

THE FREETHINKER

- EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN -

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Mystery of God

"GOD moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." I suppose that if there is a God, and if he does move, where he moves, and why he moves, and when he moves, and if he does anything while moving, we can all agree that he moves in a very mysterious way, so mysterious that no one has ever been able to detect his movements. When we say that it is a mystery to us what John Smith does, how he gets his living, or how he came to marry Mrs. Smith, and so forth, we do start with the indisputable fact that John Smith really exists, and that living he must do something. However mysterious the movements of John Smith may be, however great the puzzle of how he gets his living, or how he came to marry Mrs. Smith, we have the solid fact that John Smith is. All our speculating is based upon that indisputable fact.

But we have not, where God is concerned, this inrefragable certainty on which to build our speculations. The initial mystery here is not the way in which God moves, but whether there is anything to move in either an obvious or a mysterious manner. No one knows what God is like. There is a famous definition of God as being without body, parts or passions. But how would one recognise a being without body, parts or passions? It seems first cousin to a footless stocking without a leg. Suppose that one encountered God in, say, Ludgate Circus or Leicester Square. How would one know who or what he had met? A great many people have claimed they have met God, or have been conscious of his presence. But the only evidence produced is a feeling of elation—which may be acquired by a bottle of wine or backing a winner at long odds—or by a feeling of depression—which might be accounted for by mere gastrointestinal disturbances. Some have said they have received messages from God and have built religions on it. Jesus said he had that message. So did Mohammed, and the claims of both are accepted by multitudes, each group denying the other. But all people so affected have not built religions. Their message has often ended by their execution or incarceration in a lunatic asylum.

Indeed, to feel that one is in touch with a God of some sort does not seem a very difficult thing to accomplish. The use of simple drugs—taken without the least knowledge of their mode of operation—is one of the earliest methods of making God's acquaintance. Fasting and solitary meditation are also common and popular methods. Most of the visions of God realised by the Christian saints have been brought about in this way; and the critical observer has not failed to note that it was the celibate monk who mostly had visions of the Virgin Mary while the celibate nun felt herself clasped in the embrace of Jesus. If the monk had married the nun their ecstatic visions of God would not have been so easily accomplished.

Archbishop Temple tells us, with all the authority that may be derived from a salary of fifteen thousand pounds, that only once in the world's history has God appeared visible to human eyes by taking on the shape of a man. That is, as a matter of fact, not true. Other religions have claimed the same for their own gods, and there are plenty of graves of gods that have existed. The evidence in these cases were just as good as that given for the grave of the Christian God. They proved that the god was buried there by showing people the grave. That was good, religious, evidence. For the grave was empty. Had it been occupied by a skeleton the proof would have been unsatisfactory. But it was an empty grave, and that was good religious evidence that the god had once occupied it.

But the Archbishop's statement that Jesus Christ is the only God who was ever seen by man is unsatisfactory. For Jesus Christ, so far as the New Testament goes (Dr. Temple may, of course, have later evidence) was not seen as a God, he was seen and recognised as a man. It was only a few, a very few, of the "multitude" who saw him who believed he was a God. The rest saw him as a man. The most we can say of Jesus is that he was a God in disguise, and that does not help to answer the question, What does a God look like? How do we distinguish him from ordinary men? All men are born in the same way, they live in the same way and die in the same way. If the Jesus Christ of the New Testament ever lived he ran the same course as do other men. We are told that he had no earthly father, but he certainly had an earthly mother, and it would have been much more convincing if the missing parent had been the mother. Scores of saviour gods have been born without fathers, not one of them was born without a mother. The miracle is incomplete. The ways of the gods are too mysterious on the one hand and too commonplace on the other to carry conviction.

Difficulties Accumulate

Our question of how we are to know a god if we meet one remains unanswered. Merely enlarging human qualities will not help. Make man a thousand times as wise as he is, we are still dealing with man. Make him a thousand times better, morally, he is still man. Man will continue to be born of two parents, he may live longer than the average human

lives now, but he will die just as surely. There is no way you can leap from man to "God" by a process of enlargement. And there is no way in which you can make god better than he save by improving man first of all. It was God who said "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," it was man who knocked the idea of witchcraft out of the mind of man by abolishing witches. Man was not made in the image of God, it was God who was made in the image of man. Actually anthropologists can trace the birth of the gods, but the anthropologist has to appeal to the geologist and the biologist to discover the origin of man. Man predates his gods, as the maker must always predate the thing that is made. Gods everywhere bear the marks of a manufactured article.

But that article is losing its utility. It plays no vital part in the occupations of civilised mankind. In the present war we have had, by the official representatives of the deity, many appeals to God for help. What proportion of the general public place any real reliance on the gods giving any help? Churches are bombed as easily as the poorest of houses—in proportion churches have suffered more than the dwelling places of mere men, women and children. It is explained that churches being more prominent than houses offer better targets for bombs. Agreed. But that is only another way of admitting that the fact of the building being a church does not matter. The significant fact is that a Morrison shelter is better protection than the roof of a cathedral. Guns have proved themselves of greater utility than prayers. Once upon a time men did rely upon the help of God; but experience would not be denied, and to-day everything that is purely religious is taking second place and the nation is told by its leaders that it is human industry, human intelligence, and human courage that will bring us victory. And beyond that victory, there is maturing the deadly fact that men and women are realising more clearly than ever that the making of a desirable State must depend upon the wisdom of man, not upon belief in the power of gods. The age of the gods is drawing to its close, even though the gods may linger long after the war ends. The belief in God has always had a utilitarian basis. The Gods were believed in because it was thought they did something. The war has once more demonstrated that they do nothing. They are the projection of man's hopes and fears.

God and a County Council

Perhaps there was more than a desire to save money in the incident that occurred the other day on the Norfolk County Council. Part of the coast-line that comes under the jurisdiction of the Council is being eaten away by the sea. The area around Caister seems to be suffering badly. When the matter came up for discussion the Council declined to devote the necessary funds for making good the erosion of the coast. The ground of their refusal, which we do not expect will be persisted in, was that coast erosion is "an act of God," and they refused to vote the necessary expenditure for repairs. God caused the damage and God should see to the repairs.

I have not seen a detailed account of the discussion of the motion before the Council. It might have read: "That this Council, bearing in mind the frequency of these 'acts of God' along the coast and elsewhere, declines longer to burden ratepayers with the cost of repairs of these wanton injuries, and hereby refers the whole matter to Archbishop Temple, who is in close and constant communication with God, in the hope that he may induce God to cease making these assaults on British territory and endangering British lives." This *might* have been the resolution under discussion, but I hardly think it

was. It sounds too logical, too straight to the point where religion is concerned. Occasionally Christian worshippers do rear themselves on their hind legs and hit back to their gods, as when the inhabitants of Sicily prayed to their patron saint for rain that never came, took the figure of the saint from the church, marched him through the parched fields so that he could see for himself what a mess he had made of things, and straightway chucked the saint into the sea. But it is not often that Christians stand up to their gods in that manful manner. The usual plan is to grovel the more as misfortunes increase.

Still, here is the plain fact. The coast in the neighbourhood of Caister is being eaten away by an Act of God, and the County Council refuses to take on the responsibility for repairs or to saddle the ratepayers with the cost of undoing God's action. It may even be dangerous to so publicly accuse the deity of an act of wanton destruction. Every parson will tell us that it is dangerously wrong to attempt to deny God's purpose, and I have no doubt that Commander Campbell could provide the Brains Trust (Limited) with numerous experiences of the wonderful divine judgments he has seen in Timbuctoo, or South America, or in some province of dreamland. I think the Norfolk County Council has acted in a religiously praiseworthy manner. God caused the damage and he should be held responsible for the repairs. That is the usual legal procedure, and it is a just one. Our new Archbishop of Canterbury might advise us how to induce God to do the right, the legal, the honourable thing.

So we end as we began—in a mystery. We do not know what God is like. In fact, as he preceded everything there cannot have been anything that he resembles. We do not know what he does, although his followers claim to have the strongest manifestations of his activities in earthquakes, storms, epidemics and general misfortune. Judged by any accepted standard of morality or intelligent planning he is a long way behind the best of his worshippers. Perhaps it is best to conclude that behind the curtain that hangs before the Holy of Holies there is—nothing.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE EVOLUTION OF MONETARY POWER

MONEY has been stigmatised as the root of all evil. But this old saying needs many qualifications, especially as it was so frequently cited by those who seldom or never experienced the pleasures of poverty.

Banking was long in successful operation in old-time Babylon, while the exasperating inconveniences of primitive barter were eliminated by the use of currency in most other ancient States. In the chaos which accompanied the overthrow of the Roman Empire there were no uniform standards of weights and measures, and exchanges were made in kind. In the 8th century of our era Charlemagne established a unified system of currency, but commerce was so slightly developed in that agricultural age that the Emperor's pounds, shillings and pence were seldom in use.

With the revival of trading transactions in the 10th century, however, money became necessary as a measure of value and as a medium of exchange. Stocks of money were accumulated by merchants, but these the Church forbade its possessors to lend out at interest. Still, the wills of traders at this period frequently directed the restitution of any gains accruing from usury as a passport to Paradise, but by the close of the Middle Ages this precaution disappeared.

Subtle devices were invented to evade the Church's ban. Instead of taking interest on loans, moneylenders received rewards, gratuities or consideration from their clients. According to Crowther in his "Social Relations of Science" (Macmillan, 1941; 16s.), throughout the 12th and 13th centuries, "money was lent almost entirely on the security of crown jewels and land for financing wars and Courts.

It was not lent for enterprise, but for unproductive consumption, and ultimately medieval bankers were ruined by the system."

As the Church hindered Christians in monetary matters, the Jews entered the field only to be displaced by the adventurous Florentines. Ironically enough, the earliest "professional Christian moneylenders were the collectors of papal dues." In Italy also large-scale operations began at the ports, and there banking and the first modern commercial companies were developed.

Now that money could be invested at a handsome profit, a powerful stimulus was given to production. Import and export increased, and Venice was soon celebrated for its silk and glass and Florence for its magnificent cloth. Dante's city became the financial centre of Europe. The rulers of petty feudal domains could now borrow money to enable them to augment their armed forces and create national States. So large were these loans that, when Edward III. of England became bankrupt, his chief creditors, the Florentine financiers, were ruined.

But the golden age of Florence came later when the Medici became the leading bankers of the city. This famous family, the Rothschilds of the period, attained immense wealth and influence and remained the papal bankers until 1476. They made an impressive display and their payments in taxes and expenditure on public buildings and charities were most lavish.

Posing as a democratic leader, Cosimo the Elder dominated Florence for three decades. He suppressed every aristocratic adversary and drove his financial rivals into insolvency. Foreign princes he intimidated when he threatened to close his credit undertakings. A neo-Pagan, Cosimo "once said that he would like to have 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost all on my books as debtors.'"

Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent, expended vast sums on public services and, in 14th and 15th century Florence, the financial magnates became the Third Estate. On the other hand, the feudal nobility manifested distinct evidences of decadence. But generally, Europe was awaking from the slumber of the Middle Period. Crowther notes that: "The Florentines abolished serfdom by decree in 1415. This was followed by technical improvements in agriculture. Rice cultivation was introduced into Lombardy in the 15th century, the cultivation of the silkworm was started in the Midi, in Flanders the triennial rotation of crops was abandoned and fallow was sown with clover."

The discovery that the command of money conferred far greater power than feudal rights, sapped the supremacy of the landholders. The citizens of the Italian urban communities, as they grew more opulent and independent, openly expressed their contempt for feudal lords and their dependants. They released themselves from feudal bonds and struck out an independent path. Ancient art and letters, as well as science, replaced the traditions of the Church and the vagaries of the schoolmen. It has been shrewdly remarked that: "When feudal men saw that moneylenders, the class held in deepest contempt by feudal society, could become lords of the world, their principles were shaken, and that they felt impelled to give more attention to the facts of experience and the possibility of novelty."

One depressing aspect of the triumph of capital was the impetus it gave to militarism. In feudal times, armed retainers were alone available for war, but with the advent of the money kings, soldiers became purchaseable and mercenary troops sold their services to the highest bidder. Cannon was introduced in the 14th century and muskets were in use in Germany in the 15th. Military equipment became much more costly and created a heavy industry for which a large supply of capital was essential.

Culturally, however, the period under review was the harbinger of that marvellous outburst of literature, science and art which immortalised the Italian Renaissance. Galileo, Leonardo, Bruno, Titian, Raphael, Michelangelo, Boccaccio and a host of others were all illustrious Italians. Let us trust that the seeming decadence of contemporary Italy will prove but a temporary departure from the glorious path towards freedom and enlightenment pursued by her sons until recent decades.

T. F. PALMER.

FREEDOM AND THE FUTURE

(Continued from page 183)

ONE of the things that has gone back with the Rationalist and Freethought Movements in this country is that they have become too much divorced from their social implications, so that to much too great an extent you have had people concentrating on the propaganda against God instead of concentrating on the necessity for aiding men to live a decent and reasonable all-round life." Mr. Cole went on to point out the social upheavals of the present time, even at a period before a world-war had broken out, and suggested that a mere reiteration of a Benthamite liberalism was insufficient to meet the situation. He called Freethought to a struggle for freedom "by peaceful means, if you like, but, as the Chartists used to say in the first half of the last century: 'Peaceably if we may; forcibly if we must.'"

The challenge which G. D. H. Cole laid down at the 1938 Conference expresses the exact work of radical thought at the present time. It is of slight use to abolish the hold of superstition over man if nothing is to be done in order to alleviate his social lot and to bring about a just and righteous order upon earth. From one point of view, the theological battle is almost won. The old doctrines have but slight hold upon the hearts and minds of the general community. Physics, biology, Biblical criticism, gave them their first bad shaking in the middle of the last century. It has been the function of psychology to point out the numerous fallacies underlying the sin-obsession. Sociology now has the opportunity of illustrating the politico-economic motives which underlie various historical theologies. But this work of destruction is in vain unless its fruits are to be gleaned as a necessary contribution to the work of a larger movement. For example, psychology points out that many "sins," especially those of a sexual type, have nothing to do with an innate depravity and the need for a supernatural redemption; they call for a doctor and for therapeutic treatment. But it has also shown, with the help of sociology, that many anti-social acts are due to environment or to economic circumstance. With Karl Marx, it sees human motive as largely dependant upon hunger and fear. Of course, this admission is a further nail in the coffin of redemptionist theology, but the matter does not end there. The anti-social act is still anti-social, even though it may have very different roots to those which theology has imagined. The scientific explanation is only utilised if it is the beginning of an agitation to get rid of an environment which prompts the commission of behaviour detrimental to the well-being of society as a whole.

The "new reformation" based upon science has reached a stage at which these issues must be thought out. It is useless to continue uttering old battle-cries and flogging dead horses. A situation has come about in which reaction and progress are in conflict; there are a good many cross-currents and the general scene is set in terms of a quasi-political ideology. A constructive freethought should evolve a philosophy of life large enough to cover the whole area of conflict. It must relate itself to the struggle for economic security and for a social order which allows room to equality and liberty, both in thought and action. The collapse of *laissez faire* has spelt the end of mechanical ideas of progress as being both necessary and beneficent, the theory of so typical a 19th century philosopher as J. B. Crozier. The logic of events has compelled a realisation that huge retrogressions may take place within human history in spite of the existence of progress; an era of scientific achievement and rapid forward movements may be followed by the rise of Fascism, the destruction of liberty, the dethroning of reason. Progress is an element whose continued potency depends solely upon the struggles devoted to its cause in every age. It may call for the anti-theology of a Bradlaugh, it may need the fervent nationalist patriotism of a Mazzini, it may find its service in the international Socialism of a Lenin. A time is rapidly approaching when the cause of progress may best be served by a reassertion of civil and religious liberty, a positive philosophy linking up the older libertarianism of J. S. Mill with a new sense of community and a fresh realisation that man lives within a social context. If the individual needs both liberality and rationality in order that he may produce his fullest potentialities, so too does his sociological environment.

The present issues confronting the Freethought and Rationalist Movements suggest that the time has come when they should again be generally identified with a radical view of life. Such older radicals as Paine and Hunt, the Chartists, the followers of Bradlaugh and Fawcett, overturned the then existing orthodoxies of conventional life by going to the roots of the matter. There are scant signs of a resurrection to-day of the obsolete theologies; "the black international" is very generally in retreat. But new orthodoxies have arisen to stifle the mind of man. They are associated with State-worship; they utilise religion to support their totalitarian claims. The well-being of the future must depend very largely upon the society emerging from a three-cornered clash through these totalitarianisms finding themselves in conflict with the remnants of the old and dying social orders and with a radical and progressive view of life. Liberty and reason depend upon the victory of radicalism for their immediate survival. There is an imperative need for the Freethought Movement generally to think out its position upon these matters that it may be prepared to meet a situation in which the dominating motives are sociological. The semi-secularised sociological version of religion now popular in many Church pulpits is a sign that the clergy are awake to the issues and are attempting to bend religious forms in order that they may fit into a new situation. Rationalism must seek to overcome its temporary isolation from the economic and political background of human life; it must follow the examples of its earlier protagonists by evolving a radical outlook capable of safeguarding values of liberty, progress and reason in a world where they are widely challenged by a reactionary political creed and an economic theory based upon class distinction. The importance of the religious controversy remains, but it is only as a detail within the greater issue; the probable future of conventional religion must lie in the use to which ecclesiasticism is put by those seeking to maintain decadent social orders. "JULIAN."

BIBLE NOTES AND NOTIONS

IF the story of the origin of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is known as the Septuagint, be true, then the Jews must have had their Bible completed, or almost completed, by about 280 B.C. This story is given by Sir Frederic Kenyon in his "Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts," as follows:—

"In a letter purporting to be written by one Aristæus to his brother Philocrates, in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (284-247 B.C.), it is said that King Ptolemy, hearing of the Jewish Scriptures, and being urged by his librarian to obtain a copy of them for his great library at Alexandria, sent an embassy (of which the writer of the letter was one) to the high priest of Jerusalem with magnificent presents, begging him to send a copy of the sacred books, with a body of men capable of translating them. Thereupon six translators were selected from each of the twelve tribes and dispatched to Alexandria bearing with them a copy of the Law, written in letters of gold. . . . They set about their task of translation, working separately in the first instance, but afterwards comparing their results, and finally producing the version thenceforward known as the Septuagint, or the Version of the Seventy. Later generations improved upon this story, until the legend ran that each of the 72 translators was shut up in a separate cell (or by pairs in 36 cells) and each produced a translation of the whole Old Testament in exactly 72 days; and when their translations were compared it was found that they all agreed precisely with one another in every word and phrase, thus proving that their version was directly inspired by God."

Even the orthodox Sir Frederic was unable to swallow this miraculous story, for he admits that, though "long current," it is "largely mythical"; but he declares that it contains "a kernel of truth."

The only thing that is true is that the Old Testament was translated into Greek—though nobody knows how, when, or where, for certain. The Pentateuch may have been first translated, but authorities are agreed that the translation is very unequal in the other parts, which may have had a

variety of translators working at different times. Moreover, Sir Frederic points out that "some of the later books, such as Ecclesiasticus, were not even written at the time of which the story speaks." This, of course, takes for granted that Ecclesiasticus had first been written in Hebrew, a proposition by no means certain. What is certain is that some of the books in the Apocrypha were not written originally in Hebrew—and indeed, the suggestion has been seriously put forward by scholars that perhaps some of the canonical books also never were written in "Hebrew"—that is, "old" Hebrew—whatever that was.

The Septuagint became undoubtedly the Bible of the Greek-speaking Jews and was long revered as such. But the history of its inception is very obscure. No one knows what the first complete copy of this version of the Old Testament was like—or what exactly was its text. It must have undergone many revisions before it became more or less standardised in the form we have it. The three great Greek manuscripts of the 4th and 5th centuries, known as the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Alexandrinus, all written in *uncials*—that is, capitals—contain the complete text between them, as well as the Apocrypha and the New Testament. There are besides many MSS. written in *cursive* or *miniscule* writing, which also give the text of the Old Testament in Greek. But the real difficulty is to find out what that text is—or ought to be. The MSS. seem to be in a state of great confusion with thousands of "variant" readings. A translation was made in English, apparently from the Codex Vaticanus, by an American scholar, Charles Thomson, in 1808, which has never been enthusiastically received by either Christians or Jews because of its irreconcilable contradictions with the Hebrew. It was obvious to the orthodox that if the "original" Hebrew clashed in many details with the translation in Greek, especially if this Greek text was riddled with contradictions itself, the safest course for salvation was a very difficult problem to solve.

Many Christian scholars were emphatic in their condemnation of the Septuagint. The great Church historian, Dupin, writing in the 17th century, declared:—

"We must confess that there are many differences betwixt the Hebrew text and the version of the Septuagint, which arose from the corruption and confusion that aro in the Greek version we now have. It is certain that it hath been revised divers times, and that several authors have taken the liberty to add therunto, to retrench, and to correct divers things. . . . It is mere superstition to assert, as some authors do, that the Hebrew text which we have at present is not corrupted in any place, and that there is not anything left out, and that we must indispensably follow it at all times. . . . there have been differences betwixt the oldest of the Hebrew copies, which the Massorites have observed, by that which they call *Keri* and *Ketib*, and putting one of the writings in the text, and the other in the margin. . . ."

The famous Archbishop Usher (or Ussher), responsible for the chronology in the Authorised Version of the Bible, went even further than Dupin. He maintained that the "original" Septuagint was completely lost, and that the one in circulation now is a "spurious copy."

But it has, in spite of this, very vigorous defenders—like Mr. S. F. Pells, the English editor of Thomson's translation, who points out that

"it was the Bible used by Christ and the writers of the New Testament; it was out of this Bible our Saviour was taught as a child, and out of which he read in the synagogue at Nazareth, when 'He closed the book' and said, 'This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears.' The Septuagint was the only Bible of the Apostolic Church from which most of the quotations in the New Testament were taken. . . . Greek was the universal language; hence the Septuagint was the common Bible of Jews and Christians alike."

In view of these statements by "authorities," it can be seen that there are grave difficulties in deciding what exactly is the text of God's Holy Word, either from the Septuagint or the Hebrew.

The position is complicated because there are other Greek versions in the field. These were made—in all probability, though it is pure conjecture—when the Hebrew text was

fixed somewhere in the 2nd century A.D. The first of these was made by Aquila, a pupil of Rabbi Akiba. It is, says Kenyon, "an exceedingly bald and literal rendering of the Hebrew, adhering to the original so closely as to lose most of the Greek idiom, and often falling into obscurity and even nonsense." Another version was made by Theodotion, a Christian, which erred the other way as "being very free in its rendering of the original." His version of Daniel is found in many manuscripts of the Septuagint, while that of Job does not contain many passages which are in the Hebrew text.

Another version is by Symmachus, and it is considered a fine literary effort which exercised much influence in Jerome when at work on the Latin Vulgate; while the Alexandrian scholar, Origen, "finding all these various, and often conflicting, versions of the Scriptures existing side by side," says Kenyon, decided to use them in the production of "one more perfect version of them all." This was called the *Hexapla*, and it consisted of six parallel columns—the then Hebrew text, the same in Greek letters, Aquila's translation, that of Symmachus, the Septuagint (according to Origen) and the version of Theodotion. Little of this has come down to us, and what has been preserved is in a state of confusion owing to the use made by Origen of certain symbols. Scholars have tried to find out what Origen's Septuagint really was, and some of it, together with "readings" only of some of the other translators, have been published. But what the state of the Old Testament in Hebrew actually was at the time of Origen is still quite undecided.

In fact, the one certain thing about the text known as the Septuagint is its uncertainty. Only unquenching faith can guarantee its integrity.

H. CUTNER.

IN RELIGION'S PLACE

*You rob us of all that is sacred,
Of Bible, of God, and of Grace;
But when you thus take our religion,
What else do you give in its place?*

—"The Old, Old Story."

The Bible wide open, the preacher,
As its pages he pounded and pawed,
Denounced the devices of Satan
And exalted the glory of God.
"All fable and myth!" cried the sceptic;
"Contradictions absurd on their face."
"I know it," assented the other,
"But what will you give in their place?"

A traveller once in the Southland
Discovered a people in chains;
When he read them the story of Freedom,
They gave him sour looks for his pains.
Said they: "We are told by our masters
That chains are God's gift to our race;
Before you have riven them from us
Say what you will give in their place."

O Captive we wrest from you nothing—
The creeds that beguiled are untrue;
'Tis your bondage to falsehood we sunder
When we rob superstition of you.
The cry comes from goblins and phantoms
That hover about for a space,
And, fleeing, still hope to dismay us
With, "What will you give in our place?"

In your place! We give reason and knowledge,
Where before were belief and mistake—
Fresh joys, that can thrive but in freedom,
For every chain that we break.
The gods that oppressed men shall vanish
To unthinkable realms. In disgrace;
Their reign shall be ended forever,
AND FREETHOUGHT SHALL STAND IN THEIR PLACE.

GEORGE E. MACDONALD.

ACID DROPS

IT is curious that, on the whole, the plot for handing over the control of the schools to the Churches receives a greater amount of support from headmasters than from ordinary teachers. This is not because the headmasters are more capable teachers than others, or that they have a greater sense of responsibility towards their pupils. Those who know many teachers will not harbour that delusion. But they have entered a circle of control, and they may have been appointed because they could be trusted never to try anything very radical. It is not unusual to find that many professed Radicals are converted to hard-shell Conservatives by being raised to a higher position. They feel they are among the ruling class and must fall into line.

We were led to write the above because the President-elect of the Headmasters' Association—the fact that headmasters consider themselves as something apart from ordinary teachers is worth thinking over—is reported by the "Yorkshire Post" as saying that "our education should be based on a sound religious training and simple Bible teaching." When we think of the teaching that can be extracted from the Bible we have no hesitation in saying that the President-elect, if he means what he says, the sooner he ceases to teach, the better. In fact, if he were to teach faithfully a great deal of the Bible, he would be asked to resign.

Recently at Belfast a boy, aged nine and a-half years, was a witness in a case of action for damages. The Judge asked the boy if he knew what would happen to him if he told a lie. "I'll be sent to hell," replied the young witness. The Judge's comment was: "That is true Christianity." Let us hope that the Judge was speaking sarcastically. At any rate, it is evident that the boy's tuition was of a kind that decent men and women should be ashamed of. One hopes they will be.

The Rev. W. H. Elliott asks why, "if God is so patient with us, why are we not more patient with each other?" There seems something wrong in this way of putting the question. It is men who are patient with God. They are always manufacturing apologies for his conduct and excusing him doing things that might make the world very much better than it is. After all, on the Christian theory, it was God that made man and not man that made God; and if God had wished to have man better than he is, God should have turned out a better job.

Mr. Hugh Redwood, who decorates the "News-Chronicle" occasionally with a dose of religion, speaking at a meeting held in the Central Hall, Greenwich, takes a rather gloomy view of the future of Christianity. He expressed the belief that "the world of to-day did not believe in the Gospel." He also said:—

"He meets ministers of religion who told him it was quite easy to see the meaning of how Russia would eventually defeat Germany, but they could not see the meaning whereby God was going to fulfil his promise to shower his spirit upon all flesh."

We fancy that a great many of the clergy are very troubled for the same reason. If the clergy generally had not indulged in such wholesale slanders concerning "Atheistic Russia," the reaction of the general public would not have been what it is. If the people of this country permit themselves to be fooled again their deserve all the ills they may get.

Sir Stafford Cripps appears to have annoyed certain people in religious circles for having said, soon after his return from Russia, the Russian people were not very much interested in religion. Times have changed. At first Russia was a bogey held up to caution British people to have as little as possible to do with Russia. It was saturated with Godlessness. Then Russia began to beat the Germans for us, and our political leaders—some of them—could not find praise extravagant enough for Russia. So the new tune was that Russia really was profoundly religious, with a mere handful of Atheists, who were rapidly dwindling. It seems almost impossible for Christians to speak truthfully where the interests of their creed are concerned.

The present President of the Board of Education is Mr. Butler. Judging from his constant concern to see that children in the State schools get a good dose of religion, it would seem he would be better in the post of chairman of some little Bethel. Of course, there would be the drawback that the salary would be very much smaller and he would have to be more careful in what he said. For example, he is very fond of saying that this is "a Christian country, and therefore we ought to be able to give children a good Christian education." This is one of those glib generalisations that roll easily off the lips, but which indicate either foolishness or a very cheap form of cunning.

For, except for the fact that we have a Church subsidised by the State, this is *not* a Christian nation. Nine-tenths of the people do not go to church, a very large proportion of the people—easily a third—have no real belief in Christianity. If they are not avowed non-Christians or anti-Christians, they have no real belief in Christian doctrines. We do suspect Mr. Butler of being a professed Christian, and his talk is just so much religious cant. If we are to build a new and better Britain we need men of stronger and straighter intellectual fibre than Mr. Butler appears to be.

"Hitler sets himself above the Law," says the "Daily Telegraph." That is very wrong. But perhaps one of his illusions is that he is as great as our Home Secretary.

The Free Church Presbytery has sent a message to the Prime Minister and to Sir Murdoch Macdonald, the local M.P., asking for a day of prayer and humiliation so that we may win the war. We do not know what Mr. Churchill will say, but we haven't much doubt as to what he will think. The M.P. has replied saying that those who are making war weapons must not pause for a single hour. "The loss of a single hour might be fatal." That is, God will help us win the war, provided we win it ourselves. As to the Prime Minister, we expect from him—if he ever sees the rubbish of the Presbytery resolution—a shower of Churchillian cuss-words. God couldn't prevent the war starting; we have had about seven days of humiliation—each one followed by something disagreeable—and in the final winning of the war we shall owe most to the country that troubles God least, and even refrains from driving its soldiers to church like so many lambs—or other animals with longer ears.

We receive many letters from religious folk. Some are just impudent and they generally go to the W.P.B. Others are abusive, and amuse. Others are very, very serious, so serious that they touch the other extreme and lead to laughter. There are other kinds, and a very common one is that which states that the writers will be most miserable if they give up their "faith." We have just read one on the old theme that unless this life leads to another it is not worth the living. That reminds us of some lines on immortality by that famous satirist, Ambrose Bierce. Here they are:—

A toy which people pray for,
And on their knees apply for,
Dispute, contend and lie for,
And if allowed
Would be right proud
Eternally to die for.

The assertion that this life is without meaning, significance or value unless there is another life beyond the grave, is one of the most curious and, in terms of historic fact, one of the most dangerous illusions from which the human mind has suffered. It has fostered the bitterest of hatreds and sanctioned the vilest of cruelties; and it has saddled society with a priestly caste that has served reaction more faithfully than any other institution.

Full marks go to the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead for his attempt to re-establish the real Judas. It is true that Judas betrayed "our Lord," but that was part of the game. As we said recently, if Jesus had not been betrayed and, by inference, had never been crucified, the whole plan of salvation would have been a plot. Christians may owe their salvation

to Jesus, but the blessing came through Judas. Mr. Weatherhead is probably correct when he says that Judas would have been "received with tenderness" in heaven. Why not? Everything depended on him.

One can trust a clergyman for "mugging up" a simple situation. Here, for example, is the Bishop of Chelmsford, who "tells the world" the meaning of Democracy. Democracy, he says, "means that every individual man is an end in himself, that man is a child of God, and as a child of God he possesses a free will." Three statements—two just nonsensical and the third reasonable only when the Bishop's meaning of the term is corrected. No. 1: No man is an end in himself; he is only what he is as a man because inextricably related to what has gone before, and everything he does implies a relation to other men, without which his own manhood would be impossible. No. 2: Man is not, on the face of it, a child of God, since no one knows what God is, where he is, what he is like, and no one knows that he even exists. No. 3: Freedom has no possible connection with an unknown entity called "will," which is free to act without incentive. "Will" as an entity is nonentity. Man's freedom consists in the degree to which he can follow his inclinations. He may be free to follow them, or he may be restricted in such a way that what he does is a matter of applied force. The Bishop had better try again.

While the war is on it would be well to keep an eye on the Roman Church. When the war is over it will be wise and necessary to keep both eyes on the Roman Church. We have mentioned the notorious Roman Catholic priest, Father Coughlin, who has used the American radio so steadily to discredit anything that would lead to a friendly alliance with Russia. We have also kept touch with the same tendency that runs through the Catholic press in England. Father Coughlin works on the lines, apparently, that "Moscow and Tokyo are operating under a secret alliance," and that "the German retreat and the Soviet winter victory are a twin hoax designed to deceive us." With God, and his Church, all things are possible—even such unadulterated rubbish as that of Father Coughlin's.

Sir Richard Acland has published a plea that during the war all should be content with soldiers' wages. He might as well ask for the moon to be served up in slices to make good the shortage of cheese. Even with the fantastic rationing scheme of fuel and light, setting apart the army of men with substantial payments—one chief has already been appointed with a salary of £1,700—it would clearly be beneath his dignity not to have a special well-paid staff of his own. What if every Minister and every chief of staff agreed to take no more than £1,000 yearly until the war came to an end? But to suggest that, is to be accused of living in dreamland.

We have received a letter from a Mr. Adrian Hill, in which he writes, after saying that he has read a copy of "The Freethinker," "Thank God I am not a Rationalist." Not even a Rationalist! Poor man! Still, if he is young, he may develop. While there is life, and a modicum of healthy brains, there is always hope. If we can help in any way we shall be pleased to hear from Mr. Hill. We have known worse cases than his attain a complete recovery to normal mental health.

The "Universe," after stating the number of churches that have been damaged or destroyed in Malta, sums up with the comment that these casualties "will not affect the power of prayer." The "Universe" evidently does not say what it means, certainly it does not say what its statements imply. As a large proportion of the churches have been damaged, it is obvious that the *power* of prayer simply did not show itself. Perhaps what was meant was that the *prevalence* of prayer was not affected. That we can quite believe. Neither fear nor the non-effectiveness of God can kill at once the belief in God. For a time it may even strengthen it. All the same, when men realise that events are not affected by prayer, a number of even religious folk will begin to ask, what is the value of prayer?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

DRIVER BAILEY.—Letter has been handed to N.S.S. Secretary.

S. MORGAN.—We cannot say to what extent sermons are now printed. Whatever the number, with rare exceptions, they are a terrible waste of paper. They are all right in Church because no one is expected to take them seriously. The great thing is for them to *sound* all right. If they violently disturbed the grey matter of the brain all the comfort of a church service would be destroyed. We have just handed over about 30 volumes of sermons for pulping purposes, and we are certain they never before served so useful a purpose.

A. HATTIE.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

G. M. WILLIAMSON.—As a matter of fact, in the early 'seventies a United States journalist was found guilty and sentenced to a term of imprisonment for sending indecent literature through the post. The indecent literature consisted of quotations from the Bible, without comment. Unquestionably the same charge would hold good in this country if that conduct was repeated.

J. McILWAIN.—Thanks for letter; paper will be sent to address given for four weeks.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—H. Johnston (S. Africa), 19s.; W. T. Hawks (S. Africa), 7s. 6d.; A. Edwards, 3s.

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

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

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

THE Annual Conference will be held, as usual, on Whit-Sunday, May 24. The Conference will be held at the Waldorf Hotel, Aldwych: morning session at 10-30, afternoon session at 2-30. These meetings are for members only. We hope to have a number of delegates from the provinces and possibly from Scotland, but in existing circumstances the usual number of delegates is impossible. Those who can attend are assured of a hearty welcome. Arrangements have been made for the provision of luncheon at the pre-war price of 3s. Those who wish to be present must give notice to the General Secretary.

The Executive has decided, as was the case last year, to confine the Conference to necessary business, but the afternoon will be given up to a general discussion on matters of interest to the N.S.S. and to matters of general interest. Last year this led to some very interesting, fruitful discussions, and there should be no falling off in this direction. Meanwhile, those visitors who wish hotel accommodation reserved should write to the General Secretary without delay.

The Roman Church is seriously concerned with the falling birth rate. It always has been, and for substantially the same reasons that made Mussolini and Hitler call for more and more births. Also, judging from letters in the "Church Times," the clergy are also crying out for more babies. But the clerical birth rate appears to have dropped by three-fourths of what it was 60 years ago. But one is quite used to the clergy of all denominations preaching one thing and practising another.

The Marquis of Aberdeen and Temair raises a protest against the B.B.C. cutting off religious broadcasts before they have ended. It seems that the Rev. Roderick Murchison was cut off before he had pronounced more than three words of the blessing. We rather fancy that a great many subscribers would advocate cutting off the religious preachments before they commenced. In any case, Mr. Murchison was praying to God, and surely God cannot be dependent on the B.B.C. for knowing what his followers are saying to him? Here is a question that might come up before the Brains Trust (Limited)! Does God listen regularly to the B.B.C.? If not, does it matter whether the praying man is cut off or not?

One of the recent parliamentary questions put to the Minister of Health was whether it was the intention of the Government to increase the birth-rate? The question reminds one of a story of Charles II. Said he to his favourite, the Duke of Buckingham: "I am the father of my people, am I not, Steenie?" "Certainly," said the Duke, "very many of them."

Religious leaders have done their best to convert the world war into one for the preservation of Christianity. Of course, that was a lie, and a carefully calculated one that was voiced by those who knew better. Facts, however, were too strong, and while the lie is still current, its voice is neither so strong nor so persistent as it was. Days of prayer with the King leading this nonsensical fantasia only made the story more ridiculous; and with the fact of "Atheistic Russia" having done so much to save the situation, one may count that particular lie as so weak that it has become ridiculous. Christianity will, of course, survive the war—so will many other troubles—but the war will be largely fought in vain if Christianity is not greatly weakened and ways opened to end our other troubles.

One evidence of the truth of what has been said is the increased demand for outspoken Freethinking literature. There is a marked move in that direction, and for some weeks we have been unable to supply all the applications for copies of "The Freethinker." Last week we were badly "sold out," but we hope to get over the immediate difficulty in the course of two or three weeks. The trouble arises, of course, from the paper shortage, and it is damnably annoying to find our influence checked, if only for a week or two. What is noticeable is the warm praise we have received from new readers and the "Why did I not know of this paper earlier" tone. The answer is want of funds for advertising. But we have done our best in even this direction, and hope to do better in the future.

From the "Sussex Daily News" of April 24 we learn that the following resolution was passed by the Lewes Labour Party. The resolution, which was passed unanimously, protested against the action of the Lewes Education Committee

"introducing an unauthorised measure of religious education into the curriculum of the elementary schools, including a religious service away from school premises."

We should like to see other local bodies equally on the alert and as decided in action.

So far as we can remember, no protest has yet been made in the House of Commons against compelling men in what is, in substance, a civilian volunteer force to attend church parades. At Salford on April 28, Frank Ormes, a volunteer Civil Defence rescue worker was fined £1 for failing to attend a church parade. It is monstrous that with all the claptrap that is being said about freedom that this Church-led tyranny should exist. Anyone but a parson would be ashamed to father such proceedings. We should think a little more of our new Archbishop of Canterbury if he had the manliness to lead the way in asking that all such methods of forcing attendance at a religious ceremony should drop. The truth is that he and all other clergymen know that not 10 per cent. of the Army, Navy, Air Force or Home Guard would attend church. What we have said also applies to the Navy of Commander Campbell's "whopper."

For longer than we care to remember we have protested against the glorification of war that has been a common theme among the European nations. It is always a bad business, and the more civilised the world gets, the greater the brutalising influence war exerts. Our readers will, we think, be interested in the following, which we take from the Roman Catholic journal "The Universe." It is sent them by one of their readers, and it describes a phase of military training:—

"A 21-year-old lieutenant-colonel is teaching the toughened British soldier to HATE—and to KILL. A cadet at Sandhurst when war broke out, he has evolved a training system of 'Blood, Sweat, Hate and—Attack!' He gets his men used to blood by sending them to the local slaughterhouse to watch killings.

"He is extremely fit, and in the ordinary day covers dozens of miles at a steady jog-trot. His sallow, boyish face and streaky black hair make his hate talks almost frightening.

"Instructors urge the men on with cries and an occasional thunder-flash. A rich, drawling, insistent voice breaks through on top of the noise from the sound-track exhorting them: 'Hurry, hurry, hurry on. . . .Hurry, hurry, hurry on. . . .'

"They crash through barbed wire and prickly scrub in good style, and race to a line of trees bounded by a high fence. As they throw themselves over, the Voice insists: 'You're among the Hun now. Get that Hun. Hurry on. Hurry on.'

"They stab sandbags with their bayonets, pay no attention to the thunder-flashes that explode around their feet, splash down the line of a narrow, muddy stream.

"'There's a Hun,' insists the Voice. 'There's a Hun. Gouge his eyes out. And hurry on.'"

If the world could be induced to keep these pictures in mind when talk of war is in the air they might realise what a beastly thing war is, even at its best. It is always a reversion to a lower level, whether it be avoidable or not.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

"HISTORY," remarked Robert Walpole, "is not worth studying, for we know it must be false." "History," said Shelley, a hundred years later, "is the cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man." "History," propounded J. B. Bury at the beginning of our own century, "is a science, no less and no more." The disdainful, the romantic, the scientific; three statements typifying three attitudes, each of which, directly or by implication, still has a place in the complex relation between the past and the present. For, except in so far as Bury's dictum gave definition and boldness to a school of thought that had been gathering strength for some decades, these statements cannot be said to reflect the history of history. In space and time there has been so great a flux in the rôles, methods and influence of historiographers that therein is material for many separate studies.

The contemporary version of Walpole's indictment has been enshrined in Henry Ford's immortal phrase, "History is bunk." It is a view that merits serious consideration. Deny it though well he may, the progressivist, the reformer, the revolutionary cannot help but be in part animated by a certain impatience with history, by a feeling that much of the opposition to the changes he fights for can be traced to the dead hand of tradition and conservatism, to the fatalistic belief that the most important, the most undeniable influence on to-day's affairs is the legacy of yesterday's. That even the social rebel recognises the value of past experience is almost irrelevant to his anti-historical bias, for he is aware that by hand-picking your authorities and by selecting what you believe to be cardinal points, you can bolster any argument from history; doubtless he has done so himself. What irks him is *automatic* appeal to precedent rather than reason on questions of the hour, questions which necessarily have a quality of uniqueness, because never before have precisely similar circumstances occurred and no matter how much printer's ink has been expended on the most comparable problem in the pages of history, parallelism cannot be established nor guide lines relied upon. His primary

insistence is on rational analysis of the question in the light of all known concomitants, to be followed by synthesis of an answer freed from historically inspired preconceptions. In short, to him history is, if not exactly bunk, over-zealous exhumation.

The romantic view of history is relatively new. Its blossoming in the early 1800's suggests a casual link with the aftermath of the French Revolution, when a swing of the pendulum turned thoughts away from the blood and passion of the immediate past to the remoter "good old days." There followed a revival of interest in medievalism: The great figures of the past were given new life—often enough unwarrantedly new—and the popularity of romantic histories and historical novels would have defied the satire of a Voltaire. (The historical novel was an innovation; Scott was its exponent *par excellence*: and it may here be noted that a revival has taken place in our own generation; would "Gone With the Wind" have taxed the resources of the presses 40 years ago?) At apparent variance from the generality stood Carlyle. He was true enough to his age in his preaching of retrogression and in his interpretation of history as conditioned almost wholly by its Great Men. But Carlyle carried his work on into the middle Victorian era when he found his rivals infused with a smugness altogether alien to him. One thinks of Macaulay, the first man to write best-seller history—social history at that. Of course, the bulk of the reading public then was in the well-to-do class, which was naturally delighted to read between the lines that the England of 1848 was the best of all possible Englands. Yes, 1848! A pity the modern sport of slumming hadn't begun. Still, it can fairly be said that Macaulay did draw attention to the fact that kings, statesmen and battles were not the only important historical data. But little fruit was borne, and 50 years later we find Kropotkin inveighing against the historian's predilection for the spectacular.

The year 1870 witnessed, on the Continent, the first trial of up-to-date science plus out-of-date imperialism in the form of the Franco-Prussian War and, in England, the introduction of compulsory education. Yet not for another 30 years was history made an essential subject; and so began the production of those amazing School Histories. No words of mine can bear better testimony to their character than the recent popularity of "1066 and All That." We nearly choked ourselves with laughter over that book, largely because many of the humorous remarks were so little removed from the prototypes. We recalled that our school books had been crowded with graphic incidents labelled by suggestion Good or Bad Things.

Almost needless to add, similar tendentious textbooks, *mutatis mutandis*, appeared in other countries. The rough rule followed by the authors seems to have been: romanticise and ennoble the past of your own country and depict that of all others as inferior and ancillary, worthy of mention only because of certain regrettable but unavoidable international contacts; burke any but the most superficial ethical reflections. I cannot speak for the peoples of other nations, but I am horribly aware of the effect of this type of fare on us English: except for the specialists and the autodidactics among us, we have acquired an historical background that is a pitiful—and even dangerous—travesty of reality. I hope that one day some competent person will sit down and compile—if he is allowed—a selection of well-known historical incidents as described in the textbooks of the countries involved. What are Spanish children taught about the Armada? French children about Agincourt and Waterloo? Not knowing, I look forward to reading the book that tells me.

Let us now leave school history and examine the modern concept of history as a science. Before so doing, we might profitably glance at a few landmarks of historiography through the ages, or at least from the time of Herodotus, whose soubriquet, the Father of History, indicates that here we have yet another cultural activity of Greek provenance. Herodotus, his predecessor Hecataeus and his successor Thucydides, had in common a quality none of the earlier chroniclers had bothered about—a sense of responsibility. Within their limited means they did try to work up only well-authenticated material and thus to write as truthful an account as possible of what happened. The Roman historians we may bypass, not because they were inconsider-

able, but because, from the point of view of the development of historical method, they added nothing to the inaugural work of the Greeks.

The same can be said of the men of the Christianised Europe that replaced Roman dominion. But in this case we are not similarly justified in passing on without further comment, for we must duly recognise the profundity of the resultant set-back that historiography suffered. Complete re-orientation and distortion took place: Hebraism became the kernel of historical thought, and every sentence was imbued with theology and divorced from objectivity. Early Christianity proved indeed to be a Procrustean bed in which rational historiography was to lie cramped for hundreds of years. However, liberating agents at length appeared in the form of the Renaissance and the impacts of Islamic scholarship. Nevertheless, the (principally) Italian exponents of the new humanism were too eager in their acclamation of neo-classicism to pay attention to sources or to weigh evidence. What were destined to be of greater importance in this period were the beginnings of methodical collections of ancient records and of careful maintenance of current ones.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

(To be concluded)

"A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME..."

THE Rev. Nehemiah Snagsworthy, Resident Missionary of the Nineteenth Day Fundamentalists on the island of Perditiou, surveyed his kingdom (or should we say heaven?) with a somewhat worried eye. He'd been here many years now, and it certainly was hard going. Much worse, in fact, than his last post. Somehow the natives here seemed so much more intelligent. His big triumph was when he at last persuaded some of the villagers to adopt clothing. They used to walk about without a stitch. It was a good job the few white women on the island lived a good distance away.

Anyhow, righteousness and the Reverend Snagsworthy had prevailed, and now the villagers went about in a hideous assortment of shapeless cotton smocks, tailless Manchester shirts and comfortless calico trousers. Incidentally it was a lucky coincidence that the firm in which the reverend gentleman had some shares provided all these articles. The Lord in his goodness must have seen this contingency when the Rev. Snagsworthy invested his small savings some months before.

The only disconcerting thing was, that whereas in the days before the cotton smocks, etc., the villagers had no interest whatsoever in human anatomy, they (the young men especially) now seemed to have an unholy desire to find out what the cotton smocks, etc., were hiding. He had seen many instances of this himself, and was horrified. After all, he was never troubled with this curiosity—anyhow not now, although once in his student days up at Oxford—Really Snagsworthy, take a grip on yourself, man! You must do a tidy bit of praying to-night to expiate those memories. Must be the climate. Still—she was the toast of Oxford.

He now entered the village he was to visit, one of the anti-cotton smock school. As he made his way to the chief's hut the witch-doctors saluted him as a colleague and a brother. A rival perhaps, but nevertheless in the same business.

The chief welcomed him, and they sat together outside his hut. The Rev. Snagsworthy came straight to the point.

"Don't you think, O chief, that your people should wear clothing to hide their nakedness? It's indecent, disgusting, and God doesn't approve of it."

"Yours must be a strange God, Tuan. My people are beautiful, and do not want to hide their beauty; and also our gods send the little insects that bite to live in the clothes, and so show they do not like them."

"But Ohala's village has taken my God," went on the missionary, "and now his people can read, have clothes and are assured of eternal life in heaven."

"True, Ohala's people can read, Tuan, but now they spend all day reading those comic papers from the mainland and do no work; and when I die I want to go with the other spirits of my tribe that live in the forests—not to

your heaven, where I know no one. Poor Ohala, too, has now only one wife, whereas I have many score. Poor Ohala! No, Tuan, our gods have been good to us these many years; we will keep them. Will you eat of the sacred oxen with me?"

"Sacred oxen—what's that?"

"One of our gods, Tuan. The sacred ox, to eat gives strength."

"What nonsense!" murmured the missionary.

At that moment a child's cry came from near by.

"What was that?"

"The witch-doctors are dipping a young child in the sacred river, to cleanse it of any sin and make it favoured in the eyes of the River God."

"Well, I must go now, O chief. I will visit you again, to see if you will worship the only true God."

"Good-bye, white man; visit me often, but your God is not for us."

As he left the village the witch-doctors waved to him from their robes of feathers and painted wood.

"Good-bye, oh white medicine man; give our regards to your God."

"What can you do with them?" said the Reverend S. to himself as he walked away. "Absolute savages—who'd be a missionary! Witch-doctors dressed up in feathers and paint, ducking babies in the sacred river and eating their gods. I've wasted most of the morning on them, and I've got plenty to do, too. I must go and get those new surplices from the boat, a baptism at eleven and then take Communion. I don't know! Anyway, glad I'm not a witch-doctor."

MAX DUNSTONE.

GREECE

Cold is the heart, fair Greece! that looks on thee,
Nor feels as lovers o'er the dust they loved.

—BYRON.

TO wander in the Vale of Tempe; sit under the dark branches of the oaks of Dodona; saunter amid the groves of Academe; revel in the eternal spring on the summit of Mount Olympus; or joyously climb the slopes of the lofty Parnassus . . . !

Greece—the home of intellect and freedom, the treasure house of the world!

Athens, a city of (say) 40,000 inhabitants some 2,500 years ago, in 100 years (say 500-400 B.C.), gave birth to a number of great men which included the following: Æschylus, Pericles, Sophocles, Thucydides, Euripides, Socrates, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Phidias, Plato, Euclid, Praxiteles.

Three of the great events in the history of Greece were the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis. The three heroes of these noteworthy events were Miltiades, Leonidas and Themistocles.

Darius I. (521-485 B.C.), King of Persia, sent an expedition against Greece which was wrecked in a storm off Mount Athos. Two years later he sent another which was not wrecked until it reached Marathon. This Persian war is said by Lytton to have been "the most notable war in the history of mankind, whether from the vastness or the failure of its designs."

Marathon, a village of Attica, is 22 miles N.E. of Athens, and there, on September 28, 490 B.C., was fought one of the greatest battles of the world.

The Persian Army, to take the lowest estimate given, numbered 100,000 foot and 10,000 horse. The Greek Army, under the command of Miltiades, numbered only 11,000 foot.

An unexpected attack made by the Greeks caused great disruption in the Persian host, and this being judiciously and heroically taken full advantage of by them, the Persian Army was defeated with tremendous loss of life, whilst the Greek loss was but trifling.

For this important victory Miltiades demanded from his fellow citizens an olive crown. This was not only refused but he was severely reprimanded for his presumption. Less than a year after he was sentenced to death. But, owing to his great service to the Athenians, the sentence was remitted to imprisonment till he had paid a fine of 50 talents (over £10,000) to the State. His inability to pay

this sum kept him in prison. He had been severely wounded at Pharos and, his wound becoming incurable, he died about 489 B.C. His body was ransomed by his son Simon, who was obliged to borrow and pay the 50 talents to give his father decent burial.

Darius was not disheartened by his defeat at Marathon. He decided to carry on the war, and ordered a large army to be levied at once. He died in the midst of his preparations (485 B.C.), after a reign of 36 years, in the 65th year of his age.

Xerxes I. inherited the throne, his father's military preparations, and ambition to subdue Greece, and not only Greece, but the whole world—"until heaven itself," he told his councillors, "should be the only limit to his Persian realm and the sun should shine on no country contiguous to his own." (Herod., lib. VII. c. xi.)

Having completed his father's preparations, he set out with an expeditionary force of 5,283,220 men. We are told that the very rivers dried up in the regions through which this army passed, and the cities which it entered were reduced to want and poverty. Justin, however, tells us significantly that this vast army was without a head.

Xerxes and his huge army met Leonidas and his 300 Spartans at Thermopylae (480 B.C.)—a small mountain pass leading from Thessaly into Locris and Phocis, 25 miles N. of Delphi.

Leonidas! "There are men whose whole life is a single action. Of these Leonidas is the most eminent. We know little of him until the last few days of his career. He seems, as it were, born but to show how much glory belongs to a brave death. Of his character or genius, his general virtues or vices, his sorrows and joys, biography can scarcely gather even the materials for conjecture. He passed from an obscure existence into an everlasting name; and history dictates her proudest page to one of whom she has nothing but the epitaph to relate." ("Athens, its Rise and Fall," Book III.; Lytton.)

Yes! but by his noble death he escaped the adulation of "the mutable, rank-scented many," and the betrayal of his fellows. Had he escaped death and lived a few years longer he could not have avoided becoming the mere shadow of a mighty name.

Leonidas did not rush blindly into action. He was conscious of the result. Before the battle he commanded his wife to marry a man of virtue and honour to raise up children deserving of the name and greatness of her first husband; and he asked his soldiers "to dine heartily as they were all to sup in the realms of Pluto."

Xerxes smiled when his spy described the Grecian army. On his demanding the arms of Leonidas, he was told to "Come and take them." For three days the best detachments—the flower of the Persian Army—were defeated in trying to execute his order—"Go and take his arms!" And they would have been kept at bay for some days longer but for the action of a traitor.

For the moment Xerxes was triumphant; and to crown his success, the destruction of the Greek fleet—a brilliant spectacle—was being arranged for him.

The Greek fleet was nominally under the command of Eurybiades, the Spartan, but genius forced Themistocles into pre-eminence. "That extraordinary man," says Lord Lytton, "was, above all, adapted to the time and, suited to its necessities, he commanded its fates. His very fault in the callousness of the moral sentiment, and his unscrupulous regard to expediency, peculiarly aided him in the management of men. He could appeal to the noblest passions—he could wind himself into the most base. Where he could not exalt he corrupted. Where he could not intimidate he bribed." And after giving a lengthy and interesting description of this remarkable man, he reflects—But whether in ancient times or modern, the web of human affairs is woven from a mingled yarn, and the individuals who save nations are not always those most acceptable to the moralist."

Aristides, who helped Themistocles at the battle of Salamis, was an Athenian general and statesman—surnamed "The Just." He covered himself with glory at the battle of Marathon; was made Archon next year; banished by ostracism at the instance of his rival, Themistocles; recalled on the invasion of Xerxes; reconciled to Themistocles; fought bravely at Salamis; managed the affairs of

the State with such probity that he died poor; was buried at the public expense, and the State left to provide for his children.

It is recorded that these two men of genius (Aristides and Themistocles), supported by 380 ships, on October 20, 480 B.C., met and defeated the Persian fleet of over 2,000 sail. The Greek fleet was presumed, by the Persians, to be hemmed in by them at Salamis to provide a spectacular destruction of it for the entertainment of Xerxes. Instead of which, the Persians were defeated with heavy losses, whilst the Greeks lost only a few ships.

Xerxes fled, leaving Mardonius in charge with 300,000 men to carry on the war. But by Greek vigilance, heroism and tact he was defeated and slain at the battle of Plataea, 479 B.C.

Xerxes, on his arrival home, to the disgust of his subjects, began celebrating his defeat with riot and debauchery. He was murdered in his bed in the 21st year of his reign, about 464 B.C.

Themistocles still lingers on the stage: by his military genius he had saved Greece, and by his administrative ability made her a powerful nation. But though he had much standing to his credit, besides having a tongue that could wheedle with the devil, he ultimately incurred the displeasure of his country which had proved so fatal to many of his illustrious predecessors. He fled, was pursued hither and thither, and had ultimately to seek the protection of the monarch whose father he had ruined.

Artaxerxes I. received him with kindness, and though he had formerly set a price on his head, yet he made him one of his greatest favourites. But Themistocles could never forget that Athens had given him birth, and according to some writers, the wish of not injuring his country making it impossible to accede to the wishes of Artaxerxes, left him no option but suicide. His bones were privately, at his request, conveyed to Attica, where they were buried, about 449 B.C.

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI!

In conclusion: history deals with earthly glory, and only incidentally mentions the immortals. Æschylus distinguished himself at Marathon and at Salamis. Sophocles was, at the age of 57, appointed as one of the ten generals of the Samian War. Euripides was born at Salamis on the day of the battle; and then men not only fought for the freedom of their country while they lived, but by their literary labours—the great dramas they left us—have been fighting for human freedom for the past 2,000 years, and will continue doing so while the world lasts.

The mountains and Isles of Greece gave birth to a poetry and a philosophy which make the individuality of Athens.

"In the majestic harmony, the symmetrical grace, of Sophocles, we survey the true portraiture of the times, and the old man of Colonos still celebrates the name of Athens in a sweeter song than that of the nightingale—and in melodies that have survived the Muses of Cephissus." ("Rise and Fall of Athens," Book V., chap. xiv.; Lytton.) G. W.

THE MIND OF A CARDINAL

IN the "News-Chronicle" dated April 27, 1942, there appeared, without editorial comment, the following item:—

HALF OUR CASUALTIES ARE ONLY SONS

Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, broadcasting to youth last night, said:—

"How tragic when we read in the casualty lists that nearly half the brave British boys who die in the cause of the world's freedom are only sons.

"There will always be a Britain—yes, but only if there are more families like that of Mrs. Esmonde" [mother of the late Lieut.-Commander Esmonde, V.C., leader of the Swordfish attack on the German ships in the Channel, who also has four other sons in the Forces] "to continue British life and British courage.

"Certain dangerous folk advocate measures which would spoil family life and rob the home of its chief purpose and joy. A brave, sturdy race is not bred by mechanical devices, but by a sound, healthy family life."

Never has the ether or the Press been polluted by falser argument or filthier suggestiveness.

Supposing it is true that nearly half the young men who are killed in the war on our side are only sons. I do not believe the Cardinal knows whether this is or is not a fact. Judging from previous utterances of his that I have heard, or seen reported, I am inclined to think he has manufactured his point as one on which to base a dirty sermon. But supposing it is true. Does it follow that such cases indicate family limitation by the boys' parents?

In a house a little way down the road from mine lives the widowed mother of an only son, whom I occasionally see in uniform. I should like to introduce the Cardinal to her—and her nine daughters!

Accompanying this muddled guardian of family morals a little further, suppose we are confronted by the case of an only son killed in the war, whose parents have deliberately refrained from bringing as many children into the world as Nature uncontrolled might have given them. How ought we to react to the news of his death in action?

Normal men and women, in their ignorance of the higher morality known to the Cardinal, will remember the pride the parents took in the boy's early achievements, the sacrifices made to start him on his career, the hopes centred on his future success. When such parental pride, sacrifice and aspirations come crashing down, there is no room in normal human responses for anything but sympathy—and a sympathy made deeper by the total nature of the tragedy.

The celibate priest, however, is above such human weakness. To him, if Cardinal Hinsley is representative of the class, the death in action of an only son is a golden opportunity to point out that "certain dangerous folk advocate measures which would spoil family life," and so on, with a properly cryptic reference to "mechanical devices." This he regards as the most suitable subject for a "broadcast to youth" he is billed to give through the medium of the B.B.C.

I do not blame Cardinal Hinsley overmuch. What else should one expect from a creature whose career has involved the denial of his own humanity throughout a lifetime spent in the service of an institution existing to uphold a degraded and inhuman creed?

But who will not call shame on the B.B.C., which thrusts such false and perverted instruction on the nation's youth, and on the Press which quotes it as meriting serious attention? It is high time that both the radio and the popular newspaper allowed uncensored replies to be made to some of the more pernicious rubbish to which they at present give such generous publicity.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

CORRESPONDENCE

GALILEO AND THE CHURCH

SIR,—From "Time," March 9, 1942:—
Eppur si muove. So said Galileo after the Inquisition had forced him, under threat of torture, to recant his assertion that the earth moves round the sun. The words are apocryphal, but the story lives on.

The world has indeed moved, for the Vatican is honouring the 300th anniversary of the death of Galileo, whom the Holy Office condemned to imprisonment for his "scientifically false" and "anti-Scriptural discoveries." Soon the Vatican will publish "an exhaustive study . . . to place in its true light the aid and favour Galileo enjoyed at the hands of the Church." The Very Rev. Agostino Gemelli, president of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, who made the announcement, added that "Galileo, as a scientist and author of new astronomical discoveries, was never persecuted by the Church, but was greatly helped"—Yours, etc.,

W. G. PRIEST.

GENERAL CHIANG KAI-SHEK

SIR,—In a recent issue of "The Freethinker" it was said that General Chiang Kai-Shek was a Buddhist. He was, but was converted by his wife to the Methodist brand

of Christianity, to which Madam Chiang Kai-Shek is devotedly attached. The "North China Daily News," which at the time of Chiang's release was the semi-official authoritative British organ in China (his release from Communist "protection" at Sian in North-West China), gave an account of his "escape." It gave Chiang's explanation of his release and safe return to Nankin, which was that he had felt all through that Jesus Christ was with him during his confinement and that he had complete faith that Christ would see him safely through, which he evidently did. It was, however, partly at least the work of Madam Chang Kai-Shek, Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang and Mr. W. H. Donald, who was Chiang's foreign adviser. Up to that time Chiang had been a ruthless opponent of the Chinese Communist Party, but finally gave a verbal acceptance of their Eight-Point Programme and an undertaking to co-operate with the Communists in opposing the Japanese, which he has certainly fulfilled. As a confirmation of Chiang's acceptance of Christianity I quote the following from Edgar Snow's informative work, "Red Star Over China":—

"Just as her husband compared himself with Jesus Christ on the Cross, so also Madam Chiang recognised her rôle as a biblical one, quoting, 'Jehovah will now do a new thing, and that is, he will make a woman protect a man.'"

I think that should settle the question of General Chiang's religion and also as to who is the real ruler of China! Incidentally, Snow's description of the triumphant march of the Godless Army of Communists from south to north-west China, some 6,000 miles, is an epic.—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR HANSON.

LET THY LIGHT SHINE—

SIR,—When replying to a question in a recent number of "The Freethinker" you stated that "The Church of England wealth is uncertain, but it cannot be less than 250 millions." Many companies, associations and individuals have given, or lent, often without interest, large sums to help our national war effort. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been subscribed for the Red Cross, St. Dunstan's and other institutions of those who suffer from the incubus of war. Among the published lists of these benefactions I have looked in vain for any reference to a donation from the Church. Perhaps this may be accounted for by its adherence to the injunction of St. Paul: "Let thine alms be in secret."—Yours, etc.,

EDGAR SYERS.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES. Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields: 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London N.S.S. Branch (Hyde Park), Thursday: 7-0, Mr. E. C. SAPHIN. Sunday: 3-0, Mr. E. PAGE and supporting speakers.

Indoor

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

COUNTRY

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

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Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place), Sunday: 7-0, Mr. J. V. SHORTT, a Lecture.

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