

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### God, Man and Morals

RELIGION and morals have independent origins. Morality has its beginnings in the group life of the animal world, and of necessity is well established in the semi-human group that is hardly distinguishable from the gregarious development of the higher animals. Religion—the belief in supernatural beings—belongs to the stage of development at which man, in a blundering way, begins to look for causes and of necessity works through error to truth. And in this development there is hardly an explanation arrived at that is not ultimately set aside as wrong. The earth is not flat, as it would appear to be. The sun and moon are not living things. Disease is not due to the action of evil spirits; birth is not due to the incarnation of a tribal spirit; natural death had yet to be discovered. Man's conscious life begins in a cloud of blunders; and it is in this world of misinterpretation that religion has its rise.

In the earliest stages of human existence there is no pretence that the gods are concerned with morals. What they demand is service, and in return they confer favours. If the service is not forthcoming, punishment in the shape of disease, or ill-fortune in hunting and fighting, or some other calamity follows. It is at a comparatively late stage that religion, under pressure of the growing intelligence of man, is moralised. Within very recent times we can see how such doctrines as eternal damnation for unbelief has been killed with the majority of civilized minds. It is never religion that humanises man; it is man that humanises religion. Such gods as remain have to thank man for their being made fit for admission to decent human company, although with the best their credentials are not very convincing.

There is a story of a missionary who to a "savage" related the story of the goodness of Jesus and of his painful death. The story was realistically told, and when it was finished the comment of the "savage" was "Let us hope it is not true." That is the best thing one can say of the belief that the world is controlled by an all-powerful god. Let us hope that it is not true. To fight with an unconscious nature is bad enough; but to realise that human strength alone is powerless against the gods, that our best plans may be frustrated by them, is to bring us face to face with something at the side of which the Nazi terror is child's play. The Theist who properly realises the implications of his belief ought to hope that his theory is not true. The Freethinker knows

it is quite false. Forces—apart from human ones—are incapable of planning or of executing. They are oblivious to our needs, but they are conquerable by our intelligence. That way lies human hope and human success.

To-day, the better intellectual type of Christian preachers (not perhaps the most truthful) are working hard to keep their god alive and have developed a general theory which they think may harmonise the Christian religion with a developed moral sense. The world, we are told, is a moral world, and from this premise, in a more or less tortuous manner, God is deduced. The phrase a "moral world" in itself leads nowhere; certainly it does not demonstrate what the Christian desires. All we have to build on is the fact that man creates a code of conduct which he calls "moral"; but he also develops the negation of morality—and one is as real as the other. The argument runs that because man has a code of morals therefore there must be a God. But immoral conduct is as evident as is moral conduct, and, granting a God, we may just as logically assume an immoral God as a moral one. That moral conduct is more persistent than immoral conduct may only mean that God is not able to have his own way all the time. It must also be remembered that the Christian creed is partly based on the persistence of evil; and, as the devil has gone out of fashion, the evidence that man is fighting the power of an immoral God has just as much to commend it as the opposite theory.

But this statement that the world is a moral world may mean one of three things—sometimes it implies all three. In the simplest sense it may mean that, moral qualities existing, their existence must be credited to God. A second sense of the phrase is that morality, in the best sense of the word, pays. That is, greater happiness is derived from good conduct than from bad. A third possible meaning is that the world is so constructed that in the long run morality gains the upper hand. The dice of fate are loaded in favour of good conduct and human nature becomes moralised in the passing of the years.

The value of the first meaning may be considered with the third. But the second meaning—that morality pays—while it may be admitted in a wide and general sense, does not give the godite what he needs. Whether morality pays or not depends largely upon the character of the person with whom we are dealing. If we are dealing with a person to whom the realisation that he has committed a mean or dishonest action creates a sense of shame, well and good. Of that character we may count on the feeling that morality pays. But suppose he is a man of an entirely different type. Suppose he is one to whom position or mere gain counts for much. What then? What sense of loss will his actions bring however mean or dishonest they may be?

It may be said that he has degraded his character. Agreed—from our point of view; but to think that he feels the degradation of character that we perceive is to endow him with susceptibilities he does not possess. He has no sense of loss, no feeling of degradation. His one aim has been success. He has gained his end, and that to him is the one thing that matters. Note also that habit—that powerful factor in the determining of human character—is as effective

tive in the degradation of character as it is in the elevation of the human mind. The sober truth is that the "moral order" which the godite persuades himself exists makes as easily for the worse as it does for the better. It is entirely a question of the quality of the material that exists in a given situation. As the sun's heat hardens clay and softens wax, so natural "law" makes here for virtue and there for vice, without any intrinsic moral bias in either direction. The mean character does not feel its meanness; the dishonest one suffers no pangs for his dishonesty. We talk largely about the blessings of good actions and the curse of bad ones; but much of this is sheer humbug, and much of it is an example of intellectual dishonesty. But there is not in human nature any such semi-mathematical moral consequences of human action. To the more sensitive character there may be pain in noting the ill-deeds of others; but the bully, the liar, the thief is not necessarily conscious of any such feeling. Christians confess this to be the case when they insist that there must be another life in which the wrongs of this one are corrected. The bad man does not say "evil be thou my good." In most cases he is not conscious of there being any evil, and the greatest scoundrel may be found living happily to the end; and if he has a sufficient dash of hypocrisy in him he will die carrying the respect of the majority of his fellows.

We are at present in the midst of one of the fiercest, one of the most extensive and one of the most brutal wars ever waged. We hear much of the number that are killed, less of the number that are physically injured, and nothing at all of the injury to character that a war always brings, and which in the present instance is raised to almost incalculable heights. We believe, I believe, that if ever there was a war in which this country was justly engaged it is this one. No matter what were the causes of the war—the dishonesty and blundering of politicians, the greed of others, the foolishness of masses of people—the war stands as a matter of retaining our freedom or becoming part of a huge slave system.

But however lofty may be the aim of huge masses of people engaged in the war, however boldly they may face death or disfigurement, the moral consequences are there irrespective of motive or deserts. The better characters will in the majority of cases come back to peace with their nature hardened, the coarser ones with their nature still more coarsened. Our gratitude towards those who will have dared so much and done so much, our admiration for soldier and sailor and airman, with those who in civilian life have toiled and suffered, will weaken with the passing of the months after the war has come to an end. If, as the godite asserts, God works through nature, then the picture of the aims and character of God stand self-condemned.

Let me put the situation as it was put by a writer who believed in God and argued for the truth of Christianity, but whose mind was not closed to facts. He says that if theists will look at nature with an open mind and alert eyes—

"What they will see will astonish them. They will see that if there is anything at the back of this vast process, with a consciousness and a purpose in any way resembling our own—a being who knows what he wants and is doing his best to get it—he is, instead of a good and all-wise God, a scatter-brained, semi-powerful, semi-impotent monster. They will recognise as clearly as they ever did the old familiar facts which seemed to them evidences of God's wisdom, love and goodness, but they will find that these facts, when taken in connection with the others, only supply us with a standard in the nature of this being

himself by which most of his acts are exhibited to us as those of a criminal madman. If he had been blind, he had not sin; but if we maintain that he can see, then his sin remains. Habitually a bungler as he is, and callous when not actively cruel, we are forced to regard him, when he seems to exhibit benevolence, but merely weak and capricious, like a boy who fondles a kitten and the next moment sets a dog at it; and not only does his moral character fall from him, but his dignity also. The orderly process of the stars, and the larger phenomena of nature, are suggestive of nothing so much as a wearisome Court ceremonial surrounding a king who is unable to understand or to break away from it. . . . If natural phenomena suggest anything of a personal character at all, it is that of some blackguardly larrikin kicking his heels in the clouds, not perhaps bent on mischief, but indifferent to the fact that he is causing it."

The Atheist does not assert that the world of humanity does not move toward a better balanced moral life, but he claims that the process, halting and stumbling as it is, does not point to the existence of a God, but to a phase of evolution not difficult to understand.

We will deal with this aspect of the subject next week.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### ORGANISED RELIGION

THE war has brought out to the full the weaknesses of organised religion. Ecclesiastical zealots trumpet the collapse of a secular civilisation. It is commonly urged that culture must discover anew roots in the religious background of society. Intercessions are used which emphasise the relationship of the war to need for religion. At the same time, there is a considerable decline in general church attendance. The special Days of Prayer only serve to call together a certain number of the conventionally minded. The children, hurt, rush into their mother's arms. The atmosphere created is scarcely above the level of sympathetic magic. The living movements for the rebuilding of civilisation in the post-war period remain as secular as ever in their outlook. It is a commentary upon the lack of hold possessed by the churches that they have produced no one big appealing "personality as an outcome of the war. During the last conflict such figures as Dr. Orchard or "Woodbine Willie" provided leadership of this kind. They helped to shape common aspirations and emotions into forms acceptable to dogmatic religion. But no counterpart to them has appeared at the present time.

The situation for organised religion is one of uncertainty. Ecclesiasticism has provided a potent force in the making of Western Europe during past centuries. It has come now to count for little or nothing. Whatever may be the truth of the charge that civilisation had grown into an over-secular state of mind, the revival of orthodox creeds and doctrines is a most unlikely contingency. The Papacy maintains a wavering hold, but only at the expense of a concordat with Mussolini, an advocacy of Franco, and an uneasy acceptance of Hitler. Canterbury means nothing. The archiepiscopal fluctuations concerning the vices and virtues of the Soviet Union scarcely betoken leadership. A few prominent churchmen seek to repair the breach between religion and society. It is either by means of alliances with the totalitarian aims of Catholicism—as in "The Sword of the Spirit Movement," which Cardinal Hinsley has sponsored—or in pleas for economic Socialism which lack the expert knowledge necessary to achieve

practicality. The one thing which all alike fail to secure is any sort of effective public hearing.

There can be no doubt that organised Christianity has collapsed. Its existence has not made any essential difference to the war mentality. It has not evoked a higher standard of conduct among its followers than is to be witnessed in the average decent citizen. It has presented arms and supported military violence twice within a generation. The difficulties of the modern man are those bound up with the struggles of his existence. Rent, interest, profit are living factors which shape his morality and condition his thinking. Wage-slavery and propaganda have reduced him into a member of a dull, characterless average. He seeks some stimulant and guidance in his intellectual questionings. He asks for assistance in attempting to relate his moral promptings with his daily life. The utter irrelevance of orthodox creeds and doctrines to his needs has led him to lose all interest in them. They do not answer his questions. They do not afford moral guidance with regard to the forces surrounding him. He comes to associate the whole affair with a mental fog and with a morality which demands a high standard of chastity, which persecutes the divorced or abnormal but which refuses any assistance against the gross evils generated by modern industrialism. The ecclesiastical battle and that which he is compelled to wage are two totally different views of the world. One is associated with the pressure of life, the other with such matters as the structure of the Prayer Book.

The significant failure of organised religion lies in the deeper causes for this irrelevance. It has lost any grasp upon distinctive cultural standards. Encountered by living experiment in such matters as art, literature or science, it possesses no limits of critical discrimination by which it can test creative achievement. Faced with "An American Tragedy" or "Ulysses," it is merely shocked. It represents a baffled attempt to maintain the *status quo* within a developing society. Certain emotional reactions to events in the greater world appear, but are inhibited from generating the necessary atmosphere for distinct creative activity. The split between supernaturalist explanations in thought or morals and living culture is at least four centuries old. The decay of superstition with the rapid spread of popular knowledge has now brought latent tendencies into the forefront of the picture.

It is useless for the orthodox churches to seek a solution of the problem along traditional lines. The stranglehold possessed by their creeds and doctrines upon their power to live has become apparent. The old controversies have died down in intensity. It is difficult to realise that the middle of the last century could witness a nation convulsed through the radical Pentateuchal criticism of Bishop Colenso or by the denial of historicity to New Testament miracles on the part of a few advanced thinkers. It was a surprise to Engels, on his first visit to England, to find that the verbal inspiration of the Bible was a concept which still received serious consideration among educated people. The situation has now changed entirely. Among the more cultured classes the older supernaturalist theories have simply died. Miracle no longer plays any part in the considerations of the historian. A scientist may state his results without reference to their effects upon religious faith. It is not possible to imagine a time when belief in Incarnation or Atonement will again become moulding factors in the lives of thoughtful men. Among the less educated a secularity of life has been brought about by the radio, the cinema, the small car, the cheap Press. A newly acquired sense of sophistication will not be governed by quasi-medieval mutterings concerning peril of judgment or hell fire.

In face of such circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that the churches should have become, generally speaking, centres of moral and social reaction. An obsolete theological orthodoxy will always provide grounds in which an out-of-date sociology may take root. There is a close historical alliance between Anglicanism and the enclosure of the common land. Protestantism has found its natural morality within a capitalist society. The simple ethics of Jesus always require restatement to meet the problems of any other civilisation than that of 1st century Palestine. Maxims directed to a quiet agricultural community are necessarily unsuited to the highly complex environment of any modern state. An injunction to render both to God and Cæsar that which is his own leaves the actual distinction and its limits completely unsolved. But it is significant that the attitude of "render not evil for evil" should have been commonly abdicated. As the groundwork of the morality of Jesus, it goes deeper than any formal precept. When parsons join in the outcry for bombing Berlin, they are proclaiming the irrelevance of Christian ethics within the present war situation. Nor will a hundred Days of Prayer restore to them the equivalent of that which they have yielded.

The social background of Tory industrialism, within which orthodox forms of religion flourished, is in process of disappearance. Reaction against it may be witnessed in the vast strides made towards schemes of economic planning or in the considerable allegiance gained for Socialism during the last half century. The churches survived the intellectual collapse of their creeds for many years. A cautious restatement cloaked the changing temper. They adopted a certain accommodation to the spirit of the times. Darwin was buried in Westminster Abbey, whilst Dean Farrar used the pulpit of the same church to anathematise traditional ideas of hell. An adroit acceptance of a limited modernity could disguise much of what was happening in fact. Few people read works of Biblical or philosophical criticism. The far-reaching implications of German and French scholars were never widely popularised in England. Rebels against the old theology still accepted traditional ideas in sociology. But the social theories which orthodox theology engendered have now themselves collapsed. The churches are not finding it possible to bridge over this division. The sermons of a few Socialistic clergy do not compensate for the extent to which ecclesiasticism has been involved in the order of society now passing. The issues are deeply relevant to common life, with the result that they have become matters of popular discussion. Intellectual demands made by religious orthodoxy are no longer honoured. They are commonly viewed as a social hindrance embodying a morality out of accord with the needs of life. The pressure of cultural theories brought about by economic and political analysis throws the lack of a distinctive orthodox ecclesiastical culture into the forefront of criticism.

Yet religious impulses demand expression in some shape. The form taken by the outward manifestation will vary from age to age. Similar impulses underlie the rapid expansion of early Christianity, the spread of Islam, the popular movements of the Reformation period, or the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century. The religious excitement of the Reformation period, or the Evangelical movement initiated in Persia a century ago by the Bab is another example of the phenomenon. It is the supernaturalist explanation which scientific method has dispelled. These emotional outbursts are seeking some synthesis which may contain them and may yet be relevant to the issues of the present day. Politics have now taken the place which orthodox religion

occupied for so long in human interest and regard. They provide scope to the impulses with which religion was associated. Political platforms are the contemporary pulpit. Political parties have become the churches of the day. Political doctrines afford a popular theology, as in the neo-Marxist outburst of the 1930's. Humanity has developed on from a traditional belief in God to a living faith in man. The collapse of organised religion as a vital factor in the life of the nation has been accompanied by a new seriousness with regard to the art of living together. Distinctive culture theories have shaped opinion in the light of this problem. Organised religion has not been so much overthrown; it has become no longer necessary in order to express emotions and instincts which now attain a greater relevance when actualised in other movements.

The need of the present time is that Socialism in its broadest sense should learn to contain these creative impulses in the life of man. The sickness of civilisation demands such a synthesis as its religious background of stability. It is the one progressive movement which is capable of formulating belief in a fundamental human equality in terms of culture. It has been side-tracked too frequently into the narrow materialism of gas-and-water politics, which lack ideals, or into rigid orthodoxies which are bound up with specific economic theories. A Socialist culture, affecting man in every detail of his daily intellectual and social life, impelled by moral impulses and ethical judgments, is the true heir to doctrinal religion. It is an expression of a mysticism which centres in man. Even more important, it is an integration of religion and modernity capable of providing those standards of discrimination without which any movement ceases to be creative and sinks into irrelevance.

"JULIAN."

### ROBERT THE DEVIL

I claim no place in the world of letters; I am, and will be alone.—LANDOR.

The crime of inquiry is one which religion never has forgiven.—SHELLEY.

ROBERT BUCHANAN always bulked largely upon the literary horizon of his own generation. He was a most versatile man, a literary steam-roller. In addition to being a poet, he was an accomplished playwright, a successful novelist, and a slashing critic. Even during the most strenuous part of his life, he never forgot his high aims, and he always put good work into what he did. Once, perhaps, in one of his articles, he uttered something like a cry of despair, and quoted Alfred De Musset's biting line: "The dead poet whom the man survives." This line, pregnant with meaning, and sad in the extreme, would apply to so many writers who have started on their careers full of enthusiasms, but who have outlived their early ideals. Buchanan, notwithstanding his strenuous career, was always full of enthusiasm, and he retained his youthfulness to the last.

In Browning's expressive phrase, Robert Buchanan was "ever a fighter." Cradled in poverty, he fought his way at the pen's point to a very enviable position in the world. At the zenith of his career he had five companies travelling with his plays, his novels were in every library, and he was the subject of a eulogium at the Royal Academy Banquet at the hands of Lecky, the famous historian. Much of Buchanan's tenacity he owed to his father, who was a Chartist and a militant Freethinker in those dark days when it was really dangerous to hold advanced views on politics and religion.

Buchanan's privations were real. Once, while waiting in a publisher's office, he fainted from want of food. Nor was it an isolated instance. David

Christie Murray has told us that in those days, when pressmen had not ceased to be pariahs, in a group of well-known journalists, himself included, each admitted having had, at one time or the other, to sleep in the open air, or at the "Hotel of the Beautiful Star," as he wittily expressed it. Henry Murray, his brother, also recounts that at one time he was compelled to share a room with another man, and, when money was short, they had only one suit of clothes between them. Since the other man was the bigger, and that suit was his, it was a case of David in Saul's armour.

Buchanan had a good conceit of himself. One publisher said: "I can't stand that young fellow. He talked to me as if he were Almighty God, or Lord Byron." Buchanan had the defect of his qualities, but he won through, unaided. A literary Ishmael, every man's hand was against him. This position has its advantages. Buchanan kept his sword sharp, and he always struck hard. His appearance in the literary arena always meant hard fighting. When, for instance, he attacked the Christian superstition it was in no half-hearted fashion. He threw himself against the personality of the Nazarene, and penned in "The Wandering Jew" the most tremendous indictment of Christ in English literature. In the noisy dialectical encounter which followed, Buchanan held his own bravely, and his opponents left the arena wounded and hurriedly.

Always a humanitarian, Buchanan's objections to the Christian superstition were as much ethical as intellectual. Indeed, he often got some very startling effects in his writing by this union of intellect and emotion. Listen to these biting lines entitled, "God in Piccadilly":—

Poisonous paint on us, under the gas  
Smiling like spectres, we gather bereaven,  
Leprosy's taint on us, ghost-like we pass,  
Watched by the eyes of yon pitiless heaven!  
Let the stars stare at us! God, too, may glare at us  
Out of the void where he hideth so well—  
Sisters of midnight, He damned us in making us,  
Cast us like carrion to men, then forsaking us,  
Smiles from His throne on these markets of Hell.

Equally startling ideas are elaborated in his striking sonnet, "Our Father in Heaven":—

Oh! Thou art pitiless! They call Thee Light,  
Law, Justice, Love, but Thou art pitiless;  
What thing of earth is precious in Thy sight  
But weary waiting on and soul's distress?  
When dost Thou come with glorious hands to bless  
The good man that dies cold for lack of Thee?  
Where bringest Thou garlands for our happiness?  
Whom dost Thou send but Death to set us free?  
Blood runs like wine—foul spirits sit and rule—  
The weak are crushed in every street and lane—  
He who is generous becomes the fool  
Of all the world, and gives his life in vain.  
Were Thou as good as Thou art beautiful  
Thou could'st not bear to look upon such pain.

This mocking attitude annoyed the Christians exceedingly, and they regarded Buchanan as being a tool of Satan. They saw quite clearly that the underlying ethical appeal in his works was a more dangerous weapon than if he had written with the calm, impartial manner of Herbert Spencer. Here is another example:—

Oh, what have sickly children done to share  
Thy cup of sorrows? Yet their dull, sad pain  
Makes the earth awful; on the tomb's dark stair  
Moan idiots, with no glimmer in the brain;  
No shrill priest with his hangman's cord can beat  
Thy mercy into these—ah nay, ah nay!  
The angels Thou hast sent to haunt the street  
Are hunger and distortion and decay.  
Lord that mad'st man, and sendest him foes so fleet,  
Who shall judge Thee upon Thy judgment day?

Buchanan was as outspoken in his later works as in his earlier ones. The judgment of Christ in "The Wandering Jew" is as fiery and impassioned as Swinburne's corrosive "Lines Before a Crucifix":—

With all the woes of earth upon thy head  
Uplift thy cross, and go! Thy doom is said.

Buchanan always rated his poems more highly than any of his other work. Certainly his "City of Dream" is a beautiful piece of work, and expresses his joy of life, his passion for Nature, in most melodious language. Nothing came amiss to him. "The Wandering Jew" is pure propaganda, but it is also magnificent and sonorous rhetoric. Buchanan blew all things to melody through the golden trumpet of his genius.

This brave-hearted Pagan was buried in the loveliest month in the year, while the fragrance of the June roses was in the air. The lilac was still lingering and waving its white and purple plumes, the laburnum dropping its golden chains, the may perfuming the ways, and the birds singing in the tree-tops. The poet lies there always, within sound of the sea he loved so well. As the summer returns our thoughts go to the grave of one of the most romantic and striking personalities of our time.

"MIMNERMUS."

(REPRINTED.)

### ACID DROPS

DISREGARDING the kind of Nemesis that has overtaken British days of national prayer, Dutch Christians all over the world obeyed the call to pray to God for the protection of Dutch possessions from the Japanese. And the result that followed the British days of prayer followed. If the Japanese had been defeated there would have been peals of thankfulness to God. When will Christians have enough moral courage to publicly blame God when misfortunes happen? That would seem the logical attitude to adopt.

The Rev. W. W. Wightman is the Church of Scotland Director of Religious Education. "The Scotsman" cites him as saying that "A system of nursery schools which ignored a child's religious needs must necessarily be unbalanced and incomplete." In the name of all that is sensible, what are "the religious needs" of the inmates of a nursery school? Next thing we shall hear is a nursery school inmate crying out, "Give me religion or give me death!" We really think that Mr. Wightman has not been reported correctly. Probably what some of the inmates of a nursery school said was "Give us more milk or there will be a hell of a row." We admit that both are rather tall stories, but the latter is the more likely. When will these baby-snatchers take a rest?

We saw quoted with great gusto the saying—put into the mouth of the Duke of Wellington—"Education without religion would produce a race of clever devils." If true, that suggests a thesis on the relative values of a race of clever devils without religion, and a race of fumbling, tyrannical fools with religion. We should feel inclined to take a chance with the first.

We shall not exhaust the subject if we point out, on the authority of theological experts, that it was a devil that taught man to stand up and eat of the tree of knowledge. It was a devil who encouraged independence of thought and speech, it was devils who invented the printing press, suggested more likely theories of the structure of the universe, who helped to discover an anæsthetic that would remove from women the curse God placed on Eve, and so on, and so on. More astonishing still, if we pay attention to those who know as much about the Christian God and the Christian Devil, it was devils who founded both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches. An essay on how much good humanity owes to devils would be an entertaining essay, if it did not fall into the hands of those alleged humorists who decorate the newspapers.

The Bishop of Bradford says of Russia that it "has brought people out of barbarism to education, happiness and understanding of human dignity." He calls this a challenge to Christianity. It is not. It is a demonstration that Christianity is unnecessary. The alternative to this conclusion is that Christians are made of such poor stuff that nothing short of a religious miracle will drive them into being decent. That, by the way, is certainly the logical conclusion from most of the religious preachers of the B.B.C. It is not we, but they, who say that Christians are such poor things that nothing short of the direct help of God Almighty can keep them straight—and even he has innumerable failures.

The "Daily Telegraph" parson explains the miracle of the loaves and fishes. When the "multitude" came to Jesus asking for food, Jesus told his disciples to feed them. The disciples explained that they had only seven loaves and a few fishes, and could not feed a great multitude. Then Jesus worked like a dozen conjurers rolled into one, fed the multitude, and left more food after they had eaten than there was at the commencement of the feast. Now Mr. Ashby explains that the original food was the supper of the disciples (Mr. Ashby must have another revelation, for there is not the slightest hint that this was the case), and it was because of that Jesus did the greatest gastronomical trick in history. And the moral, says Mr. Ashby, is that when we give our suppers away we shall get the return multiplied. It sounds like a shady transaction on the Stock Exchange. Mr. Ashby says "the whole point of the story is that it was the disciples' supper they were ordered to give up," and urges us to give up our suppers in the hope of getting a much larger meal as a reward. And that is Christian morals in a nutshell. Unless there is a bumping and tangible reward, what is the use of behaving decently?

It is astonishing to see how many of the news and other papers have noted that Sir Stafford Cripps has given up "a princely income" to devote himself to politics. Sir Stafford has made no such boast, and, probably, has never considered it. But in this Christian country the testing point is reached in terms of cash. A man who has made a fortune in commerce, and then passes on money that he simply cannot spend on himself, becomes a leading figure in our national life. Many of these millionaires may be quite decent fellows, but it is probable that in many cases they would never have been remarkable for their charity had they been very liberal in circumstances where giving anything meant going short of something. That form of giving is quite common, but it brings no newspaper notice, no titles and no mixing with the nobility.

The Christian even carries this bartering right through his religion. For the historic form of the attack on "natural" morals is that if there is no reward for being good, and no punishment for doing harm, no hell and no heaven, there is no sufficient reason for decent behaviour, and a man may as well have a "good" time while he may. The word "good" in such circumstances is worth noting. It throws more light on the character of Christian morals than any other word.

Have you ever noticed the extent to which the mere handling of money gives some people a sense of power? Some years ago we had occasion to ask the bank, not for our own personal affairs, for an advance for a few months. (Full securities were held by the bank.) "Oh, yes," said the manager, "I think we can oblige you with what you want." "Oblige us," we replied, "Are you alive to the fact that it is we who are obliging you by borrowing money, just as surely as we should be obliging a shopkeeper by purchasing some of his goods. If everyone refused to borrow money from banks your dividends would be very small. It is your business to lend, and anyone who borrows is helping you to live." Of course, the manager meant no harm. It was just the fact that he handled money as a commodity that made him feel superior, for the moment, to one who was paying him for the use of it.

Mr. M. L. Jacks, Director of Education at Oxford University, says that:—

"It is a fundamental mistake to assume that children are not interested in theology. They are perhaps more interested in theology than any other subject."

What Mr. Jacks must have had in mind must have been the fact that all children love fairy tales. Any kind will do—Grimm's Fairy Tales, Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales, or any others that come along. To a child the story of

Jesus is just another fairy tale. The objection to children having it is that it is taken up by parsons, teachers and such mentally dishonest persons as the man who looks after the B.B.C. Children's Hour. The latter places the Jesus story before his young audience as though it is a narrative of unquestioned and unquestionable fact.

Probably Mr. Jacks was speaking with his tongue in his cheek. One must bear in mind that he was speaking in "Upper Chapel," Sheffield. He was quite safe in saying that children love theology. It was what "Upper Chapel" wished him to say. Mr. Jacks must appreciate the correction we have made. There are limits to possible misunderstanding, and we cannot conceive his having literal belief in what he said.

Here is a sample of what we may expect on a very general scale if the clergy get what they are fighting for with regard to the schools; and we must bear in mind that their plan, or plot, is being backed by our self-styled democratic Government. The specimen is given by Sir Frederick Manders, of the National Union of Teachers. Sir Frederick does not give the names, but it is taken from a Deanery Magazine for February.

"Mr. A. has been appointed to B. We understand he is a Churchman and has been most useful to Canon X, the Vicar of Y . . . ."

"We require teachers whose *primary* concern is the *soul* of the child, and who do their job not merely for money but for God. . . ."

"The Vicar took the trouble to go round to each Manager to explain this before the appointment to B."

This, it must be added, concerns an appointment to a Council School. At a time when it is more important than ever to see that our schools are as good as they can be made, we are getting back to clerical control.

Lord Elton, one of the B.B.C.'s safe and tame lecturers, with ideas that are as freshly crisp as a month-old loaf and so orthodox in his sentiments that they would not disturb an old-fashioned parish priest, has just published a book, "St. George and the Dragon." In it he says, "We are fighting for Christendom and should see that the education of the people should not be godless." That is a brilliant and tremendous conclusion. But as such education as the European peoples have had up to now has been heavily charged with Christianity, the result does not seem very encouraging. We should be very sorry to disturb Lord Elton's childlike serenity, but we wonder whether he thinks Europe would have been in a worse state than it is at present had Christianity never been heard of. Sorry to disturb Lord Elton's serenity, but these questions will arise.

By the way, the title of Lord Elton's book is suggestive. St. George was a very questionable character; had he been alive to-day, if some of the stories of him be true, he would now be engaged in the "Black Market" business; and the Dragon was, of course, a myth. Lord Elton might have selected a better title.

There is more trouble in Scotland. In Leith, application was made for the use of municipal vans for collecting salvage on Sunday. This was first granted and now withdrawn. There is a great deal of agitation. The Sabbatarians are adamant, and perhaps the Churches, feeling a growing dependence on the salvage of the population, reacts against anything in the shape of opposition; and yet the Churches raise no objection to fighting on Sundays, Christian shareholders will take dividends that are earned on Sunday, parsons are paid for preaching on Sunday. But to collect salvage on Sunday seems to be beyond the limit.

Still in Scotland. The Loch Lomond Angling Association still declines to permit fishing on Sundays. But no objection to fishing at sea on Sunday is made. Yet there must be a theological difference in the two cases. It may be that people fishing in the loch on Sunday, even though they are fishing for food, yet enjoy the sport; and Scotch religion always ran on the side of the cultivation of the miserable. To be happy on Sunday was a very grave offence.

It was a Scotch preacher who, opposing the establishment of a "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon" movement in his parish, thundered out, "I thank the Lord that there never has been a pleasant Sunday afternoon, and I pray the Lord that there never shall be."

But Scotland does not monopolise all the foolishness connected with religion. Indeed, the distinction between English and Scotch religious foolishness is that the English one is usually deadly dull, while here and there the wit of the Scot will out. But with ponderous solemnity, the "Church of England Newspaper" comes down on the Minister of Labour's decision not to permit a holiday on Good Friday, when good Christians rejoice on the Execution of their Saviour. Clearly the observance of his son's adventures is plainly God's affair, and if the "Church of England Newspaper" can guarantee a *quid pro quo*, say in the form of a much needed British victory over the Japs, Mr. Bevin might reconsider his Good Friday decision.

The "C.E.N." reminds the Minister that the King appointed a Palm Sunday for a Day of Prayer. But that appointment affects only those who feel inclined to notice it. The vast majority will not; and it is a pity that the King should not tell his advisers that such a recommendation is useless, and that he declines to make himself responsible for so out of date a practice.

Bishop Marshal (R.C.) finds it difficult to understand the "lack of faith" in the children of Roman Catholic parents. We suggest as a possible and reasonable explanation that the children are more intelligent than their parents. That should be something of which the parents should be proud, however much the Bishop may moan. A parent who does not aim at lifting his children higher than himself should be forever childless.

Mr. Douglas Jerrold, also a Roman Catholic, adds his moan to that of the Bishop by announcing the great tragedy of "a paralysis of the will" leading to unbelief. It is quite evident that Mr. Jerrold prefers that paralysis of the intelligence which leads to the pulpit. That at least has seriously affected belief in the doctrines of his Church. It is a curious fact that the Church has provided many homes for the mentally weak, but never one for great and independent thinkers.

Canon Spencer, headmaster of Winchester College, thinks that Christians in the home must have religion pressed on them if they are to pass on Christian ideals. The unanimity of leading Christians in the belief that if the child is not inoculated early with the virus of Christianity it is not likely to become a member of the Church when he or she reaches maturity, is striking. The prayer of the Christian preacher is "O Lord give us the kids, and we will compel them to grow up sheep, and develop, in fighting, obstinate goats."

"Christ Lived Dangerously" is the heading to a leading article in the "Catholic Herald." How is that possible if Jesus Christ was what the Christian Church says he was—an incarnation of God, or part and parcel of God? He knew what he was, he knew what he came on earth for, he knew he would be crucified and he knew that directly he was dead he would be alive again in heaven. How can he have lived dangerously? His death was part of his own plan; and how can a Christian believe that a God can suffer as man suffers or die as a man dies? Perhaps the writer intended to be sarcastic.

The "Yorkshire Post" is publishing a series of letters under the general heading "Hear All Sides." Several sides are heard, but we notice a striking absence of letters from the Freethought side. It is difficult to believe that none have been sent in. But none have reached the editor's eye. Or perhaps it is that some have reached his eye, and in that lies the reason for their not being published.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

### TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. PEPPER.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.

C. BRIDGER.—It is one of those safe commonplaces that we may expect. It is so easy to be heroic when one runs no risks, and the fondness for self-advertising is very common.

L. W.—Why not adopt the suggestion we have already made—that of arranging home gatherings of a few Freethinkers for friendly talks, with an eye to helping the Cause? A kind of guerilla warfare of ideas may prove very effective; and there should be some "bonny fecht-ing" when this physical war is over. Let us hope there will be, anyway. It would cheer up our declining years.

F. GATEHILL.—Letter will appear. Pamphlets were received and will help for collection.

W. SMITH.—Thanks for list. Will appear.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—S. Newton, 21s.; J. Bryan, 10s.; W. W. Pearce, £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 connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, E. 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

MR. COHEN met with a very hearty reception on Sunday last at Glasgow. There was a very good attendance, a close following of the subject as is customary with a Scottish audience, and questions at the conclusion of the lecture which proved that the love of the Scot for an argument has lost nothing of its keenness. It was the kind of criticism that should delight a speaker, and from an audience that deserved the best a speaker can give. About the journey to and from Glasgow, the least said the better. Dirty carriages, no chance of any food on the train, not even the chance of a wash, made the journey unpleasant. But the result of the meeting compensated. There was a good sale of literature. Mr. Hamilton, the President of the Branch, occupied the chair with his usual ability.

We are pleased to note that Mr. Sorensen, with great daring for an English politician, asked the Minister of War whether he would consider the abolition of church parades. Of course, the Minister—we do not say it was the Minister's opinion, since what a Minister says and what a Minister thinks are often very different things—replied that he would not. He added that the practice is common in the three Services. That is the reply of a true British statesman. He is asked whether the Army will give up the practice of driving men to church as though they were irresponsible nit-wits. He replies, "No; all the Services do it." It never dawned on Mr. Sandys that he might take a step in the right direction.

Mr. Sorensen's ground for asking the question was the report that a chaplain had been preaching on controversial subjects; he was said to have called on A.T.S. girls and soldiers to get married and have large families. Probably

many of them will in any case, but why the "large families"? That should be their own private business. We should not expect the finest children to be of the finer type if the only reason for their being born was the desire to produce large families for the benefit of the nation. Men and women will mate till the race dies out, but it may well cross the minds of the better ones as to whether they are justified to bring children into a world as mad and as bad as this one.

We suspect it was a Roman Catholic priest who gave the advice to the A.T.S. and the soldiers to have large families. The command of the Church is have children—the more the better—and we will gather them in. Or should it not be, "We will take them in"?

From the "New Statesman":—

"Lord Caldecote is now choosing a daily text for readers of the 'Daily Sketch.' The appointment is fitting, but surely rather late. We have had to suffer the chaos of our defences and supplies; we have had to give Thomas Inskip one job after another before at last, in the fulness of time, he arrived at the one job for which nature had always intended him—choosing a Bible text for 'Daily Express' readers."

The contempt of the "New Statesman" is deserved. Still, the way our public offices are filled explains much that would not otherwise be understandable.

We are in receipt of several of the recent issues of "The Indian Thinker." Probably war conditions are responsible for its receipt not being as regular as might be. But it is always welcome and enables one to form a better idea of the state of opinion in India. The comments on China and Japan are specially interesting at the moment. Altogether one may get a glimpse of the real India, not that of Kipling, the official English class and those to whom a coloured skin is a sure sign of inferiority. Perhaps the most scathing remark on the Japanese situation is, "Modern Japan is not a power of which the East should be proud. She is a wholesale imitator of the West."

There is not much room for dispute of this last sentence. The West has been the great teacher of the East, in modern times, in the art of that form of piracy called by the pirates "expansion." The precise degree of cunning or brutality displayed in the expansion does not really affect the fact. But our European national pirates led the way in the art of grabbing other people's lands.

Freethinkers in the Southampton area willing to take part in a reading and discussion circle are invited to communicate with Mr. L. Sanderson, "Cranleigh," Holbury Drive, near Fawley, Hants. Such circles formed all over the country would provide a pleasant means of introduction among Freethinkers and give additional strength and organisation to the Movement. It needs somebody in each area prepared to undertake the light secretarial work.

How lovingly a certain type of character looks at the possibility of suppressing, or at least controlling, thought and speech—particularly the latter! The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow, for example, who regrets that "certain types of novels" cannot be suppressed. He says he has received complaints from people, "particularly from chaplains to the Forces," of the character of certain novels that are distributed among the men. The Archbishop finds it "sad to think that our brave sailors risk their lives bringing to our shores these weapons directly calculated to corrupt youth and destroy souls." We are surprised that the Archbishop did not add that the novels were "calculated to weaken the war effort." Mr. Morrison has found that phrase very useful; and yet we would undertake to find in the rhapsodies of Roman Catholic saints—male and female—more obvious eroticism than can be found in the majority of the novels the Archbishop would love to condemn.

## AN ATHEIST IN THE FORCES

SOME observations on A.C.2. Stone's article in the "Freethinker" of March 8, "Religion and the R.A.F.," with some experiences of my own. If Stone joined up pre-war as a volunteer he would not be admitted as an Atheist, since I have been told, without official confirmation, that you could not in peace-time enlist in the R.A.F. without a religion. If he joined since the outbreak of war (and that very recently as his rank suggests) then he should not have allowed himself to be "persuaded"; certainly not if he is a regular reader of the "one and only," for the position of the rights of the individual in religious attestation has been repeatedly made clear in these pages—quite apart from his later discovery of Para. 47 of K.R.s.

He states his inability to discover a regularly attested Atheist in the Service. May I place on record that, armed with the knowledge of my rights, I enlisted under National Service as an Atheist on November 11, 1940, despite the vigorous attempts at persuasion and coercion of sundry clerks who did not know their duties. It was then that, in his chagrin at my insistence, the God-fearing Nonconformist who completed my papers hurled "It's a good job you aren't a volunteer, you'd have to go in the bloody Army." To which I rejoined that the Army evidently had more intelligence and the R.A.F.'s loss would have been their gain. It was a shot without experience of Army intelligence, but after sixteen months among the "brilliantine boys" not so extravagant I think. I can testify from subsequent conversations that many men who have no desire for religion have been coerced in their inexperience into "C. of E." It is significant and unfortunate however, that so many without desire retain a respectful regard for the faith of their childhood. Entirely due, of course, to the insidious, vicious censorship that permeates our society, preventing the comparative appreciation of religion. G. W. Foote was right when he said: "Men are born, live and die in their faith. Some few think for themselves." That few would become millions if they had the right and opportunity to *start* thinking. Here again, I speak from experience, for I was thirty (and a normally intelligent person, I suggest) before I came by fortunate chance upon the "Freethinker" and found in it and other reading the justification for the doubts of my youth and early manhood on things religious. Since then I have been the militant Atheist, and have endeavoured to do my small part in the "best of all causes."

My Service experiences have been amusing and instructive. From the sergeant who said: "Atheist? Never heard of it!" to the station warrant officer who, on my reporting to a new camp and going through the usual form-filling with his clerk, chipped in: "You're a bloody fine bloke to be trusted with looking after a plane." In between you have the R.C. schoolmaster (a new recruit like myself) who, hearing my avowal of Atheism at a lecture on K.R.s, invited me to a discussion in his barrack room that night. I gathered from his condescending compassionate opening that I was there to be floored by Catholic Truth (it deserves the capital) and then gently lifted up. Here is one gem from his creed. "Well, if you *are* an Atheist, you are not justified in being kind to a sick bed-mate." God save us from such schoolmasters; even his room mates were unanimous, despite the diversity of their deities, in howling him down at that. He was a Liverpool schoolmaster, too, in a slum district. I am a Liverpoolian, by domicile, myself and know, but no longer wonder at the thorn of sectarian strife and superstition that has and will

continue to bleed that stormy city. Exhilarated, if a trifle hoarse, I left that room at "lights out," rewarded by knowing I had let much light into the interested listeners to our wordy battle. The trio of experiences above are but three of many, but they surely serve as classics of ignorance, stupidity and bigotry.

I was interested in A.C.2 Stone's observations on Church Parades, although at my present camp they are not a flagrant invasion of an airman's liberty. In fact, they give him the only chance of a "lie in" on Sunday morning. Twenty-five per cent. of personnel are detailed for the parade each week and are excused work in consequence. Parade is not until 11-30 a.m., hence the opportunity to lie in or write letters. I cash in on this with the advantage that I do not have to swallow "the pill of the parson's dope" (my Christian colleague's expression) for after roll-call at 11-30 I am immediately free and at my nearby home an hour earlier for my afternoon off. Incidentally, I cannot see the logic of the kick against Church Parades by avowed or even "bed-card" Christians. I refer to the attendance at Church, for the preliminary parade is no different in essence to any other. It is a *State* Church Parade and the serviceman is the servant of the State for twenty-four hours each day. I will agree to the questioning of its efficiency, on the same ground that I would question the cleaning of buttons—what help or hindrance are they to our war effort.

Stone says, "and it is not that the padres themselves can be at all happy about the position." I am just as sure that they don't feel unhappy about it. The parson who goes into the Services speedily gets the Service mind—considerably helped by being made Squadron-Leader. The distinction without a difference is that he is often affable, giving you a "Good-morning" to your salute; dispenses knitted wear to the ranks from knitting circles, and acts as liaison officer between applicants and the authorities in matters of hardship allowances and such like. This, to me, is all part of the detestable, hypocritical game of the modernist clergy. Infiltration of union protected trades by unqualified workers is, in wartime, a painful necessity to those who have worked so hard to get decent rights of status and of wages for their members. They had better watch the parsons, too! I should not be surprised to see some of them have a "call" to return to the bench to continue their master's work.

Meanwhile, in the Service as out of it, I endeavour to do my small part to combat their pernicious influence. As H. W. Nevinson says: "The Battle of Freedom is never done and the field is never quiet."

A. J. ASHBY.

## THE TASKS AHEAD

### II.—The Work of Construction

THE socially beneficial work of the earlier Freethinkers is often lost sight of by those who admire their opposition towards Christianity. Humanity owes more than it realises to such reformers as Paine, Owen, Holyoake and Bradlaugh. Their efforts to improve physical welfare can be regarded with gratitude and pride.

Destruction is often necessary before the work of construction can begin. In a town in the North of England there was a large area disfigured by the ugliest and most squalid dwellings imaginable. In what Christians might describe as "God's own good time" these properties were condemned as being unfit for human habitation, and it was decided to build in their place a modern estate to house the unfortunate



tenants. To do this it was necessary to remove the old buildings before the work of erecting new ones could commence. Demolition contractors had to pull down the old foundations and clear the site before the builders could start on their work of construction. The result of this scheme is visible to all who admire the new estate, with its happy inhabitants; and the previous hovels and way of life are but an unsavoury memory.

Freethinkers must realise that although destruction is still an important part of our activities, we would do well to give a thought to the essential work of construction. Construction cannot begin unless it has a policy, so this gives rise to the question whether Freethought is a satisfactory philosophy of life. First must be considered the personal results, so well described by Tom Paine. "It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind as to subscribe his (professional) belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself."

Then the aspect of human progress. Religion is the enemy of science to-day as much as it was in the time of Darwin and Huxley, except in those rare instances when the teachings and discoveries of the latter do not appear to be incompatible with the dogmas of the former. One of these two must emerge as a guiding faith for the energies of mankind, and it is hard to imagine that religion, with its intellectual bankruptcy, and its pathetic faith in "holy mysteries" when assailed by the findings of science, can ever again direct the destinies of the human race.

Science is devoted to solving mysteries, and it is obvious to a rational mind that its efforts for human welfare have done more than all the prayers that have ever been uttered. Prayer did not produce radium, insulin, electricity or wireless communication, and surely the work of the Freethinking Madame Curie was of more use to humanity than the selfish ascetic lives of all the monks who have ever dragged out their cheerless existences. Two hundred years of science have done more to benefit mankind than two thousand years of Christianity, in the same way as the writings of Shaw, Wells, Russell and McCabe have done more to enlighten the minds of humanity than all the sermons ever uttered.

Freethinkers have no fetters to govern their actions, and have no hesitation in supporting science and progress. This progress is partly impeded by the present-day trend to indifference. Men and women who "cannot be bothered" to concern themselves with problems of mental and physical welfare which they consider do not affect them directly are our enemies in the struggle as much as religion. Freethought teaches that its adherents must interest themselves in all matters deserving their attention, and this interest must be impartial. They should take a subject, examine it from all points of view, and adopt whichever side reason dictates as being correct. Christians, on the other hand, are taught to take the same subject, reject those parts which appear to differ from the teaching of their religion, and adopt those aspects which they consider to agree.

Christianity is based upon immoral standards of rewards and punishments after death, a policy of bribes and threats. It has taught men to devote their lives to preparation for a supposed life after death. Freethought teaches that, as man knows nothing of a future state, all his efforts must be devoted to improving conditions in the only life of which he has

knowledge. Parted by reason of service with the Forces from my books, I quote from memory the words of Professor Kingdom Clifford: "We do not say 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die.' No, we say 'To-day we are here together, so let us join hands and do what we can to help.'" Bernard Shaw seeks a race of men who are not afraid of death, and Freethought can produce such a race, respecting death only as "a necessary end which will come when it will come," and never fearing it.

To sum up, Freethought teaches the qualities of self-reliance and honesty of purpose, it insists upon the necessity of truth in all matters, and, in the fine expression of the Editor, it aims at making the human race realise that "Concern should be for the development of potentialities, not for the perpetuation of idiosyncrasies."

Until the masses of the world are taught to use the powers of reason which Christianity keeps dormant within them, real progress is impossible, and no policy of reconstruction can ever fully mature.

ANDREW GLENCOE.

## PRINCIPLES

A PARLIAMENT and Science Committee was formed in 1939 consisting of members of both Houses of Parliament and a number of organisations connected with scientific activity as a link between the Houses of Parliament and scientific bodies. The first annual luncheon was held recently and speeches appropriate to the new combination were made. One such speech was given by Sir Henry Tizard, Rector of the Imperial College of Science and Technology. The speech was instructive, interesting and to the point, until Sir Henry decided to drag Christianity in, with the inevitable result of saying something safe but silly; silly because Science and Christianity will not mix, and safe because the general fear of offending religion guarantees silence from the listeners. According to report, Sir Henry Tizard ended his speech by saying, "The two great driving forces of Western civilization are Science and Christianity. The principles and ideals of science, no less than those of Christianity, must sustain and guide all political action which fights for liberty and social progress." Now we know the principles directing science. We know how men of science are devoted to those principles, except where religion is concerned, and far too many men of science are prepared to take occasional leave from the principles of science to serve religion. But so long as those scientists sow their wild oats in the Lord's vineyard, and do good work in the garden of science, let us remember they have had a Christian education and forgive them their weakness.

But what about those Christian principles which must sustain and guide the fight for liberty and social progress? Principles are lines of action laid down and practised, but the value of principles is determined by practice, not by printer's ink; so be it with Christians. So what of the Christian principles in common practice by authoritative and influential quarters as well as by individual Christians. Under priestly guidance, frauds, forgeries, fictitious history, suppression of books, etc., have done yeoman service for the Churches throughout the ages. In the 4th century a maxim was introduced into the Church that it was an act of virtue to deceive and lie when by that means the interests of the Church might be promoted. That maxim has been crystallised into one of the cardinal principles in Christian propaganda, not because of moral weakness, but because intellectual and social development has made it an essential lifeline in the survival of Christianity. Christianity could not recover from an epidemic of truthfulness on religion among Christians.

Lying for the glory of God dominates Christian propaganda from top to bottom. Direct, or in the spirit, it is seen in the Press, pulpit, radio, on councils, committees and in the schools; in fact, it is to be found in every department of our social life where Christians are in control. It is there when Freethinkers, on joining the Armed Forces, are jockeyed into making a false declaration of

C. of E. or R.C. In the Press it takes the form of freedom for Christianity and boycott for Freethought. We remember the editor of "Nature" refusing to correct an inaccuracy which had appeared on the ground that no useful scientific purpose would be served. Such an astounding remark from an editor of the leading journal of science in this country can be understood when we realise the inaccuracy was connected with religion.

With Europe in control of Christian governments for generations, champions of Christianity, after submitting their scripts to a B.B.C. committee of Christian gentlemen, are permitted to broadcast the responsibility for the state of the world to-day as belonging to Freethought, whilst the leading Freethinker in this country is not allowed a word in defence. The case for religion, religious talks, religious services, are thrust upon listeners from all angles, but the Freethought case is represented by a very occasional weak, apologetic backslider from the Christian fold. A frank statement of the Freethought position by a representative Freethinker must not be allowed.

On councils and committees the spirit asserts itself in the general boycott of Freethought in public libraries, hiring of halls, in debating societies and even social events. The same spirit is behind the fear of public men and officials of all parties in opposing the Churches or religion. It is behind the silence in official circles on the retreat of over 100 years, back to the game of building and repairing churches out of public funds. It is present in the timidity in challenging the Churches' well organised raid upon the nation's schools, teachers and children; it is always present in conversations and discussions on religion, and it is even intruded into family circles where different views on religion exist; and let it be clearly understood that this lying for the glory of God is a Christian principle with scripture authority:—

"But if the truth of God through my lie aboundeth unto his glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?"

Much more could be written, but enough has been given to expose some of the Christian principles which Sir Henry Tizard informs us must help sustain and guide all political action in fights for liberty and social progress.

R. H. ROSETTI.

### AN UNRESOLVED ARGUMENT

WHAT I have to say at this moment will not, I think, have any direct bearing on the controversial issues which, at any rate, partly under my inspiration, have raised their heads in these columns. But the matter which I wish to discuss this week has, I believe, considerable interest for Freethinkers, though not for Freethinkers alone.

It all arose out of an argument that took place the other night. I should therefore first of all explain who was present at this argument. For manifest reasons I cannot use people's actual names in this description, but except in this detail I can assure you that it is entirely accurate.

First of all, then, there were our host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. She dabbles in the arts; he is a good pianist and a composer of some small distinction, though he treats the musical side of his life as a hobby and makes banking his profession. There were also two architects, Mr. Jones and Mr. Smithson, now (like, apparently, some 90 per cent. of the professional people of these islands) temporary Civil Servants. Myself and my wife completed the assembled company.

So much for the people concerned. Now as to the argument. It arose through a discussion on the ballet, about which Mrs. Jenkins was much concerned. She thought that the calling-up of male (and possibly female) ballet dancers was endangering the growth of English ballet. She proposed that ballet dancers, as well as other creative artists, should be exempt from military service.

"Rubbish!" said one of the architects.

Now, although I am not keen on the ballet, I could see that there was something to be said for this attitude of Mrs. Jenkins, and said as much.

"On what grounds do you think that these people should be exempt?" asked Mr. Smithson.

Mrs. Jenkins proceeded to dilate on the fact that creative artists of all types have something in their possession which others do not possess. She added that there is some-

thing rare and precious which occurs only occasionally in each generation, and that if we are wise, we do our best to retain and encourage that something by all means in our power.

"Rubbish!" said the architect again. "Pack 'em all into the Forces."

"Who would *you* reserve from the Forces, then?" I asked.

"Industrialists," he replied without hesitation. "If you have enough big industrialists in the country. . . ."

"The war will go on for ever," I interrupted, and the whole argument immediately dissolved into general laughter.

I feel, however, that this presents us all with a fairly detailed challenge. The only people entirely exempt from military service are the insane, the blind and the clergy, which is perhaps appropriate, though not very flattering to our pious friends of the cloth. But should acknowledged leaders of the arts be similarly exempt? It is a very moot question. Yet it is good, even in wartime, that books should be written, journals published, pictures painted and plays produced. If everyone is put into uniform who is to do the hard and frequently exacting work of art? I'm not wholly convinced by either side of the argument which I have tried to outline, but I think that it is a matter which, for the future artistic and cultural development of this country, cannot be entirely ignored.

S. H.

### FREETHINKING

THINKING for oneself is one of those gifts given us of Nature to protect ourselves from the machinations of those who would do us harm; thus we observe the utmost importance of this heaven-sent gift.

Not so with those representing the Italian Church in Australia. According to these authorities and the direct Italian representative in Sydney, we Australians must on no account think for ourselves; the thinking must be done for Australians by the Italian Church under the ægis and control of one Panico in Sydney, where the head office for Australasia is housed.

Unfortunately for we Australians, certain of our children have been mesmerised into the firm and unalterable belief that all their mental actions shall be guided and made subservient to the Italian Church, which is definitely not an Australian Institution; as the name implies, it is Italian, controlled according to latest American files and run by Italian noble(?)men as a first-class business institution for their aggrandisement and benefit.

On top of all this demand that Italians do all the thinking for Australians, and the very fine innings all Italians have had in our country, we find the Italian nation in open war against us with the now familiar "stab in the back" tactics. Does not this, at this late hour, convince us of the very present danger of this organisation in our midst?

The Nazi Fascists openly claim support given them by the Vatican in Italy, gouge out the eyes of non-combatants and massacre and mutilate all and sundry non-combatants and war prisoners under this support, that has not been refuted by the Italian Vatican.

The time is ripe for all Australians to think for themselves, to locate those who are their true friends, endeavour to arouse the Australian blood of all Australian-born to a sense of their greater duty to Australia and the Empire; let their vows be to the defence of Australia and Australians, and let all other vows be subservient to this holy and righteous cause.

Australia asks you to think and defend Australia and Australian womanhood to the utmost of your ability, as is your paramount right and duty for the preservation of Australia for Australians, and the Empire and Australia will be your reward and Australian posterity will be ever grateful to you for so simple an act as "thinking for yourself."

From "Smith's Weekly," Sydney, N.S.W.

Nothing will ruin a country if the people themselves will undertake its safety; and nothing can save it if they leave that safety in any hands but their own.—DANIEL WEBSTER.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## RUSSIA

SIR,—Reading in "Views and Opinions" of your issue of March 15, your quotation from Sir Stafford Cripps and your comments on it and on the advice given by the B.B.C. in Children's Hour, I was reminded of a book I read a year or two before the war entitled "Unholy Pilgrimage," by T. L. Harris. In case you think it suitable for publication I give a brief résumé of the book.

Mr. Harris was a priest (C. of E., I presume) with a Cambridge degree and held a Harvard University appointment. He was a pastor for twelve years and had, he says, "a sound historical training" and possessed a working knowledge of the Russian language. He was concerned with finding out something of the thoughts, feelings and attitude of mind of various typical and unofficial members of the U.S.S.R. To this end he went into houses and talked with anyone—workers, doctors, attendants, young or old—and into museums and churches and spent some days on board a Volga steamer.

In Moscow's Park of Rest and Culture he found lovers in plenty, but on the darkest night and in the remotest corner there was nothing which would have brought "so much as a discreet cough from a chaperone." There was no boisterous horseplay; "wholesome, healthy, natural—these words properly describe what I saw," and he adds, "at the risk of being called a Peeping Tom, I looked for goings-on that used to scandalise my nurse in Epping Forest." "Russians somehow were both decent and human," he says (after some experience in a restaurant of a lovers' quarrel) "and there is no primness or prudery about them nor any neurotic proclamations of sexual freedom." He found that in Russia "culture is wedded to morality," so that "it is uncultured to swear at anyone, to lie, to bully and, above all, to exploit."

He says that outside Russian newspapers he rarely saw any attempt to weld a break in logic with the flame of emotion. Even in an argument in a religious museum and after he had admitted he was a priest, he writes, "Not once did they attack me with innuendoes. The argument was always logical."

He met quite haphazardly a number of foreign workers resident in the U.S.S.R. They were under no illusion of being better off materially, but did not want to go back to England or America, as the case might be. "Certainly belief in immortality and the desire for immortality are disappearing throughout the U.S.S.R. Confidence in the future of society has displaced confidence or hope in a personal immortality."

On leaving U.S.S.R. he sums up the youth of the country in the words, "Try as I would, I could not avoid the conclusion that the type of character being produced in Russia is superior to the type of character being produced in the other countries I know." And at the end we have this conclusion: "Goodness is quite possible without God, but without God holiness is impossible."—Yours, etc.,

J. C. KIRKMAN.

## ATHEISM IN THE ARMY

SIR,—Your correspondent, John Stone, in his very interesting article about religion in the R.A.F., stated that he did not know of anyone joining the Service as an Atheist. The present writer did—and by refusing to be entered under any other "religion."

When I was sent down to the receiving station and was asked to state my religion I simply said "Atheist." The officer looked bewildered and said that I couldn't possibly be, to which I added firmly and without compromise that I was! After much controversy, during which the officer told me that there couldn't be such a person as an Atheist, that one must have a religion in the R.A.F. in order to receive a decent burial if killed, and that I could put any religion down if I wished, I thought I would amuse the fellows waiting and have a little fun myself at his expense, so I told him that I was a Buddhist and would need a spinning wheel for prayer. He grew quite angry at this and said that I would have to be entered under the C. of E. label; to which I replied—by now a little fed up

myself—that I would not have my intelligence insulted by having my name associated with such a sect of primitive Totemism. Earlier I had compromised a little and told him that Rationalist or Freethinker would do, but he didn't seem to know what these meant. But I was glad, in a sense, for I wanted to be described as an Atheist. Finally, I insisted on being entered as an Atheist, and that if my rights were flouted I would take the matter to higher quarters.

I saw that the words "I swear by almighty God," etc., were altered to my satisfaction, and after watching about 100 fellows being sworn in holding the Bible, I had a little private session of being sworn in as an Atheist, the officer in charge of this department looking at me as if I were something low. Ever after that, whenever my form was looked at, my religion was called out as "Atheist," and I was no longer troubled. An accident removed me from the R.A.F., so I was denied the enjoyment of a few "religious talks" with the padres.—Yours, etc., W. TOLSON.

## THE NEW DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all cyclones blow,  
Praise him when rivers overflow,  
Praise him who swirls down house and steeple,  
Who sinks the ships and drowns the people.

God be praised when rivers flood,  
And scenes of famine, plague and blood,  
Praise him who men by thousands drowned,  
But saved an image safe and sound.

Praise God when fell tornadoes spread  
Disaster, leaving maimed and dead;  
When dread volcanoes vomit death,  
Destroying towns with liquid breath.

Praise God for nature's brutal plan,  
For jungle law of kill who can,  
Praise him for all the grief and pain  
Which hellish war brings in its train.

Praise God who sends the parching drouth,  
To East and West, to North and South,  
He lets the victims plead in vain,  
And while they die, withholds the rain.

For clergy who with hood and bell  
Demand your cash or threaten hell,  
Praise God for earthquake shocks; and then,  
Let all men cry aloud, "AMEN!"

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES. Etc.

## LONDON

## Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): Parliament Hill Fields: 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBRURY.

## COUNTRY

## Indoor

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

Burnley Barden House Social Club, Colne Road, Burnley): Sunday, 11-0, Mr. N. CHARLTON, "A Talk on Omar Khayyam."

Burnley (Temperance Hall, Brown Street), Thursday April 9th: Lecture in Esperanto 7-30: Mr. J. CLAYTON, "Kelkaj Estonaj Problemoj."

## Outdoor

Blackburn N.S.S. (Blackburn Market), Sunday: 3-15, Mr. J. CLAYTON, "The Psychology of Prayer."

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday, April 4th: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Newcastle (Bigg Market), Sunday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

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