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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Humanity and War

I SHOULD like to have much more time than I can get to answer directly all the interesting letters I receive from readers, but that is impossible. By the time I have done my weekly share of writing for this paper—article, paragraphs, etc.—I have little time left for personal dissipations. So many interesting letters have to pass with only an acknowledgment, and some do not get even that. But readers are very considerate and good-natured, and, I am quite sure, are reasonably content. Still, there are some that call for a lengthy reply, and when these are of a kind that possibly express the opinions of others, a double purpose will be served by taking this method of answering.

Mr. E. J. Ford takes exception to the following passage in "Views and Opinions" for January 4:—

> "The courage and readiness to fight is one of the commonest of human qualities, and is amongst the most vital and valuable ones. Physchologically 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."

Mr. Ford's criticism runs:—

> "How can you see a parallel in the fighter for ideals and the military fighter, completely floors me. The division of society into classes necessitates armed forces for the preservation of the ruling class. In every country conscription is in force. If the fighting quality is as you describe where is the need for conscription? Your remarks are an insult to all those, known and unknown, who fought, not with lethal weapons, for what freedom we have ever enjoyed. . . . Their uniform, if any, was that of the prison. You, from previous statements, can imagine things worse than war. I cannot. Wars are not fought for ideologies, but ideologies are used to get people to fight. I know of no cause that can justify men and women all over the world being set to murder one another in a quarrel that is not theirs, and for a prize that which must not be theirs either. The moral and mental degradation, directly due to war mentality is appalling, and I could have wished that you would have kept free from this curse. To say that the ideas of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin stand for human freedom, shows lamentable ignorance of their history. In their respective countries it is these interests that are being fought for. Hitler's ideas are not peculiar to Germany. They are very strongly held by reactionaries in this country."

As usual, there is in Mr. Ford's letter much that is irrelevant to the essential question, the only one with which I am now interested and which I had in mind when writing the notes that are under criticism. I know, as everyone knows, if he has brains enough to appreciate what is said about Fascism. For instance, I have been pointing out, before the war and since, that Nazism—the German form of Fascism—has not only many admirers in this country, but that it is identical with the essential teaching and policy of the historical Christian Church. Nor have I forgotten that many of these semi-Fascists are now in office, and that two of our recent Prime Ministers, by their policy, played directly into the hands of Hitler and his chiefs. The question of whether Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt understand by Democracy what I understand by it, and whether they would be advocating it if the German danger was not present, is also beside the point raised by Mr. Ford.

I agree that those who fight against war to the extent of suffering imprisonment, so far as they are genuine in their opposition, manifest a form of courage as high as is shown by all who respond to the call of war, since they have to face strong social opposition and even isolation. A man must be sure of himself to do this. I do not agree with them, but that has nothing to do with this particular view—which is that to act in obedience to one's convictions demands a rarer form of courage than that shown in obedience to orders.

I do not agree that men do not fight for ideologies, because it seems to me that they fight for nothing else. I think if we substitute the term "ideas" or "ideals" for the almost party word "ideology," we shall see this clearly enough. There is a narcotising quality about phrases against which we must always be on our guard. "Jesus" is only "Joshua" in another language. But if a parson were to say from the pulpit, "we will now pray for the saving help of Joshua," there would be a grin about the Church large enough to block the roadway to the door.

Mr. Ford says, by way of discrediting my conception of the intrinsic nature of war, that he cannot imagine anything worse than a war that can justify setting men to "murder" one another. Murder is here a very tendentious word that cannot be passed. Put it as "is there anything that can justify a man *killing* another man" and we get the question in its proper perspective and we disarm prejudice. If a Counsel

prosecuting a man on a murder charge began his address to the jury by referring to "the murderer in the dock," he would be pulled up sharply by the judge.

I agree fully that there is always mental and moral retrogression connected with war, even in a war such as the present one. Liberty of expression is curtailed, so are liberties of movement and action. Compulsion is applied all round. As I have said scores of times, war is always a step back in civilisation. Finally, war wastes resources, moral, intellectual, social and material that have been developed during peace. But, again, this should not be taken alone. The question is whether on a balance of judgment not to take part in a particular war involves greater and more permanent than it removes.

I think I can now come to a really important point in connection with Mr. Ford's letter, and I deal with it here because others may have come to the same conclusion as Mr. Ford. Man is a fighting animal. He is also a creative one. If the first only were true the history of mankind would have been of no greater interest than the history of any other animal, and would offer a curiosity that might be shown by a visitor from another world studying the biological history of this pugnacious being. But the history of man is more than can be compressed within a study of biology. Man is a social animal in the fullest sense of that general phrase. The history of mankind is the history of the creation and development of social tools, dwelling places, institutions, traditions and so forth. The history of mankind is a record of fighting against enemies, against nature in the raw. One well-known biologist rightly called man "nature's insurgent son." Ever since man became clearly distinguishable he has been a fighting animal, fighting against difficulties of climate, of food production, against the unsocial or anti-social promptings of his own people, and on a higher level risking life in the developed hunger for knowledge, for a more secure life, and to maintain the conditions of a more progressive one. In this age-long history warfare has played its part, but success in war from the time when man wielded nothing superior to a club or a spear until these days of highly scientific war-weapons, the development of all the human qualities upon which war depends are born and developed in social life; and these qualities not only exist to-day, they are indispensible if social evolution is to continue. War does not create "military virtues," but if we allow the qualities used in war to deteriorate, we can do so only at the cost of weakening social life as a whole. What are loosely called war-like virtues are, in fact, not war born. They belong to social life and the test of the quality of our social structure may to some extent be tested by the degree to which they are expended on the battlefield. What war does, always, is to spend on the battlefield qualities that should be spent to greater advantage and nobler ends on the field of social endeavour and conflict.

The essence of this was put many years ago by John Ruskin. "No one," he says,

> "who was earnestly busy with any peaceful subject of study, or set on any serviceable course of action, ever voluntarily became a soldier. Occupy him early and wisely in agriculture or in business, in science or in literature, and he will never think war otherwise than as a calamity. But leave him idle; and the more brave and active and capable he is by nature the more he will thirst for some appointed field of action. . . . From the earliest incipient civilisation until now, the population of the earth divides itself, when you look at it widely, into two races, one of the workers the other of players, one tilling the ground, manufacturing, building, and otherwise providing for the necessities of life; the other proudly idle, and continually needing recreation, in which they use productive and laborious orders partly as their cattle, and partly as their puppets in the game of death."

What I have further to add may be said in a quotation from a pamphlet written by me after the last war. It will explain fully why I believe that our fundamental choice is not that of war or no war, but to lift warfare to a higher and profitable level, instead of expending the capacity for delight in conflict and danger on the lower one of brute force.

"Military war has no creative capacity, no power to lift civilisation to a higher level. But there is another kind of war which uses the same qualities of courage, loyalty, comradeship, and also gives a discipline that moves on an altogether higher plane. It is the warfare of competing ideas and ideals which demands a far higher and rarer form of courage than that expressed on the battlefield. It is less gaudy than the conflict to which militarism invites us, and therefore it attracts less attention. It represents the fighting impulse of man raised to a higher ethical and social level. It is a war in which theories replace rifles and bombs give place to ideas. It lifts the fighting capacity of man from the level of the brute to that of a developed mankind. . . ."

"We need, the world needs, a moral substitute for war. The courage, the loyalty, the comradeship, the love of country, so often displayed in war, and always exploited by war, have their roots in the social life of man. War cannot be abolished by making it more dangerous. It is indeed one of the finer qualities of human nature that danger so frequently attracts, and risk appeals to the love of adventure. If physical warfare is to be killed it will be by divesting it of its glitter and its fictitious greatness. If we believe that war is an infliction, and by inference that the soldier is at his best a necessary evil, then we must so act as to avoid the first and make unnecessary the second."

"To do this we could commence by demilitarising our civil life. Military processions and shows, both intended to make militarism appear before the rising generation in the most attractive colours, and with all its repulsive features in the background, should be avoided. Our histories should be so written as to place the soldier in the proper perspective and not give him the front place in the picture, so that youth may grow to manhood in the belief that it is by war that safety and salvation has been found, and that the soldier is the heroic figure that stands out against a drab background. If we wish to give the rising generation examples of courage, devotion to duty, heroism, comradeship and loyalty, we could find these examples among the men who labour in mines, who sail the seas, in the scientists risking death and laughing at ease and wealth, in the quiet heroism of everyday life. We must place upon peace the emphasis we now place upon war. There is no need to ignore the soldier. So long as he is necessary, he, too, is playing his part in the social drama, but that necessity should be treated as a blot on our civilisation and not a thing in which to glory."

"The moral equivalent for war is at hand, if we will use it. Human nature is plastic enough, and submissive enough to higher influences if we go to work in the right way. We shall not destroy the fighting capacity of man; we shall only purify it and lift it to a higher level. Man will remain a fighting animal. But he will be engaged in a warfare that causes

harvests to bloom where desolation once reigned, a warfare that aims at the destruction of the organic and inorganic enemies of humanity."

I hope this will be enough, not only to make my position clear, but also to justify it. I do not hate war merely because it kills, but because it degrades in the killing. The whole history of human civilisation has consisted in a process of development from the animal to the higher human. Our development must follow the same lines. There is none other.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A VINDICATION OF SOVIET RUSSIA

THE publisher's stock of the second edition of the octogenarian Webbs' work "Soviet Communism" was destroyed by enemy action in a City raid. So a new and less expensive issue held in reserve is now available at the price of one guinea the two volumes (Longmans, 1941), which contains a new introduction of nearly forty closely printed pages from the pen of Beatrice Webb.

In this essay, Mrs. Webb makes a spirited reply to various democratic critics who have urged objections to the Soviet system. Several former friends of Russia were bewildered by the Soviet pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, as well as the Treason Trials, and were wondering whether there was a pin to choose between the autocracy of Hitler and Mussolini and that of Stalin.

If a dictator is correctly defined as "a ruler or governor whose word is law," then, his champion declares, Stalin is not a dictator. That he possesses and exercises immense influence is indisputable. But his apologist contends that: "So far as Stalin is related to the constitution of the U.S.S.R., as amended in 1936, he is the duly elected representative of one of the Moscow constituencies to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. By this assembly he has been selected as one of the thirty members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, accountable to the representative assembly for all his activities. . . . In May, 1941, Stalin, hitherto content to be a member of the Presidium, alarmed at the menace of a victorious German army invading the Ukraine, took over, with the consent of the Presidium, the office of Prime Minister, leaving Molotov as Foreign Secretary." Also, Mrs. Webb observes, that great as are the powers of a British Premier, especially in war-time, neither he nor Stalin exercises authority so autocratic as that possessed by the President of the United States.

Mrs. Webb denies the assertion that an oligarchy reigns in Russia, and claims it as a genuine political democracy. For the Supreme Soviet consists of two Chambers—the Soviet Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. Both Chambers are directly elected. The latter body, whose deputies number upwards of 600, is utilised for the purpose of furnishing "additional representation to ethnical groups, whether represented in colour and figure, language or literature, religion or manners, inhabiting large areas of the U.S.S.R." Included within the Soviet State, there are now 16 separate republics, and under the new constitution, the landowners, capitalists, dissentients and Tsarist adherents, formerly excluded from the franchise, are now entitled to vote at elections. Moreover, "nearly fifty thousand practising priests of the Greek Church," as well as other religious officiants of the Moslem and Buddhist persuasion are now enfranchised.

The one party system in operation in Russia caused many sincere democrats to regard the elections as a bitter mockery, and Mrs. Webb admits that she herself was dismayed to discover that no opposition to the Bolshevist regime was permitted. But she points out that the single party system proved fairly efficient in the Turkish Republic, although Ataturk tried the experiment of creating an opposition group in the Assembly. This test failed, and, although it has been revived more recently, experience proves that a considerable period of political, social and religious education is necessary to make any really independent party a sound asset to society.

The complexity of this problem in Russia was far greater than in Turkey. When a revolutionary Government, it is urged, "is confronted with the task of educating a mass of illiterate and oppressed peoples, of diverse races and religions, among them primitive tribes, not only to higher levels of health and culture, but also in the art of self-government, there is no alternative to the One-Party system, with its refusal to permit organised political opposition to the new political and economic order."

There is, however, a substitute for a two-party arrangement in the initiative, the referendum and the recall. Under the referendum, all projected changes are now open to public discussion and suggestion before their submission to the Supreme Authority for acceptance or rejection. In fact, the new constitution of 1936 was eagerly examined throughout Russia before its adoption. We are informed that "copies of the draft constitution were issued in editions of ten and fifteen millions, until the grand total of sixty million copies was reached, a greater number than has ever been published in any document in such a brief period." Indeed, in both local and national administration projected measures are carefully considered and then subjected to public approval or amendment in gatherings of the trades unions, co-operatives and local Soviets. This critical procedure forms an important part of a scheme for educating the people in the art of self-government. The animated debates concerning the advisability of penalising the practice of abortion, for instance, are duly reported in the Soviet Press, and the diversity of opinion expressed in these gatherings has been hailed by hostile outsiders as proof positive of the futility of the Soviet system.

In commenting on this, Mrs. Webb intimates that the greater number of books published outside Russia which strive to show the utter inefficiency and widespread corruption of the Soviet administration, justify their charges by citing passages culled from the reports of these discussions which appear in "Pravda," "Izvestia" and "Trud," the trade union publication, and other prints. She requests her readers to "Imagine the thousands of bankruptcies occurring in capitalist countries every year being investigated not only by the workers concerned, but also by the inhabitants of the 'distressed areas'; and their proceedings being fully reported in the local Press. What material they would furnish to the critics of profit-making capitalism! But to those who value free thought and free speech as the most important factor in a democratic world, these risks would seem worth running, as they apparently do in the Soviet Union."

The turbulent condition of Russia in revolution simply necessitated the One-Party System, as it was imperative to check incipient insurrection and the machinations of Fifth Columnists. But of far greater consequence, in Mrs. Webb's estimation, was the successful establishment of the democratic control of the factors of production, distribution and exchange. In order to solve the problems of industrialism Lenin encouraged the growth of a powerful trade union organisation. Still, the main difficulty in Russia was

agrarian. Under the Tsardom there were great landowners and a number of Kulaks who possessed smaller estates and employed peasant labourers who received pitifully poor wages. But the bulk of the agricultural population were poverty-stricken peasants, almost always on the verge of starvation. Lenin found himself unable to cope with this distressing state of affairs, but his successor, Stalin, extended the policy previously adopted in urban life more or less successfully to rural requirements. According to a recent estimate the collective farms now number about 250,000.

Experimental stock-breeding and the scientific cultivation of cereals and other food plants have been extensively conducted. Important researches are, or were, pursued on both national and local State farms with the close co-operation of the trade unions, which also assist in all other socialised undertakings.

Then there is much waste land to be reclaimed. This, when adequately drained and fertilised, will greatly augment the food supply. Such soil, remarks Mrs. Webb, will scarcely yield an immediate return, and its reclamation would hardly be undertaken by any ordinary capitalist concern, but when made productive by the State, its ultimate fertility will prove highly serviceable to the community. Many other beneficent activities—sanitary, educational and others —have immensely increased under Stalin's supervision.

Whatever intolerance may have been displayed in the Soviet's opening stages, more recently little, if any, disability has been imposed on pious Russians. In fact, it is doubtful if at any time persecution of a religious character has ever equalled the penalties normally imposed on the dissentient sectarians when the Greek Orthodox Church was in power under the Tsar.

Pronounced progress in the social and economic domain in Soviet Russia is now plainly evident to all, and a more friendly relationship in pre-war days might have delayed, and perhaps prevented, the present conflict. But political and religious prejudices were too powerful to permit Britain's friendly association with Russia. Even now, theological animosity encourages a frigid attitude towards a purely secular State.

Yet Russia is no more and perhaps less secular than the Anatolia of our friends, the Turks. There the Moslem cult was practically suppressed by Ataturk. Still, Soviet Russia relegates all forms of supernaturalism to a benighted past. On the other hand, as Mrs. Webb truly states: "Soviet Communism puts no limit to the growth of man's knowledge. It counts, in fact, on a vast and unfathomable advance of science in every field, but it refuses to accept as knowledge, or as the basis of its code of conduct, any of the merely traditional beliefs and postulates about man and the universe for which no rational foundation can be found, or any of the purely subjective imaginings of the metaphysician or the theologian. . . . This new, living philosophy . . is working out the ethics of a new civilization arising from its own experiences of social life."

In conclusion, Russia's advocate warns the English ruling class of the danger to the establishment of a permanent peace when this dreadful war is over if an influential section of this class continues its icy attitude towards Soviet Russia. She urges that hearty co-operation with that State is indispensable if we are to create "a permanent international organisation guaranteeing a world peace, a failure which may mean a revival of Germany, as a newly armed Great Power, once again intent on a racial domination over other countries, whether in Europe, Africa or Asia."

T. F. PALMER.

THE DYING CREEDS

EMILY BRONTE, the author of that engrossing novel, "Wuthering Heights," who was the daughter of a country vicar, wrote: "The creeds of the Churches are as worthless as withered weeds."

The Orient was the birthplace of most of the religious creeds that have prisoned the mind of mankind, and from Babylonia to Egypt, from India to Palestine, their basic conception was that of a god or gods who had to be propitiated by bloody sacrifice; it was the same in the ancient religions of the Americans—there, deep in the tangled forests, the great temples of the Mayas in carved relief depict the processions of the maidens to be sacrificed to its cruel god.

The altars of Israel dripped with human and animal blood, and the Christian religion was based on the atrocious creed of the Atonement.

The Rev. A. W. Momerie, historian, in his "Corruptions of the Church," thus sums up the orthodox God of Christianity:—

> "The character of the orthodox Deity was as bad as can be.
>
> "He was furious with Adam and Eve for having disobeyed Him. They had eaten something—EATEN SOMETHING—which He had told them not to eat.
>
> "In consequence of this single and trifling act of insubordination He became so incredibly vindictive that He condemned the wretched pair, with all their unborn and, therefore, innocent descendants, to a life of suffering and an eternity of torment.
>
> "The Son of a Deity, however, moved by compassion, offered Himself as a sacrifice in their stead.
>
> "He proposed to redeem them, He proposed to buy them off at a cost of His own life and suffering.
>
> "The prospect of blood satisfied the Deity, and He therefore concluded the bargain."

The Rev. Chas. Beard, in "Reformation of the 16th Century," adds:—

> "I say it with the deepest respect for the religious feelings of the mass of Christians: I cannot but think that the whole system of Atonement shrivels into inanity amid the light, the space and the silence of the stellar worlds."

George Bernard Shaw, one of the greatest thinkers of to-day, sets out the attitude of Rationalism to this dreadful, cruel creed that has sent throughout the ages millions of poor innocent folk to bloody sacrifice to gods, and recollect that it was the children, the youths and the maidens who were the victims—the priests themselves were not sacrificed; they took care of the members of the caste, and fattened on the credulity and ignorance of the people.

Listen to G. B. S.:—

> "The Church is so saturated with the ancient and, to me, quite infernal superstition of the atonement by blood sacrifice, which I believe Christianity must get completely rid of if it is to survive among thoughtful people.
>
> "I have no patience with it. I can keep my temper when I read of the Carthaginians flinging living persons into their sacred furnace to propitiate their deity, and I have climbed the altars on which Mexicans, like our Druids, cut the throats of youths and maidens with the same object. But neither the Carthaginians nor the Mexicans ever, as far as I know, gave as a reason that 'God so loved the world' that he had to be propitiated in this horrible way.
>
> "As to teaching that we can all escape the guilt of our sins by allowing an innocent victim to suffer for them, thus assuring every crook that he can go on with his crookedness because he can wash away his guilt in the blood of the Lamb next Sunday, it would wreck any nation if it were not that the secular law sternly refuses to accept the alleged cleansing, and will admit the rascal to no redemption but that of ceasing to do evil and learning to do well."

Yes, the cruel creeds are dying: "The Athanasian Creed," "The Thirty-nine Articles," "The Westminster Confession," and the multitude of other creeds by which the babel of Churchianity has sought to enslave mankind, are

passing; soon they will be forgotten, lying on the dusty shelves of time, beside the other mythologies of Egypt, India, Babylon, Greece and Rome, together with the Christian Hell, its demons and devils and its winged angels, and the whole stock-in-trade of the Holy Fair.

The triumph of Truth, through its servant Science, is but a question of time.

Had it not been for St. Paul coming to Rome, Christianity would have remained *what it is*—but the mythology of a small Palestine tribe.

Therein lies the Truth! Christianity was born of the myths of a barbaric Jewish race, and despite all the attempts on the part of its sophistic apologists, who are continually endeavouring to refine and refurbish its crude avatism, so as to make it acceptable to modern civilisation, it is passing, for as grim old Carlyle said:—

"We don't want to wear the Jews' second-hand clothes.'

Strangely, the Bible, which was to be the impregnable rock of Christianity, has become the cause of the decay of their religion.

The searchlight of Science has been turned upon it, the patient research of astronomers, geologists, biologists, historians and other illustrious workers who toil for truth and truth alone, has shattered the Bible with the whole basis on which Christianity rests. "The Fall of Man" and the Atonement are found to be but the reflections of the hopes and fears of primitive man, born in the twilight of tradition.

In vain the Christian apologists endeavour to amend the Jewish mythology so as to make it acceptable to modern life.

Purged of its supernatural myths, whatever ethical ideals Christianity may retain, were borrowed from earlier philosophies.

The Golden Rule was borrowed from Confucius and the Lord's Prayer lifted, word for word, from the Babylonian invocation to its pagan God.

The common virtues of justice, fair play and brotherhood were known to mankind centuries before Christianity was born.

Canon C. E. Raven, of the Liverpool Cathedral, sums up in a few pregnant words the debacle of the orthodox creeds in "The Grounds of Christian Assumption." He says:—

"The scheme of orthodoxy has gone! Biology, psychology, textual criticism, the scientific study of history itself, have made havoc of it."

It lies in ruins.

Could we Freethinkers put it plainer?

HENRY J. HAYWARD.

ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of Canterbury has announced his coming resignation. There is little to be said about it here. The Archbishop was perhaps as good as the next without being better than the last. His ability for plotting and the degree of cunning he showed by his association with the dead—but unburied—Baldwin in securing the dethronement of Edward VIII., after he had himself stood guarantee for his being a perfect King. He will also bear remembering as one who took a prominent part in taking advantage of a state of war to lower the quality of our educational system by leading a movement for giving the clergy greater authority in the schools. For the stereotyped praise that will be given him, those interested will find in our Press. That may be trusted to say what is "right" on such occasions—even though it may be that which is not true.

It is whispered that the Archbishop of York will take Cantuar's place. Of the two we should say he has the greater intelligence. We are, of course, applying the measurement of greatness with the present state of religion in mind. For the day has gone by when men of genuine first-rate ability serve the Church. When the world was smaller, life not so varied, and science still in its childhood, it was possible for men of real intellectual power to enter the Church. Now it must put up with what it can get, and in any case the Church could hardly get intellectually lower than it did when the friends of Cosmo Gordon Lang placed him on the throne of Canterbury. In that sense if York becomes Canterbury—which is less of a miracle than the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection—he need not soar very high to hold his own with other clergymen.

The Archbishop of York, by the way, appears to be aiming at gaining the reputation of a social reformer. In that case the lines of procedure are clearly marked out—for an ecclesiastic. There must be plenty of talk about social justice, the bettering of the state of the poor, the need for better homes, the development of human brotherhood, etc., etc. But these things must be accomplished without injury to the great landowners, the disturbance of vested interests, or interference with the dominance of ruling families. Above all, the revenues of the Church must not be diminished, nor any of their privileges curtailed; and the new social State must be religious, it must believe in God and believe that without religion we shall sink to the level of what Russia used to be until it became our ally in the present war—and what it will be again when the war is over unless Stalin abandons his Atheism and goes regularly to church. Russia must learn that without religion no social state of value can exist. Further details may be obtained from Cardinal Hinsley.

By the way, has anyone ever collected the portraits of, say, 20 of the greatest religious leaders of a given period and placed them side by side with 20 leading scientists of the same period? We did it once and the result was startling. The difference was in the eyes and the mouths of the two sets of men. Trying the same method with ordinary clergymen and ordinary laymen is not nearly so striking. But we suggest that others should try the experiment that we did.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, when announcing his resignation, explained—tearfully, one imagines—how hard it is, "after being in the very centre of great affairs in Church and State, to contemplate a withdrawal to some obscure place and to face in that place the restraints and inconveniences of very slender means." We understand that the Archbishop's pension will be the paltry sum of £1,500 per year, and he will not be eligible for the ordinary old age pension. It is hard for a man to face old age on a miserable income of £30 a week.

We have always understood from the statements made by some of our archbishops and bishops that the salary they receive while in office is misunderstood. There are numerous expenses attaching to the office which run away with a great deal and leave little as a net income. In that case the Archbishop should find himself—financially—better off now. But as the Archbishop explains he now has to face the future with "slender means," it looks as though the tax on the larger income is not so severe as we were led to believe.

Still, there is a silver lining to the cloud. He thinks that by leaving public life he will now "be able to gain that communion with God that has been so sadly broken by the incessant pressure of work." But we always understood that these archbishops were in constant communion with God. God called the Archbishop to his post, the Archbishop asks for God's guidance in whatever he is doing. He offered up thousands of prayers on his own account and for the people. Accordingly, to enter into communion with God for the people was one of his chief jobs, and now the Archbishop informs us that his communion with God has been broken because of the work he had in other directions. The two chief supernatural beings that the Archbishop is concerned with are God and the devil; but if his communion with God has been broken, who was it he was in communion with during part of his term of office? Some inquiry ought to be made in the matter and more stringent rules laid down to keep the present Archbishop's successor along the right lines.

The Bishop of Chichester says he could "shake hands with a non-praying Stalin," but he would "beg to be excused from doing so with a Petain, Darlan, Mussolini or Weygand." Quite a good sentiment in its way—although some qualifications might be made concerning Petain. But

the Bishop's sentiment leaves something to be desired. Why, for instance. "a non-praying Stalin"? That description applies to large numbers of those who still call themselves Christians and to a still larger number of theists. "Non-church going" fits the majority of the people in this country. Stalin is more than that. Stalin is an Atheist, head of an avowed Atheist Government. Why insult him by bringing him down to the level of a mere churchgoer?

There is rather too much of this patronising by Christians of the rest of the world, when it suits their purpose. It belongs to the impudent practice of patronising a Freethinker by saying "he is as good as a Christian." That, too, is a very doubtful kind of compliment. To be as good as a Christian should not overstrain the morale of anyone. There are plenty of occasions where "as bad as a Christian" might be descriptive. The man who cannot easily be as good as a Christian will not rank very high in the ethical world.

We do not mean by this to be more impertinent than the ordinary Christian preacher. We mean that goodness and badness are qualities that lie much deeper than religion. They are founded on the social nature of man. Religious belief has often made a man's conduct worse; we know of no religious influence that has made his behaviour better. This does not deny that men have acted well under what they called religious influences, but in neither science nor philosophy do we take a man's explanation of the cause of his actions as final; and if we wanted a single illustration of the degradation of morals we would take one of the tame Christian professors or professional preachers instructing the world on the essential immorality of our natural impulses. It belongs to the same vicious order of things as Fagin's school for boys. A world that cannot rise higher than the ideal these people put forward may well be at war.

In the "Star" of a recent date there was an account of a colonel who committed suicide. On the table by him was an open Bible. Why not? We do not see any kind of a moral in it. Men have committed suicide with a whisky bottle near them, and others with nothing but a knife, or a pistol, or a bottle than had contained poison. But we do not imagine that Christians will find any moral at all in this colonel's death.

Catholics in Holland are to wear a badge so that their Nazi masters may know them. There seems something like the "Mills of the Gods" in this, for it was the Roman Church that did this kind of thing when it ordered Jews to wear a badge so that they might become easier victims of Catholic brutality and taste for robbery.

Someone has spotted what is considered a difficult verse in Isaiah ix. 3. This reads in the A.V.: "Thou has multiplied the nation and not increased the joy"—a dreadful sentiment for Christians who have always insisted that birth-control is the Devil's own work. Some Christians want to delete the "not"—which is what the R.V. has done, putting the other reading in the margin. This shows how marvellously is the text "inspired," for you now can pay your money and take your choice—yes or no, just as you like. As for the "original" Hebrew—well, that agrees with the A.V.: increasing the nation does *not* increase their joy. Still, God's Holy Word is always right whichever way you look at it.

The "Catholic Herald" is highly indignant over an appointment made for a Town Clerk in Belfast. It was discovered that the man had a Catholic wife, and the Ministry refused to endorse the appointment. We agree that is religious bigotry, and we know that religious bigotry runs very strongly in Belfast. But suppose the man appointed to the Town Clerkship in Dublin was a Catholic with a Protestant wife. Would his appointment have been ratified? If religion in both North and South Ireland were abolished, the relations of the two peoples would be much better than they are.

The chief of the B.B.C. religious broadcasting section has proudly announced that there are now 37 religious broadcasts every week. That is an average of just over five per day. Of course, these do not include the professedly social lectures given—such as those by Professor Macmurray—the chief aim of which seems to be that of leading up to the irrelevent conclusion that we must believe in a god as a basis for our social life. Never by any chance does one get a lecture in which the speaker says very decisively that it does not matter a damn whether one believes in a god or not, a lie is a lie, truth is truth, goodness is better than badness and moral roots in social life. All the speakers are of the tame order that speak as they are expected to speak, and they who will not are left out in the cold.

But we should all remember that the B.B.C. is more than a private institution. It is in fact, whatever it is in theory, a Government-controlled institution, and its 37 religious addresses every week—plus?—is almost evidence that the talk we get from the Government about Democracy is just so much bunkum—useful for a time but not seriously meant.

It should be noted that John Reith—now Lord Reith—was the one who stereotyped the religious course of the B.B.C. He is now in politics—one of our political responsibilities. If he loses one job another must be found. Religiously, we should say he has earned his position. As G. W. Foote used to say: "Jesus died on the Cross; many Christians live on it."

Mgr. Waring, Vicar-General in the United States Army, has issued a notice to the soldiers that wearing a "scapula" increases the chance of a wounded man receiving the last sacrament. That is very tame. Why not tell them it increases the chance of not getting wounded? Can it be because someone might calculate the number of wounded men who wear scapulas with those who do not? A very artful man is Vicar-General Waring; and what a cheap get-out! It only betters the chance of getting the last sacrament. It does not ensure it. Why, in the good old days, wearing something "sacred" would have warded off bullets and turned the edge of a sword. How have the mighty fallen!

In the spring of 1940 the Bishop of Chichester managed to get a number of churches together to provide a Sussex coast town with constant day and night praying—no cessation whatever. In spite of difficulties, this continuous "intercession" was kept up, with results so familiar to everybody. France collapsed and a great part of the Sussex coast, including the above town, became a danger zone. Not only that, for a large number of the praying people had to be evacuated and many churches closed down for the duration. God seems to have taken this praying quite in the wrong light.

The Church of England Year Book for 1942 records that about 1,000 churches and Church schools and halls have been bombed by German warplanes. What is the moral of it? When a church is saved the clergy are not slow to put it down to the watchfulnes of God. What is signified when the churches are bombed? Surely the conclusion is that God could if he would, but he won't, or that God would if he could, but he can't. We should like to get some other reasonable conclusion from an intelligent Christian preacher.

There is a story of a millionaire who wished to make himself "right with God" by building a very handsome church. The church was decided on and built. Then the parson came round with another request. A cheque was wanted for a lightning protector. "Not at all," said the millionaire, "I paid for the church and gave it to God, and if God can't take care of his own property, damned if I will!" And God used to be a rare hand at striking people dumb or blind or dead if they desecrated his sacred buildings. What has happened?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. Newbold.—Article received. Shall appear as early as possible. Thanks.

F. Collins, H. Shaw and L. Williams.—Much obliged for cuttings. They help.

Jack Barton.—We are keeping well, although at the moment of writing we are bothered with a cold. It is worry that is more trying than what other people call work, but which we only know as occupation.

R. Bott.—Thanks for good wishes and addresses of likely new readers; paper being sent.

War Damage Fund.—A. H. Deacon, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. Ingham, £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 have received a number of letters from friends away from their homes on war service asking for introductions to Freethinkers in various localities. We propose compiling a list of resident Freethinkers who would be willing to invite those on war service to their homes—as visitors, of course. An hour or two in the evening with congenial friends would do something to make their lot comfortable. Letters from both the local residents and men on service should be addressed to the N.S.S., 2 and 3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4 Meanwhile, the offices of the N.S.S. and "The Freethinker" are always open to service men and others who are "passing through," or who are in London for a longer period.

We are pleased to note that the Prime Minister bowed to the obvious and well-founded opposition of the majority of Members of the House of Commons to the broadcasting of his speech to Parliament concerning the war situation. It might be good to broadcast the whole of the debate. Then the general public would be able to form some idea of the value of the ministerial defence. But to broadcast the speech of the Prime Minister alone—with probably a selected speech or two, or parts of the few reported—would have been a flat denial of fair play. Mr. Churchill was very ill-advised to make such a suggestion; he showed good sense to drop it when the nature of the proposal was recognised. An indication of astute leadership is the willingness to follow when following becomes advisable.

There is a good run on "Pamphlets for the People." All of these are not available, but such as are continue their good work. The aim is, as we have said before, to present the fundamentals of Freethought in a brief but adequate manner. We invite help in their circulation.

A very useful addition to "The Thinker's Forum" is "Russia and the Roman Church," by Joseph McCabe (Watts and Co.; 6d.). So far as the co-operation of Russia is considered essential to the much-talked-of New World Order, and so far as the basis of that New World is to rest on the humanising of life and the independence of thought, to that extent the Roman Church must be reckoned as the most powerful force for evil. The Papacy has but one aim—that of establishing its own supremacy—and it seeks the realisation of that aim in substantially the same way that Nazi Germany has sought to secure supremacy in Europe and, through Europe, the world. So far as it can be done in 48 pages, Mr. McCabe has done his work well.

The following is a report of a resolution carried, with only two dissentient votes, by the Conference of the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools at Oxford. The Executive moved:—

> "'That this Council most emphatically expresses the belief that any religious test, expressed or implied, for head or assistant teachers in secondary schools would gravely and adversely affect the well-being of secondary education in this country.'
>
> "Mr. J. Clay Jenkins, moving the resolution, said they were faced with the last stages of a long and vigorous campaign to insist that in all State-maintained schools there should be taught authoritative Christianity.
>
> "'If it succeeds it will be a disaster to education in this country,' he said.
>
> "'At the best it puts a premium on orthodoxy, and at the worst makes the teachers subalterns of the clergy and puts a premium on hypocrisy.
>
> Religious Disunity.
>
> "'The people who are trying the introduction of the test cannot agree among themselves as to the fundamental beliefs, yet they claim the right to order the beliefs of teachers and do our thinking for us.
>
> "'If the teachers allow this to come to pass they will only have themselves to blame and will deserve no sympathy from any quarter.
>
> "'I should also like to appeal on behalf of the children in the schools. It is cruel to take the immature mind, run it in blinkers and say to the child: "All good people believe these things; you must believe it or you are a moral pervert."
>
> "'We must take a stand for liberty of thought and liberty of conscience.'
>
> "Mr. A. Merrick (Bootle) said religion was one of the most important things in life, but religious tests were tests which only punished the conscience.
>
> "'We will not sell our conscience for any pieces of silver,' he declared. 'Any form of religious tests for teachers would be destructive.'
>
> "The motion was carried with only two dissentients."

This is not the only resolution of its kind; we should like to see more, particularly from Council Schools. None have more cause to fear the success of the plan arranged by Christian leaders and the Board of Education to place the schools under the domination of the clergy.

The regretted death of that charming film star, Carole Lombard, has been put down in certain quarters to the fact that she refused to take any heed of the solemn warnings of some obscure "numerologist." There is not much difference between belief in magic numbers and belief in the all-powerful stars—a belief which has been lately the subject of attacks even from our superstitious and credulous bishops. However, here is a problem for our own numerologists to solve—the year 1942. Add these figures together and you get 16 which, added again, gives us 7, and 7 is, of course, a very lucky and, in some quarters, even a holy number. What exactly can we learn from this? One writer, commenting upon it, has found out that the numbers totalling his income-tax return also come to 7, and wants to know if this means that he or the State is lucky? We give it up.

An effort is being made to form a branch of the N.S.S. at Bath, and Freethinkers in the area willing to help are asked to communicate with Mr. G. Thompson, 13, The Croft, Monkton Combe, near Bath.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS AND CONFESSIONS

STANDING outside my office a few days ago, I noticed two strangers on the other side of the road, looking at me in a curious fashion. They could not take their eyes off me even when I deliberately returned their gaze, to let them know I was aware of their interest. With them, though not staring, was a young friend of mine who is becoming keenly interested in Freethought, and it seemed he was responsible for the inspection.

Later, I asked my friend why the strangers had stared.

"I told them you were an Atheist," he replied, "and they seemed to want to have a good look at you."

"I suppose they were disappointed?" I queried.

"Yes, they were, really," he replied. "Although I don't know why they should have been."

"Perhaps it was because they couldn't see my horns and pitchfork," I remarked, and I suggested they should come to Secular Society meeting in the hope that they might at least see an Atheist breathing fire as he talked about God.

This incident, which might be termed "Christian impressions of an Atheist," sent my thoughts back more than twenty years, to my first impressions of Atheists. Having an Atheist father, even as a youth I did not expect to find horns and pitchfork, but I did find something different.

The first Atheist I ever knew outside my home was Edwin Robertshaw, of Halifax. When I went to see him at his home one evening in 1921 I had the feeling of coming into the presence of a hermit. Robertshaw, to my youthful eyes, was a grisled veteran, about seventy. The victim of a leg accident, which had ended his outdoor activity, he lived in a bed-sitting room, surrounded by an intelligent man's best companions—scores of books in all parts of the room, scores of issues of "The Freethinker," and other Freethought publications, two or three portraits of Freethought notables on the walls, and, among other busts, a magnificent twelve inch bust of Charles Bradlaugh in the centre of the mantlepiece. Yes, Robertshaw was like a hermit, an intellectual hermit, during his declining years, and I am pleased to think that the frequent visits that this then callow youth paid to him helped to renew his confidence in the future of Freethought.

Never an orator, but a staunch, fighting ranker, he had, before his accident, tramped hundreds of miles in 'busless days to fight in the battle of Reason on the Yorkshire and Lancashire battlefields, a loyal henchman of the leaders of the day.

The greatest tragedy happily he never knew, for he was dead and buried when the sacrilege took place of the collecting of his books and periodicals by the waste paper department of the Salvation Army. I was then too young to know the ways of the Christian world, or that final Christian insult would never have been permitted. Where the Bradlaugh bust went I never knew, but I regret to this day that I lacked the cheek to make it mine while Robertshaw could have given it.

Edwin Robertshaw's obituary was my first contribution to "The Freethinker." My second was the obituary of Robertshaw's friend, A. B. Wakefield, of Hipperholme, near Halifax, who died some years later. Youth paying tribute to the passing pioneers was not a bad way of entering into Freethought writing, creating, as it did, a consciousness of the debt we owe to those who went along the rougher paths, to make them easier for our feet.

It was Robertshaw who sent me in search of my second Atheist, when he asked me to see A. B. Wakefield, and give him his regards; and thus began a new and inspiring friendship for me. The dignified, courteous, white-bearded Wakefield was an inspiration for any youth. To "sit at his feet" in that little room overlooking Sunny Vale, to listen to, and talk to, this veteran of Freethought, was worth a thousand sermons; to know the charming woman who was his wife (and one of our first lady magistrates) was to recognise the lying slander about women in Christian doctrine.

To know his home was to shatter the lowest of Christian libels on Atheists; and to watch him write affectionate letters to his grown-up children away from home was to understand that love and reason are co-existent qualities. Wakefield's was a home to give the lie to every Christian calumny. What I saw for myself, Alvan Blake saw twenty-five years before I knew Wakefield—before I was born—and he wrote in "The Truth Seeker" of that time:—

> ". . . There is no happier home in England; none where wife and weans are more honoured and cherished, none where children are more idolised and idolising, nor where domestic virtues reign in greater completeness."

And that was my impression, long before I knew anything of either Alvan Blake or "The Truth Seeker."

Mention of "The Truth Seeker" recalls another Atheist who, though I never knew him personally, left a vivid impression on the single occasion that I saw him.

J. W. Gott—the indefatigable business manager of "The Truth Seeker" near the end of last century; Bradford's most notorious Atheist, and later, near the closing days of his life, the nation's most notorious Atheist; the blasphemer who went to prison.

Strange, that a man with the name of Gott should be the last on the list of those who have been imprisoned by defenders of the name of God!

Gott seems to have been one of the tigers of Freethought, attacking and tearing down without mercy the veil of Superstitution; and it was a tiger that I thought of when, as a curious lad, I once stopped to listen at the bottom of Ivegate, Bradford, as he was selling pamphlets and voicing propaganda to the dense (both ways) crowds that thronged this narrow shopping street after the Saturday football matches had emptied their throngs into the town for some fresh excitement.

It is recorded of Gott that once, when selling a pamphlet on the edge of the crowd at a political meeting, he caused the chairman to halt the meeting and disclaim any association with "the man who was selling pamphlets." The ingenious Gott, far from being perturbed, continued to sell his pamphlet, announcing it with a new slogan:—

> "God and the Workers. The pamphlet that got the chairman's back up. One Penny."

Gott suffered much for Freethought long before he paid the greatest penalty that a liberty-loving man can suffer; but those heartbreaking prison months of Christian revenge took their final toll, and Gott came back to freedom only to suffer more, and to die. Gott was not a martyr; he was the victim of a savage creed which has a vicious law to guard its God. But his sacrifice was not in vain, for I personally know several whose faith in the religion of "forgiveness" was so shocked by the case of Gott that to this day, almost twenty years afterwards, they still fight shy of the Christian Church, though they shamefacedly hang on to God.

F. J. CORINA.

(To be concluded)

A RADIO RUSE

THE B.B.C. is the outstanding example, in this country, of a governmental body that is greatly influenced (to say the least) by Christianity. It is probably not a coincidence that it is also run on more dictatorial lines than most of our other institutions. Broadcasters are not allowed to say what they want or even what the majority of the people would like to hear, but what the B.B.C. decides is best.

As radio, however, is perhaps the greatest propaganda medium of the present day, and as the B.B.C. is the only organisation of its type in the country, its influence cannot be ignored. It is no use, on the other hand, submitting oneself to its dictatorship and trying to "get some message across"; censorship renders that impossible. The remaining method is to criticise in writing, and I shall attempt here to expose a piece of misrepresentation by a speaker on the radio.

The talk concerned was "The Community of Mankind," by John Macmurray, printed in "The Listener," and is an example of the most insidious type of Christian propaganda. In a religious programme everyone knows what to expect, but when a social talk is used as a vehicle for a Christian message it is liable to be more dangerous.

The broadcaster starts by dividing society into two kinds —the "State," which he calls the "functional life," and the "Community," which he terms the "personal life." Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand are different States," he says, "but they are parts of one community." That is true if "community" is used in a wide sense, but even in its "widest sense" this unity cannot be called "a religious unity," as Mr. Macmurray claims it to be. It is simply due to an original physical or blood relationship and has nothing to do with religion.

It is later that the speaker's religious motive really becomes clear: "To bring to birth the brotherhood of man is the ancient purpose of the Christian Church," he says. That is far from true. On the contrary, the Christian Church has always been the greatest obstacle to that end—history provides ample proof of that—and as G. W. Foote said: "Christianity is an historical religion and must be judged historically." Its damnation then becomes inevitable.

Mr. Macmurray, however, thinks that the problem of uniting mankind is "a religious task demanding a religious motive and a religious leadership. It cannot be achieved by political or economical organisation." This is nothing short of ridiculous. Perhaps Mr. Macmurray could tell us how to unite the many religions of the world. He should set to work first of all in the small "community" of Glasgow, trying to unite Roman Catholics and Protestants. After that he could tackle the same problem in Northern Ireland. If he had any success with warring Christians he could travel to Jerusalem and then to India to settle religious differences there. It is impossible even to unite conflicting Christian sects, and yet Mr. Macmurray thinks Christianity can unite the whole of mankind.

The only way to obtain a unity of peoples is by appealing to, and fostering, what is common to all. Obviously no religion can fill this category, nor can even a combination of religions (if that were possible), because there are people in all lands who have no religious beliefs at all, and their numbers are increasing.

It becomes evident, therefore, that it is only on secular grounds that the brotherhood of man can be achieved. The promise of eternal happiness after death is no longer sufficient—what is wanted is happiness now, in the only life we know anything about and the only life with which we are really concerned. The appeal then must be made to the common love of life among all peoples to work together for the same goal—the greatest amount of happiness for everyone on the earth.

It is not surprising for Mr. Macmurray to misuse words, but perhaps his most patent error in this direction occurs near the finish when he says: "The real Atheism is the refusal of human brotherhood." The adjective "real" is meaningless; there is only one Atheism and, simply stated, it means "without belief in God," and that is the only logical sense in which it can be used. It has no connection with either the acceptance or refusal of human brotherhood, but is the negation of religious belief.

Now a great deal of misunderstanding is caused by speakers and writers using words loosely. This is most evident among the clergy and their supporters. Soul, spirit and the like have definite religious meanings and should be confined to theology. Unfortunately they are not and, with a little ingenuity, a totally different aspect may be put on a word than is actually correct. "A faith in God which is not a faith in common humanity is an imaginary faith," says Mr. Macmurray. It can be replied that faith in God is all imaginary, but the sentence is an example of the modernist tendency to embrace in Christianity all that is good in our social system. Mr. Macmurray makes this clear when he remarks: "If the Church is to perform its task, it must conceive it in terms of the common working life of to-day and not as a purely spiritual function."

There is danger in this movement to widen Christianity, but there is also encouragement to Freethinkers. It is an indication that Christianity is weakening. When it was strongest and a seat in heaven was the sole aim of life, its doctrines were narrowest and strictly theological. Now it is losing its hold. Heaven has become more shadowy and man is desirous of happiness while alive. To that extent has Freethought triumphed, but the struggle is by no means over, and we must not relax until our task of ridding the earth of its most virulent disease is completed.

C. McCALL.

TESTIMONY OF TACITUS CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

(Continued from page 43)

The relation of Sulpicius to Tacitus is as follows: Sulpicius ("Chronicles," b. II. c. 28, s. 2) relates the obscene story of Nero and Pythagoras. This same story, almost in the same words, is related by Tacitus in his "Annals" (b. XV. c. 37), a passage of unquestioned authenticity. Then, after a brief interval, Sulpicius narrates, in Sections I. and II. of his next chapter, how Nero, failing by other means to divert from himself the suspicion of having ordered the fire, cast the blame for this disaster upon the Christians, putting them to death in cruel ways, three of which the narrative specifies; all these details Tacitus gives in the disputed passage of the above work (b. XV. c. 45), where his account of the mortal inflictions much resembles that which Sulpicius renders. The fact that Sulpicius does not mention the reference of Tacitus to Christ, nor the censure of Tacitus upon the Christians, is not at all surprising, because he would be likely to regard the first as superfluous and the second as injurious. Hence it may safely be concluded that the copy, or the copies, of Tacitus within reach of Sulpicius contained the disputed passage, even in its present form. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that what Sulpicius quoted from was a pre-existing forgery. The internal evidence of the passage, as supplied by its style, its contents and its connection with the parts adjacent to it, strongly confirms its authenticity. The absence of corroboration from external evidence is the only source of doubt, but no one who regards the matter carefully will deny that this very absence constitutes a most serious objection. Excepting Tacitus, Sulpicius is the earliest known writer who accuses Nero of having thrown the responsibility for the fire upon the Christians. The fact that such men as Eusebius and Orosius, who were so well acquainted with Christian literature, do not mention the above accusation as reported in any Christian work, strongly supports the view that up to their days it had never been made by any Christian author, for the reasons which might induce them to decline repeating it after Pagans, would not prevent their repeating it after Christians. Josephus, writing towards the end of the first century, declares that many persons had written accounts of Nero's life, some of these being of an inculpatory, others of an exculpatory character.* If any such account mentioned that Nero had charged the Christians with the fire, it is strange indeed that no Pagan save Tacitus, and no Christian before Sulpicius, should have been found to repeat this charge in their works still surviving, or have been said to repeat it in their works now lost.

* Ant. XX. viii. 3.

This particular silence, however, falls under the head of that general silence of theirs about the Christians which long ago impressed Gibbon as a remarkable fact. In the first century not one Pagan writer mentions their existence. Early in the second century Pliny counsels Trajan as to how they should be treated. Within the next dozen years or so there is the description of the Neronian Persecution given by Tacitus, and the brief reference to it made by Suetonius. Later on Celsus attacks their system, and Lucian derides it. Dio Cassius leaves them unnoticed. The authors of the Augustan History say very little indeed about Christianity, though they wrote under Diocletian and Constantine. As regards Victor and Eutropius, who wrote in the second half of the fourth century, the first never mentions that religion, whilst the second has only one reference to it. The truth is that at the age of Tacitus and Suetonius, cultured and influential Pagans still regarded the Christians as a fantastic sect from the East, whose morals were reprehensible and whose teaching was contemptible. People with these views and feelings would hardly think it worth while to commiserate Christians of the past. As time went on, persecutions under Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Decius and others would put the Neronian Persecution out of mind, precisely as the monstrosities of Commodus and Heliogabalus caused those of Nero to lose much of their interest. Finally, when the Christians began to seem on the way to victory, prudence would deter Pagan authors from giving them needless offence and, after all, why should they try to support their cause by holding up for imitation the example of a wretch like Nero?

As concerns Christian writers, it is evident that from the scribes of The Revelation onwards, they were wont to recall the cruelties which Nero had inflicted upon their sect, and this was especially the case after the belief prevailed that the apostles Peter and Paul were among the sufferers. The traditions of their own party touching this persecution were so ample that they had no need to produce Tacitus for its attestation. Orosius, although well acquainted with Suetonius, never adduces his testimony to the fact that Nero punished the Christians. Moreover, since Tacitus, whilst acquitting the Christians on the charge of arson, agrees that they were guilty of flagitiousness, Christian authors would be reluctant to bring forward his evidence, fearing lest it should do their cause more harm than good. Sulpicius, when borrowing from Tacitus, omits his name, and in the case of the famous passage, omits likewise all that it contains against Christians and Christianity. This procedure on his part may suggest the query, why had not other Christians taken the course which Sulpicius took? Hence the following remarks. A contributor to Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of Classical Biography"† well says:—

> "We cannot suppose that Tacitus was ever a popular writer. His real admirers will always be few; his readers fewer still."

Such a fact would of itself tend to restrict the reproduction of his works. A further restriction would be caused by two evil practices already existing among men of letters at his day, and soon afterwards rampant. For, to gratify idle readers, collections of assorted facts culled (mostly without acknowledgement) from regular historians and biographers were furnished by an ever-increasing mob of Epitomists, whilst more or less drastically made breviaries of great historical and biographical works were provided by equally complacent scribes. These abuses occasioned the loss of many noble books, because they prevented the originals from getting copied in sufficient numbers to ensure their preservation. To the perils of books in those ages from neglect of reproduction should be added the risks incurred by fires, earthquakes, wars and tumults; also the fact that when the Christians got into power they systematically destroyed all works attacking them or their beliefs. Finally, there is an historical fact which seems to indicate that by the opening of the third quarter of the third century the works of Cornelius Tacitus had become, or were becoming, rare. For lest they should perish by "the neglect of readers," the Emperor M. Claudius Tacitus, who claimed descent from their author, ordered that ten copies of them should be made yearly, at the national expense, and deposited in the public libraries.‡ This order, it is to be feared, lacked obedience, since M. Claudius Tacitus reigned only from the autumn of A.D. 275 until the beginning of April, A.D. 276,§ and Florianus, his half-brother, who succeeded him, was murdered by his own troops after a reign of two months and 22 days‖, the throne then passing in a revolutionary manner to M. Aurelius Probus, who had no kinship with the late emperors.¶ The above facts appear to suggest a reasonable explanation why the *Annals* of Tacitus was not as well known in later ages as might have been expected from its unquestionable merits.

My inquiry ends with the evidence afforded by Sulpicius, general and particular circumstances hindering me from perusing the subsequent history of the passage. How gladly would I have sought after it in the Historical Epitomes indited by the scribes of the Dark and the Middle Ages in order, if traces of it there appeared, I might see whether those compilers had merely reported the fragments preserved by Sulpicius, or whether, with or without them, they had repeated other fragments, and finally, whether one or more of them had cited the entire passage.

E. CLAYTON DOVE.

† London, 1850.

‡ Flavius Vopiscus, Tacitus X.; Panckoucke's Edition (Paris, 1846).

§ Liebenham (p. 116).

‖ *Ib.* 117.

¶ Flavius Vopiscus.

P.S.—Vol. LXI., p. 560, C. 2, N. 1.: For Taceti read Taciti. P. 561: For siccarii read sicarii, and for supplicum read supplicium. P. 577, C. 2: For Septimus read Septimius. Vol. LXII., P. 8, C. 2: For "a register" read "a registrar." P. 20, C. 1: For "the pagan" read "the Pagans." Upon "after briefly describing" read "in accordance with Suetonius the progress of the fire, and the cruelty of Nero." P.21, C. 1: For "his interest" read "its interest." For Sulpicii Severi Leberi Qui Superanut read Sulpicii Severi Liberi Qui Supersunt, and make the three lines a footnote. For ab es (twice) read ab eo. For reservate read reservati.

SHOULD WE READ FICTION?

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL, former Liberal statesman and eminent man of letters, has been credited with the remark that every time a new book was published he read an old one. A colossal task nowadays! But no one took the remark seriously as the meaning was clear enough. The cheap Press and the cheap novel commenced about the same time as the first work of Shaw and Wells appeared. These writers were unaffected by the "competition," and their works shone the brighter in comparison with the new and poorer standards. It was Matthew Arnold, one of the masters among English constructional critics, who mentioned the danger of permanently lowered cultural standards. These thoughts occurred after reading the article under the above heading appearing in a recent edition of this paper.

But surely the question is what kind of fiction should we read? Geoffrey Crump, M.A., writing in "The English Language: Its Beauty and Use" (Odhams Press), remarks: "We read in order to live more fully, and consequently we should read the writings of those who are wiser, wittier and more lovable than ourselves, so that we may increase our stock of wisdom, wit and love. We should accord to books the same attention, respect and politeness that we should accord to their writers if they were speaking to us in person." He goes on to say that "opinion is of little use to us, or to anyone else, unless it is based on reasoned judgment and experience." One gathers from this comment on reading that we should read both for pleasure and profit. Fiction, if wisely chosen, should supply both of these assets.

The task is to separate the wheat from the chaff. Or, should this entail too much trouble, to read whatever comes to hand—without discrimination and without care. Which is the best way?

As the subject is fiction, we should not include such writers as Darwin, Frazer, Tylor, Herbert Spencer and Kant, as has been suggested in the article referred to. There is no doubt that some of these writers had some

thrilling matters to write about. In fact, many of their discoveries read "stranger than fiction." But there the similarity ends. There is no fiction in Darwin's "Voyage of the Beagle" or in Frazer's "Golden Bough." So we must turn our thoughts elsewhere—in short, to the novel; to the thriller, to the land of mystery and imagination.

It may be possible to maintain that something may be learnt by reading fiction of "third-rate" quality. A book may be termed "good" or "bad" as it affects our prejudices and dislikes; but this is not very helpful. Unless we can explain whether or not a book interests us, and why, we have not gained much, if anything, by reading it. The effect of appealing direct to the sensations of the reader is a pleasure that cannot be sustained; and many of the third-rate writers fail because of this. The test of a good novel is to give lasting pleasure. Novels of enduring character are fashioned from the best materials by superb craftsmen. Poor imitations resemble inferior furniture which is covered with veneer, and having imperfections filled in with putty and covered with french polish. Let us read fiction by all means, but let it be worth while and not worthless!

The English language is rich in first-class fiction both old and new, and the difficulty which presents itself is who must be left out if we are to read a tithe of what is available in the short span allotted to us. For it must not be forgotten that much reading exists for us which is quite distinct from Fiction, e.g., History, Philosophy, etc. The novel is a mirror held to life, whereas History is life itself.

There is fiction in plenty for every age and taste. How shall you take your fiction? There is mystery and imagination, love and adventure, murder and detection, romances and revenge with wit and humour thrown in. There are books that may be read over and over again—with zest and zeal.

Here is a mixture of old and new. Most of the books written by these authors cannot fail to please: Trollope, Aldous Huxley, Thackeray, H. G. Wells, Dickens, D. H. Lawrence, Arnold Bennett, John Buchan, Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle, Eden Phillpotts, John Galsworthy, Stanley Weyman, Meredith and Hardy. Mention should be made of the American novelists, Poe, Irving, Hawthorne and Henry James. Of eminent women writers, both old and new, the following are worthy of attention: Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, the Bronte Sisters, Margaret Kennedy and Clemence Dane. Turning to foreign countries, there are thrills and variety in the works of Dostoievsky, Dumas, Anatole France, Victor Hugo, Tolstoi and Pierre Loti. These stars constitute some of the most brilliant in the literary firmament and, if change of metaphor be permitted—from heaven to earth—the writers have provided a well of inspiration and delight from which you may draw for many years to come.

In conclusion, it was Bacon who said: "Reading maketh a full man."

S. GORDON HOGG.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held January 18, 1942

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, Bryant, Ebury, Horowitz, Griffiths, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Monthly financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Kingston, Bradford, Glasgow and the Parent Society. Arrangements for lectures in Manchester, Preston, Blackburn, Glasgow and South London were noted and instructions issued. Progress was reported in the case coming before the Indian Law Courts. Mrs. M. Quintin was re-elected as a Trustee of the N.S.S. Correspondence from various sources was dealt with and the proceedings closed.

The next meeting of the Executive will be held on March 1 next.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

CORRESPONDENCE

"S. H." AND MENTAL VACUISM

SIR,—I have very carefully read the article of "S. H." in the current issue of "The Freethinker," but I fail to find in it any elaboration of his statement that people who have given up religion experience a mental vacuum, and that mankind in the mass must have something to worship.

Now "S. H." makes a challenging statement that all thoughtful folk find it necessary to question the "universe at large" for an answer to those essentially religious questions put forward in these difficult and trying days. He immediately follows with the statement that the answer to the questions need not be religious! It would be interesting to hear what the questions are. "S. H." will probably enlighten us when he has crystallised his thoughts on those matters. He may be a vacuist—one who holds the doctrine of a vacuum in nature, opposed to a plenist.

With regard to his statement that Freethinkers can, in fact, become as set and almost as bigoted in their outlook as the most extreme religious folk, surely he is mistaken in this! If the Editor of "The Freethinker" had been a bigot would "S. H." have been accorded the privilege of inclusion in "The Freethinker"? The Editor's attitude in this respect is typical of all Atheists, who are always open to hear the arguments of their opponents. At every lecture given under the auspices of the National Secular Society questions and discussion are always welcomed.

As to the advice tendered to me to study the attitude of certain writers to prove that they are becoming more religious in their outlook, I wonder if they introduce into their characters any Atheist or Rationalist, and what kind of a case they put up. I make bold to state that they are made to come off second.

I quite agree that of the huge masses of people who have left the Churches, few take up a definite Atheistic position. The forces of bigotry are still very strong, and it requires strong courage to fight against them; but it is a fact that Secularism is making progress, and the Churches are becoming weaker as time marches on.—Yours, etc.,

H. R. CLIFTON.

THE BRAINS BURST

SIR,—During the Christmas Day broadcast a question was put to the "Brains Trust": "Why do the Scots celebrate New Year instead of Christmas?" It was a "corker," all right. Not one member of the "Brains, etc.," made any effort to answer. They were dumbstruck!

I put the question to a strict old Presbyterian Scot, who considers Christmas as being something mystical, and he said: "The question should be put the other way—like this: 'Why do the English hold Christmas instead of New Year?'" Then he added: "Because they need their brains brushed!"—Yours, etc.,

G. HUMPHREYS.

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, RENNIE SMITH, B.Sc., "The Religious Front in Nazi Germany."

South London Branch N.S.S. (Labour Party Hall, 95, Grove Vale, East Dulwich—opposite Grove Vale L.C.C. School): 3-0, 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."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate): 3-0, Miss EDITH MOORE, "Christian Unity and Peace Aims."

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

President - - CHAPMAN COHEN
General Secretary - R. H. ROSETTI
2 & 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.

SECULARISM affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human effort should be wholly directed towards its improvement: it asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

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