to learn the truth; those who love their own sect better than the pursuit of truth are, I am sure you will agree, undesirable persons.

On another point, a high proportion of the present religious broadcasters make doubtful assumptions and use words in a manner so loose as to mislead the public inevitably. This is almost bound to happen when there is no opposition or criticism; and it is not the way to assist the public in making up its mind as to the truth of these matters—which the B.B.C. should have as its aim.

There is little doubt that this enormous number of Christian broadcasts and the exclusion of other opinions arises from the fact that the Governors of the B.B.C. are themselves Christians. If so, I would like to point out to them the suspicious nature of their policy—that surely a convinced Christian must feel that his creed is capable of answering criticism; and indeed he should welcome criticism (any genuine seeker after truth does), as this stimulates interest infallibly. I at least will feel much more kindly towards Christian broadcasts when other creeds and philosophies have an equal chance of being heard.

Of course, partiality and one-sidedness might be excusable but for the monopolistic position and national character of the B.B.C. As it is, to put it clearly, the method employed in Great Britain with regard to religious broadcasting is amazingly similar to that used by German-controlled radio transmitters with regard to Nazism, and rates the human intellect at the same level.

Readers may occasionally draw parallels in B.B.C. policy with regard to other controversial issues. (Incidentally, there is only one body which makes the freeing of radio its principal aim, and that is the newly-formed Radio Freedom League,* a non-party, non-sectarian body which I urge all readers to join.)

No one has the right, in these matters, to impose the

* Secretary: Miss Elizabeth Millard, M.A., 78, Elystan Street, S.W.3.

view that he knows the truth and that the others are all wrong; hence all must have their say and each must decide for himself, and in order to form reliable opinions each must have access to all the facts and thoughts that have appeared. The B.B.C. must not be permitted to withhold this essential from the public, to a large proportion of which radio forms one of the chief, if not the chief, source of information on such problems.

There are several questions to be answered: (1) How can the B.B.C., particularly as a national institution, evade the charge of immoral conduct and partisanship, when it gives no broadcasts expressing certain religious and philosophical points of view while devoting many hours every week to the propagation of certain other views? (2) How can this policy be reconciled with a sincere desire to further the pursuit of truth—which implies a corresponding desire to assist the public in learning all there is to be said on these problems of religion and philosophy?

Should the answer by any chance be that the B.B.C. does not claim to be above partisan preferences, then it is misleading the public by its title, which should promptly be changed to the "British Orthodox Christian Broadcasting Corporation." This simple change would be advantageous in every way and would remove all illusions from the mind of the public. It would be no novelty—the Dutch radio societies were similarly named. The objection that religion forms only a portion of the B.B.C.'s programmes is removed by the fact that religion is the principal controversial issue upon which the B.B.C. takes sides.

What can we as individuals do? (1) We can complain to the B.B.C. (2) We can write to the Press, especially our local Press. (3) We can work for the inauguration of a new broadcasting association. There are various ways in which equality of broadcasting opportunity could be ensured, and this movement will help keep the B.B.C. from further reactionary activities.

Here and now we must persuade our M.P.s to get the religious advisory committee of the B.B.C. altered on the lines suggested by E. N. Mozley (in the "Hibbert Journal," October, 1941). Corresponding with that committee he elicited the statement that it had unanimously refused, and would continue to refuse, to permit religious broadcasts to take place outside the main stream of Christian tradition. Mozley desires that the B.B.C.'s religious advisory committee should be made to include the Quakers, Unitarians, Jews, Rationalists, the Royal Society, etc. And there is little doubt that even such a simple change would have a profound effect on the nation's attitude to and knowledge of religion. Let us do our utmost to further this change.

BASIL BRADLAUGH BONNER.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

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

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit., "Goodness and Freedom."

South London Branch N.S.S. (Labour Party Hall, 95, Grove Vale, East Dulwich—opposite Grove Vale L.C.C. School): 3-0 p.m., F. A. RUDLEY, a Lecture.

COUNTRY

Indoor

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

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Hall, Assembly Hall), Saturday, January 31: 7-0, Mr. J. V. SHORTT, "Religious Teaching in Schools."

Glasgow Branch N.S.S. (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street): 3-0, ATHOS ZENOO, "The New World: by Godism or by Science."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate): 3-0, MADAM KOLMER, "Austria under the Nazis—How Austria Fell."

Newcastle Debating Society (Socialist Hall, Arcade, Pilgrim Street): 6-30, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, "Faith, Hope, and Charity."