

THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity and the New Age

PROVERBIALY and in fact the general body of the people have short memories. For this reason, if for none other, it is necessary to preface what I have to say by recalling events of recent years. When the ex-Archbishop of Canterbury, who had artfulness all over his face, joined hands with Prime Minister Baldwin, who had trickery written all over his nose, to secure the deposition of Edward the Eighth, Dr. Lang made certain charges against the companions the King had kept. Challenged to name the people by some who considered themselves slandered the Archbishop replied by pleading that the matter had gone far enough, and as a distraction launched a "Back to the Bible" campaign. That campaign fell very flat. Dr. Lang's move was a bold one, but it was hopeless. For the Christian religion rests upon a revelation from God. That revelation is contained in the Bible, and the historic Christian Bible is, for educated people as dead as the Dodo. The Free-thinking campaign against the Bible as inspired by God has been gloriously successful. The Freethinker's task to-day is more against mental dishonesty than it is against the Bible fetish. The Archbishop's campaign was never openly discarded, it just died very early from want of nutriment. It is impossible to revive to-day such biblical yarns as the Jonah story, even though its authenticity is guaranteed in the New Testament. Not even Commander Campbell would claim to have seen a man swallowed by a big fish somewhere on the Amazon.

The next propagandist opportunity came with the war. With an impudence that commanded something like admiration the Archbishop fathered the yarn that the world war was being fought for the preservation of Christianity. Not content with the plain statement that if Hitlerite Germany—having received much Christian support from Christian circles here—won the war our liberty of action would be gone, the issue presented to the people was the life or death of Christianity. 'Twas a brave lie, worthy of the B.B.C. in its most elevated Christian propagandist humour, but facts were too much against it for the lie to live. To imagine that the eighty per cent. of the people who cannot be brought to Church by any means, that the many non-Christian religions in the British Empire, with the millions of Freethinkers in addition, were fighting to preserve Christianity, deserves a front place in the history of Christian tarradiddles.

The final blow was given to this lie when Russia entered the war on our side. It soon became plain that whenever the war was won Russia would have played a very great part in securing that victory. The Churches were worried and flurried. To continue the Christian campaign against Russia was impossible. A war week to help Russia showed on which side the sympathies of the mass of the people lay. A Jesus week would not have spurred the factories to nearly the extent that the cry "Aeroplanes for Russia" did. The Protestant leaders had to just bite their nails and remain silent. Only the Roman Church, with its headquarters in Italy, urged "No close association with Atheist Russia after the war." That hope was undoubtedly cherished in Christian circles in this country. But in this religious leaders forgot a very important fact. A people may remain superstitious because it has never understood the real nature of the thing to which they paid homage. But once its true character is understood that understanding cannot easily be eliminated from the human brain. One cannot *unpull* a man's nose. A nose once pulled is pulled for ever. A lie once exposed remains exposed to all who appreciate the exposure.

The next and latest attempt of the Churches to recapture lost ground, has taken two forms. One is the formation of a plot with our Tory Board of Education to restore the clerical domination of the schools. I have dealt with this often enough to do no more than name it in passing. The second is that of propounding what is called a Christian social gospel. Of course, there is no such thing, there never has been any such thing. Christians have assisted in the work of trying to create a healthier and better human society, but so have people of all other creeds and those of no religious creed at all. Actually one might as reasonably talk of Christian mathematics as Christian social science. Christians are born as are other men and women, they live by the same foods and die by the same poisons. A Christian may be a sociologist or he may be a bricklayer, or even a burglar, à la Charles Peace. He may be in every respect good, bad or indifferent. He is before all things a human, and we must let it go at that. His human qualities remain, however much they may be distorted by his religion.

Canterbury and Cant

There is a general agreement—while the war is on—that after the war there should be a radical reconstruction of our social life. The vile slums, which grew up during the days of our greatest Christian activities—say from 1746 to 1840—genuinely shocked everyone who had not become hardened to them by familiarity. It was openly said that but for the loss of life, we owed the Germans thanks for having wiped out the hovels in which so many lived. Here was a chance for the Churches. Some Christian leaders set to work on a line of Christian propaganda. It is not I who put it in this way, Christians have said it. They say it is their Christian feelings that make them talk of building a new social life. The mere human desire to see a new generation that shall be better housed, better fed and better educated than other generations have been is not strong enough with

Christians. They must have a Christian conviction, plus mere human feelings. Our poor, weak Christian brethren! What a pity it is they are not more human. We will hope they are really better than they wish us to believe.

Here is an example that will illustrate what I have in mind. The new Archbishop of Canterbury has just issued a small book under the title of "Christianity and Social Order." The only justification for such a title would be the laying down a programme that owes its origin to an impulse given by the Christian religion which could not be found apart from Christianity. What is it that he puts before us? He gives us six points as the *Christian* contribution to the new after the war order. Here they are:—

(a) Every child shall find itself a member of a family housed with decency and dignity.

(b) Every child should have the opportunity for an education till years of maturity, so planned as to allow for his peculiar aptitudes and make possible their full development.

(c) Every citizen should be secure in possession of such income as will enable him to maintain a home.

(d) Every citizen should have a voice in the conduct of business or industry which is carried on by means of his labour.

(e) Every citizen should have sufficient daily leisure with two rest days in seven.

(f) Every citizen should have assured liberty in the forms of freedom of worship, speech, assembly."

I have no intention of criticising these points at any length. My essential criticism will be very short, but I hope, very clear. But it is clear that they might mean something very good, or they might be mere words that would be almost worthless in their interested interpretation. From (a) to (e) the items may be something very good, or they may be mere words, mere sentiments that one has heard from pulpits and political platforms for generations. It is the interpretation of these things that matter. Have we not had from the mouths of royalty, after visiting the slums, expressions of admiration for the cheerfulness shown by the slum-dwellers in circumstances where it was a crime against humanity to be content? And what is meant by giving children an opportunity for education till years of maturity? How can that be done save by giving parents means and opportunities that do not now exist? The first five items may mean anything that one cares to make them mean. We really cannot picture the Archbishop of Canterbury heading a revolution. There is a lot of cackling but no guarantee of an adequate supply of eggs.

Number six demands more attention. "Assured liberty in the forms of freedom of worship, speech and assembly" has a fine rotund appearance, but what do they include? Still more importantly, how much do they exclude? Will Dr. Temple advocate the abolition of the blasphemy laws? We doubt it. And yet these laws contain a threat to both social and religious liberty—a threat that may become actual as Rome gets more powerful—far beyond the suppression of speech that may be objectionable to the more ignorant sects of Christians. Will Dr. Temple advocate that the Churches pay their share of rates and taxes? They are at present paid by citizens at large. Will he advocate the surrender by the Church of its royalties drawn from the coalfields, of its ground rents—the Church of England is probably the greatest landowner in the country—its Church rates, etc.?

Will he advocate the abolition of all Sunday laws which forbid or hinder free assembly—the opening of museums and playgrounds all over the country, and which in their day have done so much to demoralise life? Will he support a movement for the abolition of bishops and archbishops from the upper chamber of Parliament? These are serious questions, but I am afraid our Archbishop will not answer them.

I pass these points. I am even willing to consider for a moment the six points as all that their author would wish them to imply, and even more. What then?

A great deal, and a great deal that is important. Dr. Temple heads his suggestions as "Christian Objectives." Why? We do not speak of Christian boots because our shoemaker happens to be a Christian. Or of Christian mathematics because a mathematician attends Church. Why then should these be headed *Christian objectives*? They may be the objectives of some Christians, but that is an entirely different proposition. What Dr. Temple implies, without having the impudent courage to say it in plain English is, that these objectives—accepted in the most liberal manner—are products of the Christian religion, and that simply is not merely untrue, but Dr. Temple knows it is untrue. He knows as well as we do that nearly every one of these "objectives" have not only been initiated by non-Christians, but that the Church to which he belongs was foremost in their opposition to them—as the majority belonging to that Church still are. The fight for trades unionism, the fight for freedom of publication, of speech and meeting, the fight for parliamentary reform and the enfranchisement of women, for free education, for shorter hours of labour and many other things had their origin mainly with those who had but scant time for genuinely Christian objectives. Dr. Temple must not rely too much on the forgetfulness of the general public. He should remember that there are always people more wide-awake just round the corner; people who do not forget, and will also strive to make others remember.

Of course, Dr. Temple may retort that there were always some Christians helping all the reforms named. Of course there were. And if the prevailing religion had been Mohammedanism we should have had the same thing occurring. Man is a social animal first by birth, he is only a Christian, or a Mohammedan, by distortion, or sheer misfortune. If Dr. Temple will refer to the series of books written by J. L. and Barbara Hammond he will find a mountain of evidence of what I have just said. He will also find that was from the Christian side that the most ferocious and brutal hostility to reform came.

Why then call these objectives "Christian"? Is not the purpose that of persuading people that they will get reforms only through Christian belief, and secondly that Christianity alone can provide a reasonable foundation for them? Both statements are false, I do not hesitate to say deliberately false. Dr. Temple is no fool, and it would be an insult to his intelligence not to say that he knows better than he writes. But whatever else he is, before all things he is a Christian Archbishop. He must see that anything good coming for his stores must be stamped Christian. If some of the stock is bad it can be labelled "pagan" or "un-Christian."

Very plainly, and very simply, one may label the Archbishop's contribution to the reform movement as intended to advertise the Christian Church. That it contains by suggestion a depreciation of human life as a whole and an implied slander on non-Christian reformers by insinuation, does not matter—to a priest. Dr. Temple now holds the highest religious post in this

country. For that reason he is less able to work for genuine human betterment than he would have been as a mere country curate. And infinitely less useful than he would have been had he been working altogether apart from the Christian Church. He will probably make quite a good Archbishop.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm is the height of a man.—EMERSON.

IN any project that is being launched, success or failure often depends on the amount of enthusiasm individual participants instil into their efforts.

Enthusiasm is described as "passionate zeal," and who can doubt that this attribute animated the pioneers of the Freethought Movement to the extent they willingly suffered imprisonment and heavy fines for the cause they so ardently promulgated?

It has been remarked that "right thinking is the beginning of right actions." As we are convinced of the rightness of our cause (righteousness smacks too much of holiness and the rest), to what extent does our enthusiasm stimulate the desire to shout about it from the housetops?

Should our enthusiasm not find its expression in a vocal manner—and there may be important reasons for enthusiasts being obliged to block this particular outlet—there are other ways which may provide vent for our zeal. For example: One way may be termed the "Sub rosa" method. Careful scrutiny of newspapers and periodicals often discloses the inquiring type of mind, which is expressed in readers' letters to the papers concerned, and which relates to special topics. Perhaps the current issue of "The Freethinker" contains reference to a subject being dealt with by the letter-writer, or may contain ideas of possible interest to the type of mind referred to. Send your copy. The result of your "temerity" may never be known unless you put your name and address on the wrapper! Under no circumstances must "The Freethinker" be disposed of as salvage. This action could only be regarded by fervid admirers as a "sacrilege," despite the war effort.

Your enthusiasm may tempt you to distribute with discrimination the many Freethought pamphlets so ably written by Chapman Cohen and Colonel Ingersoll. These pamphlets act on the recipients much the same way as the effect of a motor horn on a careless pedestrian or day dreamer. A very severe jolt is administered! Your own experiences may recall many such who require similar mental stimulus, or a little rational uplift to their supernatural supineness, or a gleam of light let into their godly gloom. This may work wonders.

Your enthusiasm may find its outlet in personal contact. The Freethinker who is in the Army should be in his element now with so much "raw material" to work on. But a word of caution. Don't be over earnest in your enthusiasm. Remember, an ounce of wit oftentimes outweighs a ton of facts. There is much difference between table-turning and turning the tables!

The enthusiast may not be voluble, far less eloquent. His success depends largely on his ability to give his thoughts vivid, sincere and convincing expression. For there is the man who merely talks, and the man who talks convincingly. Demosthenes said to his rival orator, Aeschines: "You make them say 'how well he speaks'"; I make them say, 'Let us march against Philip.'" An ever-eagerness to convince may tend to blur the picture you wish to create in the mind of your listener. A man was overheard trying to describe a building he had seen. His efforts to convey his impression were ineffectual until he said: "Well, it resembles St. Paul's Cathedral." Economy of words and the power of suggestion are a bridle to exuberance.

Enthusiasm can arouse interest even in the least of causes. How much greater must be the interest engendered when sustained enthusiasm is directed in the "best of all causes"! And the reward? Those who have experienced the thrill of battle in a war of words have their reward—it is the exhilaration that accompanies the heightening of the intellectual powers during a debate.

The poet Thomson said, "High hopes and youth are destiny enough"—with enthusiasm, we may add—and then, with the head of ripe judgment and experience on his shoulders, what great deeds youth would accomplish—in the cause of Freethought, of course!

S. GORDON HOGG.

ACID DROPS

RATHER cruelly the "Daily Telegraph," in reporting the Prime Minister's address on May 10, pointed out that the closing words, "God helping us, we can do no other," was a paraphrase of Luther's "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen." We think Mr. Churchill would do better to concoct his own phrases; his borrowings, which are not uncommon, seldom are for the better. Luther's speech carries with it firmness and dignity. It was given at a time when men could honestly believe in God's help. Mr. Churchill's paraphrase is minus the strength and certainty of God helping. It has the sound of, "We shall do our best, but we may probably fail; in that case the game will be up."

But suppose God does not help? If Mr. Churchill believes that without God's help we cannot win, then his dependence upon the aid the people of the country can give is not by itself enough, and the outlook is black. Suppose we can win without God helping? Then the hopeless note is unwarranted. If we win because God's help is added to ours, then, as Germany must be without God's help, it would follow that man to man Germany would be able to beat us. It looks as though it would be better and far more complimentary to the British people to leave God out altogether. The penultimate sentence of Mr. Churchill's, "We shall drive on to the end and do our duty, win or die," is much more dignified. That kind of sentence should not be followed by the weak whine, "God helping us."

In the House of Commons a question was asked by Mr. Barstow whether the Minister of Transport had noted the waste of time and material and labour power in keeping a standing engine for the train for the purpose of conveying to London "a certain important personage from York to London." We fancy the question refers to the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

But why are not these things done properly? *Via* the Prime Minister, Dr. Temple had been called by God to his new post, and the proper way—the Christian way—would have been for God to "translate" him from York to London, and from London to Canterbury. That would have been a dignified and religious course of action, and it would have given the Church a much needed advertisement. But to make Dr. Temple's presence at Canterbury dependent upon a steam-engine was to treat him as though he were no better than a commercial rushing for a train to book a more than usually profitable piece of business.

The heads of the Church are much concerned over the difficulty of getting recruits for the "sacred" ministry. We are not surprised. When the Church was really strong there were only two "honourable" professions—the Army and the Church; and before modern science could make its advances really effective in its effect on religious doctrines a man of real ability might enter the service of the Church without experiencing a feeling of degradation. The development of science opened new avenues for human activities and human energy, and the unscientific character of Christian teachings and doctrines could no longer be concealed. So generation by generation the quality of the clergy has sunk lower and lower. To-day the Church has to be content with what it can get, and what they get is mainly very poor stuff. In the early years of the last century it was a common saying that the Church got the fool of the family. To-day that is more than a jest—it is a notorious fact.

The Clerk to the Blackpool Police Court must be a very simple-minded kind of a man. He actually thinks that if anyone believes in God he can't tell a lie, or that in telling a lie one is denying God, or that God will punish anyone

who tells a lie. We are not quite clear what exactly he does believe, but the one thing we are certain of is that never in the whole history of the world has any religion ever had the slightest influence in the direction of destroying or weakening the lie output. Men have been turned out of a Church for telling the truth, but never, so far as we can remember, have they been expelled for telling a lie. "The Lord loveth a cheerful liar"—or is it "giver"? But the first form wins easily as a matter of fact.

What led to our writing the above is the following from the "Blackpool Gazette" for April 25:—

"I don't believe in God," said a boy of nine, peeping over the witness stand, at Blackpool Court the other day. He had just taken the oath on the Testament.

"All eyes in court were turned on this 'young Atheist.' Then the Magistrates' Clerk (Mr. C. F. Johnson) looked into his eyes and read his mind.

"The boy had been asked if he knew what would happen to him if he did not tell the truth. Then came the reply which shocked the Court.

"Do you mean," asked the Clerk, "that if you don't tell the truth you don't believe in God?"

"Yes," said the boy.

"The Court breathed again."

If the boy really thought that if he believed in God he ought not or could not tell a lie, the blunder must be put down to his lack of the right kind of education. But the real error lies with the Clerk, who ought to have known better, and who must have had plenty of experience with thousands of liars who were demonstrably staunch believers in deity. The identification of a belief in God with truth-speaking really has no connection with telling the truth. That Clerk to the Court must be a very simple-minded individual.

By permission of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, the "translation" of Dr. Temple to the Archbishopric of Canterbury may be seen at the cinemas. The appointment, of course, rests with the Prime Minister, whoever he may be, and theoretically Mr. Churchill is carrying out God's wishes. We do not doubt but that Mr. Churchill could persuade himself to the belief that God suggested to him the appointment, although we have our doubts. But the "show" at Canterbury went off very well. It was "impressive," etc., etc., and to all who like a show that doesn't tax their intelligence very much it must have been very satisfactory. Dr. Temple is now God's chief representative in England. We hope God is pleased. We are sure Dr. Temple is. Both ought to thank Mr. Churchill—if he deserves it.

But the ceremony! That is, in its essence, pure savagery. It belongs to the same class as does the religious coronation of the King—where there is a magical embodiment of the tribal god in the person of the King—in this case in the Archbishop. The dress worn by the Archbishop is as fantastic as the belief itself, and the belief rests solidly on the very lowest levels of savage life. Neither the beauty of the building, the quality of the music, the richness of the robes, nor the size of the salary can alter these bedrock facts. For the time being Canterbury Cathedral brought to life, in a country which claims to be civilised, the most primitive of savage superstitions. We suggest that those who see this film should think of it as what it is. They will get real value for their money.

Hannen Swaffer has been giving some very nice knocks at the clergy and their ways, and we hope that he will continue at the game. In the particular instance before us he is striking at that pure British mixture of humbug, hypocrisy, cant, lying and petty tyranny that centres round church parades in the Services. In a recent issue of the "Daily Herald" he deals with the case of a man who became an Agnostic and stood out during the parade. An officer behaved "offensively," and a few days after he was sent to interview the padre. He "argued" with him for about an hour, "very smug and very unctuous," and tried to persuade him to remain Church of England. The padre remarked to others that the man was "a trouble maker; I

shall have to see that he is put on the next overseas draft." Here is the man's summary of the situation:—

"Although nearly all the chaps go to the services, it is only because it is warmer inside and easier than drill or work. . . . Few of us want a religion. Why force us to go to one?"

Perhaps the answer is that we are fighting a war for liberty, and the cant of the average well-paid padre is an example of the kind of liberty that they have in mind. The case stands out against the unctuous humbuggery of the padres the B.B.C. is fond of parading.

Has anyone yet noticed—certainly none of our newspapers have commented on it—that our Christian leaders only discovered what fine, intelligent and human people the Chinese are since they showed they could fight as well as any trueborn Briton? Yet there it is. There has been some little talk about the value of Chinese philosophy, of the genuine democracy—magic word—that exists in China, and so forth. But little was said of this before the Chinese showed they could help us in the world war. We wonder how the missionary societies feel in the matter.

Russia reminds one of the same situation. Never were a people painted in blacker colours than were the Russian people. Our leading politicians—including Mr. Churchill until the thirties—did what could be done to rouse public feeling against what was to become a pariah nation. The Churches as a body rose up to give spiritual support. Never did there exist such despicable people. And now? Well, if Russia could not have fought well the British leaders would never have praised Russia's leaders. Beaverbrook would never have gone into hysterics about them. Our standard of excellence seems to be still largely measured by the army and the air force. Oh, gentle Jesus!

It looks as though the new Archbishop of Canterbury would do well to stick to generalities—which usually do not lend themselves to criticism—where religion and contemporary life is concerned. For example. Speaking at Manchester, the Archbishop said that "the test of democracy was not whether the majority prevailed, but whether the minority was tolerated." But this is very, very wrong, although it is illuminative so far as Dr. Temple is concerned. "Democracy" as such, is not concerned with either minorities or majorities, but with individuals in their social relationship. "Tolerated" is a hateful word and implies too much of the "putting up with" attitude. The true democrat does not ask to be "tolerated." He demands the social right of equality as a member of society. We see "toleration" in the behaviour of the "aristocrat" towards the common man, of the Christian who puts up with Atheists living in the same street, or the grading of "upper" and "lower" classes in terms of the position they occupy in society. Evidently the Archbishop has yet to learn the meaning and significance of "Democracy."

Still we are not surprised. We recall that the most impudent statement made for a long while was when our present Prime Minister told the American Congress that he learned his democracy from his father. Those who remember Randolph Churchill will have smiled hugely. Still, the assertion showed that Mr. Churchill possesses courage.

It is a very old plea of ours that if one can do without religion others can also. We deny altogether the statement that while the Atheist may lead a decent and intelligent life without God, the Christian is made of such poor stuff that it takes a miracle to place him on the same level. A Christian can be as good without God as an Atheist if he will only try. But so long as he goes about snivelling that he is a poor weak sinner, so long will he be very likely to live up to the character he gives himself. In many cases this profession of weakness and proneness to "sin" is just humbug. The Christian does not believe it of himself; and if anyone were to tell a Christian that he not only is a poor sinner, but he looks it, there would be a free fight in no time.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

B. A. WILTER (Johannesburg).—Thanks for cutting. Will well bear reprinting. One of the bitterest satires in the political world is the impossibility of getting so many of the whites in Africa and elsewhere as offering even the possibility of their moving on the same level as their white overlords.

R. O. K.—You are quite wrong in thinking that your letter will not appear because we disagree with its contents. We prefer to print letters with which we disagree, rather than the other way about. Our only objection to printing your letter is that of its quality. Try again with more serious matter.

J. DUNCASTER.—Thanks for your suggestion, but we do not think that it would be generally adopted. The National Secular Society has a badge which many of its members wear regularly. That may serve for the present. Much obliged for what you are doing to make "The Freethinker" better known. We owe much, very much to this kind of unsolicited aid.

D. GRIFFITHS.—Whatever degree of freedom accompanied or followed the Protestant Reformation was incidental or accidental. The mere revolt against Rome would have had the effect of opening the eyes of many to other evils to which they had quietly submitted. But that Protestantism, as a religious movement, had no conscious aim of securing general freedom is shown by the fact that persecution for religious difference was as savage in Protestant countries as those that remained Catholic. You will find an elaborate discussion of this point in Lecky's "Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe," and in spite of conceding much to which we should demur, it is a damning indictment as it stands. It is to Protestantism that we owe the legalisation of persecution by the civil authority.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—MRS. Wood, 13s.

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

THIS is about the last opportunity we shall have of calling attention to the Annual Conference of the N.S.S. on Whit-Sunday, May 24. The morning session of the Conference will commence at 10.30. The meetings are for members only, entrance by production of card. The afternoon will be given up to a general discussion on matters of immediate interest to the movement. There is no period we can recall when the opportunities for making headway were so great as at present, and Freethinkers must aim at making the best of them. We have more than held our own since the war began, while the Churches have lost heavily. But their losses, the failure of whatever propaganda they have attempted, gives us not merely gratification, but also opportunities, and it is these we must use as much as possible.

It is impossible to say how many visitors from the provinces, Scotland and Wales will be present, but we hope some will manage to attend. The last Conference showed how much good may be done by such discussions, and we are sure that equal benefit may again be reaped. As announced last week a lunch will be provided at the pre-war price of 3s. But as catering is not very easy nowadays, and accommodation for a last minute rush impossible, we must impress upon all who intend joining in the meal to write the general secretary as early as possible.

We can very heartily commend to our readers the latest addition to the "Thinker's Forum" (Watts and Co., 6d.). "B.B.C. Religion," by "Clericus," is the kind of booklet that is much needed, and the case against the policy of this Government-controlled chartered company with regard to religion has long been disgraceful. Over and over again the B.B.C. has been challenged to put their policy of giving certain aspects of Christianity full and increasing opportunities, while carefully excluding anything that would tend to discredit the Christian superstition, to the test of a public vote. This has been refused. More and more of the public time is taken up in religious propaganda, which even then is confined to a special type. All that can be said against Christianity based on history, science and philosophy is ignored. The semi-farcical Brains Trust offers a good illustration of this. No question that, if answered, could but tell against Christianity is included. Should the "discussion" drift in the direction of reflecting on Christianity it is at once stopped. But very few questions of that kind get past the censor. At present the B.B.C. is the finest example of what a sham a great deal of current talk about freedom and democracy is. No genuine democracy would suffer the B.B.C. for a month. We wish "B.B.C." religion a very wide circulation. Not nearly all is said that could be said, but "Clericus" has given a useful and good lead in the right direction.

We see it announced that the B.B.C. (Limited) Brains Trust is to have a rest for about two months. We should have thought what the majority of the staff needs is not rest, but exercise. On the other hand, its members may get brain exercise elsewhere and come to the microphone to get a rest. We would write and inquire if we had any hope of getting a truthful answer.

"The Times" Literary Supplement (it is too orthodox to fulfil the function of a national liberal journal) for May 2 takes for its principal article Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of the famous "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It is strange that in the three columns devoted to the subject no mention is made of her not quite so well-known work, "The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin." Perhaps this is so because the strong crusade now being carried on by some of our leading clerics to popularise Christianity as an indispensable guide to social betterment would not have been helped by the reminder of the support given to slavery by the Churches.

Of the two books, the "Key" was historically and sociologically of the greater importance. When Harriet published her first book her picture of slavery was denounced by the whole of the Southern clergy, and by some of the Northern, as being a fantastic production, a mere novel, unworthy of serious consideration. It was in answer to this charge of exaggeration and extravagance that the "Key" was written. It is a book of several hundred pages, with precisely documented statements of resolutions passed at Church meetings, official assemblies and sermons by Christian preachers, all accepting the institution of slavery as an inextinguishable part of the Christian religion. It was one of the most damning indictments of slavery and of Christianity ever written. We are not surprised that attention is not called to it by "The Times" Supplement. Our own copy was destroyed when the Farringdon Street premises were burned, and we should be greatly obliged to hear from anyone who has a copy for sale. As readers of our "Christianity and Slavery" will know, we used the "Key" liberally in writing that work.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

(Concluded from page 197)

With the coming of the Reformation historiography again became essentially a handmaid of theology but now in the healthier atmosphere of fierce controversy; and about the same time began a new secular patronage of historical research. Statesmen, factional leaders and deflectionists sought the help of the scholars to prove the legitimacy of their demands and the necessity of their actions. Nor, as we have noted earlier, has this practice entirely ceased. Thus employed, the historian, together with his works, could command scant respect from individualists. Dr. Johnson spoke for many of his fellows when he said, "Great abilities are not requisite for an historian; for in historical composition, all the greatest powers of the human mind are quiescent."

A few years before Johnson spoke there had died in Italy Giovanni Vico, who had laid down some highly original but hardly noticed historical principles. He was the first modern to urge the treatment of history as an organic unity, as an unbroken continuity through the ages, by means of strictly logical methods of research. This proleptic view was generations ahead of the times.

It was in the next century, the 19th, that "real" historical research began. All over Europe, and particularly in Germany, a systematic combing of archives took place and the realisation steadily grew that all records of the past—not merely the royal, military and ecclesiastical—were germane to historical reconstruction. Hitherto unquestioned sources were critically re-examined and checked in the light of still earlier sources—and in many cases found wanting. The era of debunking dawned, although its products were and still are unpopular with penny-a-liner historians. (Very humanly, of course: one is reluctant to believe that Helen of Troy was over 60 when abducted by Paris and aggrieved to find Lucretia's virtue doubted.) G. L. Lewis ably voiced the new outlook:—

"Historical evidence, like judicial evidence, is founded on the testimony of credible witnesses. Unless these witnesses had personal and immediate perception of the facts which they report, unless they saw and heard what they undertake to relate as having happened, their evidence is not entitled to credit. As all original witnesses must be contemporary with the events which they attest, it is a necessary condition for the credibility of a witness that he be a contemporary, though a contemporary is not necessarily a credible witness. Unless, therefore, an historical account can be traced, by probable proof, to the testimony of contemporaries, the first condition of historical credibility fails."

Such was the stringency of the principles of reformed history. Is it surprising that under their application a good half of ancient history had to be classed as apocryphal?

At about the time when Macaulay was preparing his "History" and Carlyle his "Past and Present," two men were independently working out a brand new theory of history. The first and more important was Karl Marx, an economist rather than an historian, who sought to explain the cultural status of any given civilisation in terms of its economics. The second was T. H. Buckle, whose incomplete "History of Civilisation" was the first to emphasise the importance of material background, although his eccentric ideas on the validity of historical evidence were a serious impediment to his authority. Henceforward serious history began to be less "pure"—a salutary change. Whole treasuries of adscititious material were ransacked. Not only economics, but geography, climatology, archaeology, biology, psychology and philology were called upon to help reconstruct the past, and it is now becoming axiomatic that only by taking into account all such things can we weave the records of human behaviour into a satisfactory pattern; and so vast has the task become that the modern historian cannot hope to tackle more than a fragment of the whole: the new standard histories are all co-operative efforts.

So far in reviewing the pedigree of the new history, we have been predominantly concerned with principles and methodology; we have not thereby ascertained what history is or what its function. Bury's subsumption of history as a science is, we must observe, far from being wholly acceptable. There is nothing *measurable* in history—although in

this connection it is notable that measurement plays but a small part in zoology. Again, experimentation is not possible—but neither is it in astronomy. Nothing in the nature of *a priori* laws would find universal acceptance. There is, however, some evidence of an evolutionary pattern in history, although the nearer the historian gets to his own time the more blurred the pattern becomes. That is a consequence of one of the unique features of history: the fact that trustworthy interpretation of the significance of an event requires knowledge not only of its antecedents but also of its repercussions. True science has no parallel to this. The difficulty can be overcome by extrapolation which, in the case of history, means prophecy—a notoriously uncertain step. We see what may be called the teleological method of historiography in H. G. Wells' famous "Outline," in which he fuses history in its classical sense with biological evolution and depicts all human society as progressing slowly but inexorably to a harmonious and Utopian world state. He thinks of wars and jealousy and greed and hollow Causes as obstacles over which rational melioristic man is bound to triumph in the end. (Incidentally, it would be possible to enlarge almost indefinitely on the influence of evolutionary ideas and the new belief in progress—Spencerism generally—on the theory of history.) On the whole, it would be wisest to leave history provisionally in the ante-chamber of science.

And the function of history? Partly, it is instructive, i.e. it should enable a people to profit by a knowledge of the faults and virtues of its forbears. That there is in fact little evidence of such historical profiting has been felt by many. Coleridge put it beautifully when he said, "If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us! But passion and party blind our eyes, and the light which experience gives is a lantern on the stern, which shines only on the waves behind us!" Yet no matter how wide the schism between theory and practice, we are, I think, bound to admit that the function does exist. Further, history provides a form of intellectual pleasure for its readers—as indeed it does for the research historian. It gratifies the strong human instinct of curiosity, fascinating and puzzling us. Nevertheless, as we noted earlier, there is the ever-present danger that over-preoccupation with history has an enervating effect: it kindles fatalism and inhibits original thought.

On this uncertain note we may end, for redefinitions at this stage would be presumptuous. The last words may well go to a re-emphasis of the necessity of caution in drawing upon past experience to meet present conditions. Not the least reason is that no interpretation of the past can be exhaustive, a fact alleged to have been brought home to Sir Walter Raleigh during the compilation of his "History of the World": being unable to elucidate the nature and cause of a quarrel beneath his window, he was moved to laugh at his own temerity in trying to record all history.

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

THE TYRANNY OF WORDS

"THE only instrument we have to express our thoughts is language, and that is saturated with meanings that were expressed long before an exact analysis of thought was possible," says Mr. Chapman Cohen in "Materialism Re-stated." Later on he adds: "All our chief words come to us heavily laden with anthropomorphic implications. They are born of the past, they suggest the past, and we have to use them to express ideas of which our remote ancestors had no conception." Whilst Mark Graubard, in his "Man the Slave and Master," explains that: "Words that are used to define objects never cause difficulties because their meaning is specific and clear. Language which represents ideas, emotions, states or concepts, however, is readily open to confusion, because its meanings are less concrete and objective." Other authors could, of course, be quoted to the same effect, but these two will suffice.

We are, to be sure, all more or less slaves of the past in the manner indicated by these writers. For example, when describing someone whom we have in mind we say either that he is "wilful" or "stubborn" or "pigheaded" or "obstinate"—we generally use the first word that occurs to us—when actually all that we mean is that that

"someone" is experiencing a particular emotion which expresses itself in a particular way, which emotion is variously described by these—yes, and other less polite—means. But because of our own mood at the moment, which may be just as "wilful" or "stubborn" or "pigheaded" or "obstinate" as the other man's, we do not stop to consider the appropriateness of the word which we so readily employ. All that the above-mentioned four words really mean, as a rule, is that a particular person to whom any one of them is applied has a mental attitude towards a certain proposition which differs from ours—but we select the word that pleases us and which, often enough, merely betrays our own mental condition. All that we could truthfully say, if we were to put to it on such an occasion, is that the other man differs from us in regard to the matter under consideration.

The difficulty of attributing "wilfulness" was made clear some years ago in the case of *Forder versus G.W.R.*, where it was laid down that: ". . . wilful misconduct . . . means misconduct to which the will is party as contradistinguished from accident, and is far beyond any negligence, even gross and culpable negligence, and involves that a person wilfully misconducts himself who knows and appreciates that it is wrong conduct on his part in the existing circumstances to do, or fail or omit to do (as the case may be) a particular thing, and yet intentionally does, or fails or omits to do, or persists in the act, failure or omission regardless of the consequences . . . or acts in reckless ignorance, not caring for the result." Since this ruling was given it has been appreciated in the transport world that to prove "wilful misconduct" is an utter impossibility.

The word "will," like the words "soul" and "spirit," are relics of the past, when a human being was believed to be a bit of a mixture—made up of a number of parts that were of gross material, "of the earth, earthy," weak and sin-stained, and a number that were ethereal and "spiritual." But although, as J. H. Robinson says in his "Human Comedy," ". . . to find out how the human body is made and how it acts is to fill one with a veneration akin to religious awe," we must not overlook the comparatively recently discovered fact that we are little more than animals with an animal ancestry, with all that that implies. In our gropings and blunderings through very many centuries, from animal to man, we have given names to certain of our mental and bodily activities which no longer explain and suffice. Like vestigial encumbrances they have served their purpose and must now be cut out.

"Race" is another word which has had its day. It has been so overworked just lately that it will probably soon die a natural death. It will die of sheer exhaustion. Hitler notwithstanding, there are no "pure races"—no, not even the much belauded "Aryan" race—and to probe into the history of any so-called race is to find a mixture of all sorts and conditions of people. Obviously that must be so, having regard to the very process by which the peoples of the earth have spread out and intermingled. "As for the concept of the race itself, about which there is so much to-do at present," says Mark Graubard in his "Man, the Slave and Master," "the fact is that for the purposes of reference the biological scheme of designation according to origin and purity is wholly ineffective and ludicrous. We cannot speak of pure Nordics or pure Mediterraneans unless we speak of a remote past, and even then only as a convenient name for a group formed in isolation and possessing certain characteristics distributed throughout the population in an unknown manner."

Sometimes there is a humorous side to the use of well-known words or phrases. An instance of this occurred lately when a twelve-year-old boy was fined 16s. in the St. Helens Juvenile Court for assault on the wife of the headmaster of a school. The boy threw a stone at the lady and used "a bad expression"! When the Chairman of the Bench asked what this was, the offending words were written on a piece of paper and handed up to him, whereupon he told the boy that "the expression was being used in an entirely wrong manner"!

More recently the Court of Appeal was asked to define the meaning of the word "Ireland" in Rule 2 of Order XI. of the Rules of the Supreme Court, which provides that: "Where leave is asked from the Court . . . to serve a

writ in Scotland or Ireland. . . ." On behalf of the appellants it was submitted that the word "Ireland" in the rule must be read in its geographical sense and must include Dublin, whereas counsel for the respondents argued that the rule had been drawn up long before the formation of the Irish Free State, and that in the light of present circumstances "Ireland" in the rule could only include Northern Ireland; and the Court held that the word "Ireland" in this connection meant only Northern Ireland.

Then there was another case which actually had to go to the House of Lords before a decision could be reached. This case raised the question whether preventive officers of his Majesty's Customs and Excise were authorised by Section 186 of the Customs (Consolidation) Act, 1876, to detain a person whom they believed on reasonable grounds to have committed an offence under the section, or whether, acting on reasonable grounds, they were liable in damages to the person detained in an action for false imprisonment if the complainant had not actually committed the offence. A majority of the Court of Appeal held that the word "offender" in the section must be a person who had actually committed the offence, and did not cover a person who was believed on reasonable grounds to have committed an offence but in fact had not done so. But the House of Lords held that "the offender who might be summoned must include an innocent person who was wrongly suspected of having committed the offence"!

It is by no means an easy matter for us to rid ourselves of this tyranny of words. We learn first one word and then another at our mother's knee, add to their number as we grow up into manhood, and together they become part and parcel of our stock-in-trade, so to speak. We seldom stop to examine our mental or vocal machinery. If we did we should often find that, parrot-like, we were using words which have no relation to realities but which are merely sounds reflecting a little more than the ignorance of primitive man—like the word "Hell." "An act of God" is another phrase which is pretty well out of date, it being appreciated nowadays that if, for example, an earthquake occurs it is nothing more nor less than an earth quake—a natural phenomenon—and cannot be attributed, as it once was, to God's wrath and a visitation for our "sins." But probably the reader can, after a moment's reflection, give many other examples of a like character, so we will leave it at that.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

THE BRAVE DAYS OF OLD

THE chief advantage to the Jews in being the Lord's chosen people appears to be the failure of their enemies to exterminate them.

The Jews were chosen by God for special favours, and selected by Christians for savage persecution, and in spite of both they have managed to survive.

They were happiest in the brave days of old before the emergence of a Christian species of mankind. In those days Jehovah bossed everything and everyone; he was a great god. But a great god does not mean greatness as understood by intelligent, civilised human beings. Gods originate among primitive, savage people, and greatness as conceived by primitive people must be applied, such as strength, ferocity, terrible in war and anger, something always to be feared. It is when gods get civilised that they become Cissies in the holy family. Gods, in their wisdom, never act as pioneers in civilisation. There is no truthful record of a god civilising a people. Man discovers the road and, having civilised himself, he then proceeds to civilise his gods. The Bible God is such an example. In the brave days of old Jehovah wallowed in blood, human and animal. The slaughter of animals at the altar, with their blood splashed and smeared about his holy premises, were features of his divine power and pleasure. In those days the Jews were barbarians and equal to such practises. To-day Christians worship the same God—sharing it with the Jews—and being civilised they have civilised their God, or as near civilised as is possible with gods. The result is that no Christian to-day would allow his God to slaughter sheep and oxen at the altars and splash the blood around as in the brave days of old. Then man obeyed God in abject fear; to-day God limps behind civilised man, grateful

for an occasional nod of recognition. When Christians lapse into a temporary barbaric mood, as during war, their God is allowed the same lapse, as is indicated in the war speeches of the clergy. When the Christian is at war his God is at war with the same enemy. If an armistice is arranged, God complies with the terms, and when peace is secured God also signs on the dotted line.

What a fall from the brave days of old when the same God shook the earth in his wrath. When he declared: "For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies; he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood" (Isaiah xxxiv. 2-3). Now the same God is humiliated in his own strongholds, thwarted by heathens, etc. Days of National Prayers for our cause are followed by Japanese victories. If, as the clergy say, the war is a punishment for our sins, for what reasons are the Japs being victorious? With less than three years of war we are strictly rationed and couponed. In the brave days of old the Israelites were marching around the wilderness for 40 years, yet food, and enough of it, was always there—and remember, the quartermaster's stores were in heaven, quite a long way from Egypt. During the whole 40 years there was no clothing trouble; by a simple miracle clothes did not wear out. Forty years in the same suit was a pleasant hardship for the men. One hat in 40 years no doubt meant a strain upon the ladies, but they survived—so did the hats. The real difficulty was with the growing children. Imagine Rebecca, a taking little thing four years of age, entering the wilderness with her parents, and emerging 40 years later a buxom wench wearing the same little skirt and undies!

Now our Prime Minister is a God-fearing man, our Government is made up of God-fearing members, the people are loyally backing all the war efforts, and yet we are not doing too well at the moment. Here the clergy should be important, especially as they are selected by God for their job. In the brave days of old the men of God were in front: Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David, etc.; they were leaders and conquered on many a battlefield. To-day there seems something missing from our strategical machinery. Our men of God are full of military fervour, but they are at the wrong end of our armies. In fact, they are exempt from combat, which does seem a waste of very promising material. Could their warlike utterances be translated into deeds at the head of our armies, might not Jehovah be restored as of old, our enemies be broken and scattered, and a triumphant peace rapidly follow?

R. H. ROSETTI.

CORRESPONDENCE

DEBATES

SIR,—Would you please allow me to appeal to your readers for any unwanted debates and public discussions held many years ago by famous exponents of Secularism. I want to purchase any by Charles Bradlaugh, Charles Watts, Joseph Barker, George Holyoake, etc., etc., in their discussions with the Rev. Brewin Grant, Dr. McCann, A. Robertson, T. Lawson and many others.

I well remember the lively meetings of Foote and Wolfendale in London and the huge gatherings in Finsbury Park and Hyde Park.—Yours, etc.,

GEO. WATLING.

3, Larchwood Close, Collier Row,
Romford, Essex.

THOSE DEAR PADRES

SIR,—Reading in "The Freethinker" about the Radio Freedom League campaign has prompted me to send you a copy of a notice which appeared under "Company Orders" a few days ago. It is as follows:—

NOTICE

"The Rev. R. W. V. Selbie Wright has been appointed radio padre, and his particular task is to look after anti-aircraft. He broadcasts every Wednesday on the Forces programme, immediately after the 9 o'clock news. His first broadcast last Wednesday was an immediate success. It is the wish of the C.O.

that as many as possible listen-in to the Rev. Selbie Wright as often as possible."

I like best the phrase about "his first broadcast . . . was an immediate success." Just whom it was so successful with I can't imagine, as four out of five detachments in this company do not possess radio sets. Most officers' quarters have one (naturally), but even the officers seem to prefer dance music to talks on religious uplift.—Yours, etc.,

DRIVER BAILEY, T/6479007.

GOD AND DEAN INGE

SIR,—While reading "Outspoken Essays," by Dean Inge, I came upon this assertion on page 83: "The Mogul hordes have been an unmitigated curse to humanity." This protest coming from a Rev. Dean who believes that God Almighty made all mankind from Adam onward, was a surprise to me. Why didn't the Dean send his protest to God direct? Perhaps the Dean thinks that God may yet consider his reverent opinion, and send a Moses or a David to exterminate those "hordes" as his two "faithful servants" dealt with the Midianites and others. Now is the time if God means it.—Yours, etc.,

JAMES NEIL.

AWA' TAE HELL!

SIR,—In the town of Kelso, Scotland, there is a tombstone in the graveyard which bears the following inscription:—

Remember man, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now so must you be,
Prepare for death and follow me.

To this the local Atheist has added:—

To follow you, I'm quite content,
But I'm damned if I know

Which way you went!

J. HUMPHREY.

Lycurgus dedicated a little statue to the god of laughter in each hall. He considered facetiousness as a seasoning of the hard exercise and diet, and therefore ordered it to take place on all proper occasions, in their common entertainments and parties of pleasure.—PLUTARCH'S "LYCURGUS."

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. Various speakers.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0, JOHN KATZ, B.A., "The Passion for Community."

COUNTRY

Indoor

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

Glasgow Secular Society. Annual General Meeting at 6-30 p.m. in 25, Hillfoot Street on Sunday, 17th May.

Outdoor

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

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday: 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Edinburgh N.S.S. Branch (The Mound), Sunday: 7-30, Mr. J. Gordon.

Kingston-on-Thames N.S.S. Branch (Castle Street), Sunday: 7-0, Mr. J. W. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Stephenson Square): 3 and 7 p.m., Mr. W. A. ATKINSON will speak.

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