

# THE FREETHINKER

• EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN •

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Here and There

SOME time ago, when dealing with the position of the Churches during the post-war period, I called attention to two things in connection with the State Church. One was the enormous financial possessions of the Church, the other the fact that the Church could be trusted to protect other large vested interests in order to safeguard their own. The statement of Marx that the Church would sacrifice thirty-eight parts of its Thirty-nine Articles rather than lose one thirty-ninth of its property still holds good.

Having said that much I proceed to again assert that so far as the State Church is concerned there is no such thing as Church property. There is only State property, part of which is allocated for the maintenance of the Church of England, just as the State levies taxes with a promise to apply the funds so raised to particular purposes, but which may be applied to whatever use the Government thinks circumstances demand. The money paid over to the State may be used in a good or in a bad way, in the way in which it was intended to be used, or in some other way that seems more urgent. Money left or given to the Church is money left or given to the State with a request—it amounts to little more—that it should be used in a specific manner. The possessions of the Nonconformist bodies come under a different heading. They are associations of citizens banded together for specific and permitted purposes. So long as these purposes are legal they have the same protection that is given to any other legal association. But I do not think they have any legal standing as religious bodies, although privileges may be granted them on that account.

When dealing with this matter the enormous sum of money controlled by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was mentioned. When the war is over this question of Church possessions and their social value—or danger—is likely to become a very live question. If the Church authorities can dodge the question it will be shelved; and they will have the support of other huge interests the social value

of which must be considered and dealt with if the new world promised us is not to be a very pale reflection of the possible one.

This wealth of the State Church—I will keep to the familiar phrase—is a heavy tax on land, and so a burden on living. If the same sum were raised voluntarily one could only pity the people who gave it. But the much larger part is forcibly raised. Religious or non-religious, the Church makes no inquisition into the nature of anyone's religious convictions when collecting its dues. When the founder of the Salvation Army said there was no such thing as tainted money he was echoing a sentiment that the whole history of the Church illustrates.

### "Black Diamonds" and the Church

If the Government keeps its half-made promise, coal royalties will be one thing that will receive early attention. The scandal of this has been before the public for more than two generations, but the coal kings sit tight and the Church repeats its prayers; for among the coal royalty possessors, and by far the largest one, is the State Church. The figure mentioned as the price for buying out the royalty owners is round about £150,000,000. Of this sum, the share of the Church of England is estimated at £60,000,000—two-fifths of the total. How many users of coal in this country are aware of the fact? A little time back the new Archbishop of Canterbury struck a pose in declaring that, in his judgment, when shareholders in a company have received the whole of the capital from their investments their dividends should cease. How much money has the Church invested in coal pits? Or if they have invested any, how many times have they received their capital? His lordship said nothing about this yearly plunder of the people by the Church. His salary would certainly be shortened without it.

But let us be under no delusion. Suppose the deal is finished and the Church takes £60,000,000 of money for the greater glory of god and his church. Many may think that once this huge sum is paid the public will be done with it. They will have shaken off the ecclesiastical incubus. Not a bit of it! The annual payment will continue for ever and ever to the extent of the value of £60,000,000 invested at the current value of money. Be not deceived, the priests of God are not fooled. It is his worshippers that appear in that light.

### Compel Them to Come In

Now to another topic. The other day the "Evening Standard" (May 23) told a very interesting story. Air-Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding is the man who led the Air Force in the Battle of Britain. He is, I believe, a Christian, but not of the common and certainly not of the parson type. Sir Hugh attended a Salvation Army meeting, as he says, with no intention of taking part in it. But the Army saw an advertisement. He was invited to speak. He spoke, and informed the meeting that he was

"a fanatical opponent to compulsory worship in the Forces." I guess the Salvation Army was sorry they invited Sir Hugh to speak; but we are pleased to record the name of one highly placed soldier who does not like to see his men marched to Church like cattle to play the part of asses when they get there. "Londoner," who writes paragraphs for the "Standard," says he cannot remember any Service chief speaking out so strongly against compulsory worship. Neither do we; but it is high time that men in the Forces were treated like other men where religion is concerned and not like so many helpless fools. Every officer knows that to the majority of the men serving Church service is objectionable. The Government knows it. The chaplains know it, but their pay and their prestige depends upon this compulsory service being maintained, and they sanction something that often looks very much like a penalty for those who will not attend a service in which they do not believe and do not want.

The Chaplain-General of the Forces (he gets very good pay, I believe), the Rev. C. D. Symons, when approached on the matter declined to discuss the subject. Naturally! He could not deny that men are driven unwillingly to Church. If he had spoken he could only have replied by a falsehood. Up to date, Commander Campbell, who apparently leaves his brains in trust with the B.B.C., is the only man we know who has never found a man in the Navy who does not delight in compulsory attendance at Church service. I resent this attack on the intelligence of seamen.

The Chaplain-General evaded discussing the matter by the remark that people could get fanatical about anything. Agreed. But that was not the question at issue. The question was whether members of the Armed Forces should not be considered sufficiently mature to decide for themselves whether they will go to Church service or not. The Rev. Symons knows the issue as well as we do. He also knows that the only way to get a reasonable number of the Forces to attend Church is to compel them to go. We are still looking for self-respecting chaplains who will join Sir Hugh in his manly protest.

One other point. "Londoner" says he receives a considerable number of letters on the subject. We know he does. We have letters from many of the airmen, sailors and soldiers who write them. Other papers have the same experience as "Londoner" of the "Standard." But—mark it well!—these freedom-loving newspapers of ours hardly ever publish them. Is it not time the newspapers began to plead that men in the Services should be treated as grown up responsible individuals? Until the Press acts differently from the way it now does it must be counted as an accomplice in a petty tyranny of the most contemptible kind.

### "The Lie in the Mouth of the Priest"

The religious lie that is forced by clergymen and co-operating officials on men joining the Forces is not a new one. The historic lie of the war began with the opening of hostilities. It was placed in the mouth of the King by his advisers; it was canonised by the Archbishops and repeated by the clergy. It was the lie that this war was being fought for the protection of Christianity. We lost no time in branding it for what it was. But we could hardly expect our voice to have much influence on the B.B.C. Where Christian interests are concerned the

B.B.C. dares anything in the shape of misrepresentation. So we welcome the following from a recent issue of "Tribune":—

"Every Sunday and several times a week the B.B.C. tells the world that we are fighting for Christianity. Who says so? Certainly not the people who are doing the fighting. Are the Russians fighting for Christianity? Are the Chinese fighting for Christianity? Are the Jews fighting for Christianity? Are our own men fighting for Christianity? The boys in the Commando and parachute regiments—did they volunteer for the job because they are devout Christians? The boys who flew to bomb Augsburg in daylight, knowing that they would never come back—were they inspired by the vague miasma which is called the Christian way of life? Like hell.

"Anyway, the most Christianity-conscious country in Europe—Italy—is lined up with pagan Germany and sun-worshipping Japan. Christianity, as represented by His Holiness the Pope, gave its blessing and encouragement to the dress rehearsal for this war, the Nazi 'try-out in the provinces' of Spain. Just as the Spanish priests later blessed the ill-fated Blue Division going on its 'Holy Crusade' against Soviet Russia. . . .

"The 1914-18 war was for Christianity. So was the Boer War and the Crimean War, and so on, ad infinitum.

"It is high time the prelates and the parsons found a more inspiring battle cry."

"Tribune" might have reflected that the Churches were running true to form. Nowhere have the Christian Churches made for peace. The frequency of wars have not diminished under Christian dominance. In the last 100 years there is not a decade in which we were not at war somewhere—and these wars never failed to receive the support of the Churches. The historic policy of the Church has been not to stop war but to moralise it. It has always provided the moral justification that has reconciled civilised man to the bloody business of armed warfare.

If the Church had said that sometimes war offers the least harmful of two courses, but even then men cannot make it their duty and their business to kill one another, to make direct or indirect warfare on women and children, to let suspicion and hatred and the desire to kill rule where confidence and honesty and friendly co-operation should prevail, that war is always waged at the cost of the better qualities of civilised human nature, if the Church had taken that attitude it would have retained the respect of men even where it could not command their allegiance. The Churches could then have helped the soldier and saved their own souls. But the Churches at home, and the chaplains with the armies, never even pretended to give that lesson. They continued to preach the greatness of war, its uplifting qualities, the fine comradeship that military service develops; it continued to play the part that General Crozier gave them in the last war: that of being the greatest creators of "blood lust" we possess.

Some weeks ago we gave specimens of the almost insane bestiality of the language used and the practices adopted to get soldiers ready for action. There was nothing very new in the practice; it was done in the last war, but not in quite so brutal a manner. We are pleased to see that

those in high command have issued orders that this kind of imitation of German training is to be stopped. War is always a bloody business, a filthy business, a business that depraves and disorganises civil life. The more seriously it is taken the longer it persists. But there are occasions where it is the better of two courses that are open to us. The Churches have never realised this philosophy; they certainly have never practised it. What they have realised—partly unconsciously—is that war, with its descent to a lower level of civic life, carries with it a possible resurrection of those primitive mental and moral traits out of which all religions have grown and on which all religions live. But the futility of considering the Churches as leading men to a better civilisation is becoming glaringly apparent. The old saw that one may hope to fool some people all the time, but it is vain to imagine that all the people can be fooled all the time is becoming glaringly applicable to the religious situation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S PLEA FOR POLYGAMY

LANE-FOX PITT-RIVERS, the distinguished anthropologist, has furnished his science with an important contribution in his "Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races" (Routledge, 1927). This informative work is dedicated to his revered fellow-scientist, Dr. Malinowski, and is the outcome of five years' personal study of the manners and customs of subject races, most of which are declining towards extinction. Apart from the introduction of European vices and diseases, our author attributes the rapidly decreasing population of once prolific peoples very largely to the white man's misunderstanding of native psychology and its attendant evil, the dictatorial and meddling methods of the missionary bodies.

Clothes and Christianity seem synonymous to the native mind. Shocked by the sight of naked savages, and with all their inborn horror of what they must consider their Creator's nude handiwork the missionaries insisted that their converts must be clothed. Therefore, notes Pitt-Rivers, the missionaries' "first efforts are directed to inculcating 'decency' and 'modesty' and by creating a sense of 'shame.' In other words, by inculcating 'flesh consciousness' and the virtue of concealment, the two signposts of Christian culture. In this endeavour great insistence is placed upon the importance for a woman to cover her breasts. Many, in fact, most missions insist as a condition of admission into their Churches, upon the women being supplied with the hideous and unhygienic cotton 'blouses' that form a common article of trade in the South Seas. Some missions make clothing a condition of baptism." This, of course, encourages trade, while, in a tropical climate, the missionaries themselves, especially Catholic priests pledged to celibacy, may, as one of the latter admitted to Pitt-Rivers, find the proximity of unadorned females "trying and most conducive to nervous strain."

The volume under review contains a chapter surveying the psychological causes of depopulation and stresses the power of depression induced by the intruding white man's interference with, and suppression of native customs. For the people become apathetic and melancholy and the joy of life they formerly exhibited fades away. "Stevenson," notes our author, "was greatly impressed by the absence of a will to live which seemed to overtake the native races of Polynesia and afflict them like a chronic disease from which they never recovered whenever Europeans established a control over their lives." Many other instances of this state of dejection have been recorded and deplored by sympathetic observers of savage races.

In most communities the numbers of the two sexes tend towards equality. So it is commonly assumed that polygamy on an

extensive scale becomes impossible unless women greatly outnumber the men. But when we realise that the nuptial age of the female is invariably lower than that of the male, this practical equality is diminished. With native peoples apparently "the difference in the marriage age . . . tends to be much greater than among modern civilised and industrialised peoples." For with primitive agricultural peoples girls are usually wedded a little after puberty, while the nuptial time for men may average twice that of the female. This rule is common in the Orient, and the earlier age of female mating obviously determines the ratio of marriageable males. Sexual commerce, however, is not confined to wedded couples. In Oceania and Melanesia generally pre-nuptial intercourse is customary. This it seems "has little or no effect upon the supply of young wives, since pre-nuptial liberty seldom extends much beyond female marriage age, and their experience seems to have no deleterious consequences, but rather to make the subsequent marriages more stable. Illegitimate births are most rare and are looked upon with the greatest disfavour."

Largely the result of the discrepancy in the marriage ages of the opposite sexes, a normal surplusage of females existed in polygamous societies. But monogamy, at least in theory, being the ideal of most Europeans, polygamy was penalised in Fiji, South Africa and elsewhere, with the sequel that in many lands where women, prior to the white man's appearance, were in a majority, there is now a serious deficit of the female sex. In fact, masculinity seems more and more to preponderate as a native community drifts towards extinction.

That the pregnant and later suckling mother needs rest in order to recuperate and to do full justice to her offspring passes unheeded in monogamous circles. Yet this truth seems self-evident to a people so lowly as the Fijians, as their *dabe* custom proves. "This word," we are informed, "is usually applied by Europeans to the custom of separating the parents of a child during the suckling period, but in the vernacular it actually signifies the injury sustained by a child whose parents have cohabited too soon after its birth. It is then said to have become *dabe* and to exhibit symptoms of debility. According to the Report, native witnesses old enough to remember the customs of ancient times, state that a child was suckled from a period varying from twelve to 36 months—in some cases longer. During this period the mother refrained from cohabitation owing to the fear, partly of impoverishing her milk and partly again of becoming pregnant before her child was weaned."

Innumerable instances occur in polygamous communities where the taboos forbid coition with a pregnant or suckling woman. Intercourse until three years after confinement was made illegal in Dahomey.

Archdeacon Maunsell vainly endeavoured to induce Paora, a highly respected Maori chief, to suppress polygamy among his people. The "Maori English Tutor" published their interview, which was conducted through an interpreter, which thus concluded: "Tell him," thundered Paora, "that whereas the birds of the air and the beasts of the glades cease to pair when the female is fertilised . . . the Pakeha (European), with his model one-wife system, continues to occupy the same apartments till within a very few months of the birth of the child." Such a practice, he said, was utterly abhorrent and he absolutely refused to authorise it. The Archdeacon and the Maori chief never conversed again.

The Rev. W. Lowry, a pioneer missionary, is mentioned in the "Fijian Report," who "thought he foresaw that the teaching of Christianity and the inculcation of the customs of Western civilisation, while raising the individual character of the natives, would ultimately lead to their extinction as a nation. He regarded this event as the retributive justice of Providence for the idolatry and bloodshed of heathen times."

In the light of their past history and the example of the Biblical patriarchs and kings, the Mormon missionaries, unlike

the other Christian proselytisers, display little aversion to polygamy. All other missions display the bitterest antagonism and the Romanist priests and their satellites have frequently resorted to trickery and even violence to obtain their end. In the case of the timid or dying, threats of hell or promises of heaven are methodically employed. Girls pledged to enter into a polygamous union have actually been forcibly abducted and married, with Catholic converts by the priests and their confederates.

Pitt-Rivers refers to several shameful scandals of this character, in one of which, even after the resident magistrate had decided in favour of the native custom and had sentenced the girl's assailants to imprisonment for assault, she was nevertheless later kidnapped and married to a Catholic boy in the mission's church. Such outrages, declares Pitt-Rivers, "suggest to the impartial observer the patent injustice of forcing an alien code upon a people whose whole social organisation and whose every idea conflicts with it, involving, as it does, a degree of interference with private life and persecution that even the people of Europe, who profess to accept that code and that morality, have never, since they were freed from the Inquisition, for a moment tolerated."

T. F. PALMER.

## JOHNSON'S "ANTIQUA MATER"

### II.

THE greater part of "Antiqua Mater" is concerned with an examination of what Edwin Johnson called the "Internal History"—that is, the evidence gathered from the oldest Christian documents as to the earliest mention of the "Christiani." It is claimed that they were certainly called "Saints" very early in their history, and Johnson cites as proof the Book of Enoch, "which probably falls within our era," the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and the Book of Tobit. But he contends that the word "Apostles" is a "term of Jewish origin," and "we cannot certainly date the Christian use of the term till the time of Justin."

The accepted works of Justin Martyr, contended the author of "Antiqua Mater," ought to be very carefully studied, for it is in them that "the historical origin of the new faith must be sought primarily." And Johnson claims that if they be read with "careful attention" as to what is or is not Evidence, the result of this reading must be that "Justin had no exact knowledge, whether of the 'Apostles' in general, or of him whom he calls the 'Apostle of God.' He had an Idea before his mind, but not actual Persons, of whose life and teaching any accurate particulars had been recorded." It has often been pointed out that in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, the young Jew, Trypho points out how Christians "invented" a Christ, and that if he lived at all, no one knows anything about him. This would be all the more true if Johnson is right, and Justin had nothing in his mind but an "Idea."

In connection also with Justin there is the claim made that the first mention of the change of the Sabbath Day from Saturday to Sunday is in his works. Certainly there is no Biblical authority for the change. Justin says:—

"On the day of the Sun so called, there is a gathering together of all who abide in the cities or fields into the same place. . . . During the day of the Sun in common we all make the meeting, because it is the first day on which God turned the darkness and the matter, and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For on the day before the Kronik day they crucified Him, and on the day after the Kronik day, that is the day of Helios, He appeared to his Apostles and disciples, and taught those things which we have delivered for consideration unto you also."

This is, says Johnson, "the earliest known statement of the observance of Sunday among the Christiani, and the reason of it,

dating from about 100 years after the event said to be commemorated." And he adds, "It is impossible not to wonder at the effrontery of innovators who thus seized upon the Old Testament Scriptures, appropriated them, and perverted their plainest sense in favour of their own dogmatic assumptions and the substruction of Christian history."

Of course, the new religion which Justin takes upon himself to defend and propagate had eventually to separate itself entirely from Judaism, which it came to hate—a hatred reciprocated, naturally, by the Jews. But it is astonishing how many Jewish ideas and concrete things were eventually "symbolised" by the new faith. The Temple of the Jews became a Spiritual Temple of the Heart, for example—and even the word circumcision was later "spiritually" applied.

As well as Justin, Johnson examines Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, the mystical ideas and teachings in which he insists had a great deal to do with the development of the new faith. But he finds it extremely difficult to extract any history in any real sense from all these concepts. But if anything real can be found in the writings, it is that they show "intense mutual jealousy between rivals for the possession of the Beautiful Bride"—that is, one must suppose, the Christian Church. "For the sake of her they call Ecclesia," says Johnson. "men have hated and fought with one another, as for her not less beautiful sister, Theologia, as if they could not endure her praises should be sung by another tongue than her own."

Johnson thinks, and gives good grounds for so thinking, that the "mysterious use of the bread and the cup in the initiation of Christian proselytes was probably imported from the religion of Mithras." And he comes to the positive conclusion that the literature he has been examining "belongs to a class of religionists who have not learned to assume the name of Christiani," but who called themselves in all probability Saints or Elect of God. From this early writing he was unable "to trace out an historic Founder or Founders of this new order of things." Also there was no "Canon," no New Testament, "no body of writings of any kind on a level of authority with the New Testament."

Johnson asks another question: How is it that the word *Evangelion* and connected words, which glitter in the pages of the New Testament like daisies in a field, appear so sparsely in our so-called "Apostolic Fathers" or the old Christian literature generally? Hermas, it appears, never uses the word *Evangelion*; Barnabas, it is true, uses it at least twice, but his 19th chapter, which contains similar teaching to that of the Sermon on the Mount, "ignores either Jesus or apostles as its source. Nor is there any 'Paul' nor any Gospel in the sense in which 'Paul' speaks of it in our 'Pauline Epistles.'"

From all this it can be gathered that Johnson delved deeply into early so-called Christian literature, and his book is a mine of information on their contents, especially with regard to symbolical and mystical interpretations. He analyses the way, for instance, in which the numerical significance of letters helps to prove that the Greek T is made to signify the Cross in Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria; or how the extended arms of Moses as related in Exodus provide another symbol of the Cross of Christ in the Old Testament. In fact, the whole conception of the Messiah, who was, naturally, Jesus Christ, is for these early writings not a real person at all, but a Word, a Logos, an Idea. "Had there been," insists Johnson, "during the second century, recognised 'witnesses of the resurrection' in the physical sense to whom appeal could have been made, we should have heard of them. . . . The question is one of belief, from which the facts were to be inferred, not of facts on which the beliefs were to be built."

The stories woven around the suffering Messiah were never meant to be taken literally, but "form one vast monument of the powers of human imagination and belief." It was indeed "only by historic accident that the Sophia of Siracides has not been in theology personified and made an historical daughter of

God." Johnson writes in "Antiqua Mater" very lengthily on the way the early writers personified ideas and how little of genuine history can be deduced from them once "the fictitious and baseless reasoning of these documents" has become familiar through study. I cannot do justice in one or two short articles to his brilliant analysis, which the reader should examine for himself.

If history therefore cannot be found in early Christian documents we are left only with what are to us vague, mystical, or even sheer nonsensical ideas based on absurd speculations which might have done splendid duty for early Gnostics, but which are now completely outdated. That there are still persons professing Rationalism or even Atheism who cannot see what Johnson took such pains to prove, shows how difficult it is to eradicate religious ideas inculcated in childhood.

But Johnson later formulated a much bolder theory regarding the origin of Christianity—in fact, it is, I think, the boldest so far enunciated. As his "Rise of Christendom" is rarely referred to these days, I will say something about it in another article. It is, as I have already hinted, quite sensational. Whether he was right or wrong must be decided by his readers for themselves.

H. CUTNER.

### SJAMBOK ETHICS

IT is difficult at times to keep pace with the political ideologies of some of the predikants in the House of Assembly and a charitable silence towards their attitude is, perhaps, the best course to pursue. But few decent-minded people can have anything but abhorrence for the latest outburst of the Rev. S. W. Naude, who, in the Assembly on Wednesday, advocated a "taste of the sjambok" for non-European juvenile delinquents such as are now sent to the reformatory at Tokai. These youngsters, he said, should be handed over to the farmers, who would "help to save their souls" by making them work from sunrise to sunset.

This is the old doctrine of slavery in a modern but familiar guise, and also the negation of every Christian ethic; and it is more repellent as coming from a minister of the Gospel. It is an outrageous calumny on the majority of the farmers in this country, men of Mr. Naude's own race, but, happily, not of his persuasion in this matter.

There are doubtless a minority still attached to penal methods in the treatment of native labour, but their ideas are as repugnant to the majority of farmers as Mr. Naude's views are to decent-minded people as a whole. The system of "indentured" labour was tried out in full measure, first in the Cape Colony and afterwards in the republics, and it left such a blot upon the country's history that it is astounding that even Mr. Naude should advocate its revival.

Delinquency in youth is not a matter of colour or race. In the majority of cases, though not in all, it is the product of environment, for which society as a whole, and chiefly the European Government of this country, is largely to blame. If Mr. Naude thinks the lash can "whip the offending Adam" out of erring humanity, he must not stop at applying this form of correction to one element only. We can understand, while profoundly deploring, the type of mind that considers flogging and semi-slavery the proper medicine for all wrongdoing. But when a man prescribes this for a particular class or race, and particularly a community in chancery, as it were, to a ruling element, he puts himself outside the pale of that larger humanity which aims at the betterment, rather than the repression, of those entrusted to its care.

(From the "Star," Johannesburg, South Africa.)

Great revolutions are the work rather of principles than of bayonets, and are achieved first in the moral, and afterwards in the material sphere.—MAZZINI.

### ACID DROPS

GOERING has assured the German people that "God sent the Fuehrer." But that cannot be true, for we have it on high ecclesiastical authority that God sent Churchill. So we can't accept Goering's statement. It is quite unEnglish. Besides, where the devil does Stalin come into the picture? We really cannot expect British Christians to believe that God sent *him*. Most prominent Christians have, we expect, been praying to God to give them strength enough to put up with Stalin until the war is over.

The Rev. Dr. Barry, addressing an audience at Nottingham University, asked: "Was it not extraordinary that Christians for 2,000 years had joined together in receiving symbols of a criminal execution?" Not at all. It seems to us most appropriate. The historic doctrine of Christianity is that Christ came to sinners, and they have always been well represented in his following. That Jesus died on the Cross only makes the fact that a large number of his followers have lived on the cross more conspicuous.

The "Church Times," in spite of the fact that the present Government's sympathies lie with religious education in all schools, admits "that everything is not wholly roseate on the education front." What the paper wants is, of course, a complete surrender to the Church—or the Churches, it is not quite clear which. The clergy must take a big hand in the management of the schools and in choosing the teachers; Bible teaching will be forced on children wherever possible. That is what the "Church Times" would call "roseate." But it finds somehow a fairly strong opposition to this "positive and definite Christian foundation," and is quite hurt because "the idea of Christian democracy now prevalent involves the denial of Church teaching to Church children, which is undemocratic; and the establishment of a humanitarian religion of national service, which is not specifically Christian."

This is quite true, and we are glad that a religious journal of such standing has had the pluck to see and state what everybody not religion-mad must see. Humanitarianism is not only *not* specifically Christian, but has actually nothing to do with Christianity as such—as was pointed out by Gibbon long ago in a famous passage. Nonconformists want to add to "humanitarianism" what they always call "simple" Bible teaching, and which is hotly disputed by the Anglo and Roman Catholic Churches, who want their special dogmas rammed down the throats of the little unfortunates called "Church" children; and so the merry fight goes on.

We confess to being unable to find justification for the American Government giving strict orders to its airmen not to bomb the royal palace in Tokio. After all, bombing the palace would not do nearly so much injury to life and belongings as bombing the houses of ordinary people, who if they escape with their lives lose all their worldly goods. And as the superstition that the Emperor is closely related to God is not dead in Japan—at any rate it hovers about there to a much greater degree than in this country—the destruction of the palace might have had a much greater effect on the Japanese morale than a similar event would have had on bombing Buckingham Palace.

Mr. Stanley B. James, of the "Catholic Herald," says that in a Christian society there is a proper place for all. We like that phrase "proper place." And we agree with Mr. James, Roman Catholic though he is. The snag is that the Church has always aimed at deciding what that place should be. On a slave estate there is also a "proper place for all." But when the slave aims at getting into some other place there is likely to be a devil of a row.

The editor of "The Living Church" (U.S.A.) writes in the "Church Times" that the war has awakened the Church in America to its duties. We fancy "duties" is a misprint for "opportunities." It has had the same influence on devotees of the "black market."

A Conference of Anglican Churchmen in Australia have resolved "to educate public opinion in the stemming of the tide of secular education." Meanwhile the march of civilisation continues to make the tide for a civilised life grow stronger. Of course, there is such a thing as stemming the tide, but it is not easy once it begins to run. One of the wise things said by Dean Inge was that orthodox Christianity—and there is no other—died with the establishment of the Copernican astronomy. But the clergy have kept the fact of its death to themselves.

"We have got to admit," says the Rev. E. M. Davidson at a Perth Presbytery meeting, "that the youth of Scotland has lost its respect for the Church. In Germany they persecute Christianity, but over here there is no Christianity to persecute. They just laugh at the Church and ignore it." And with God on their side too!

The Rev. J. Clifford Banham, at a meeting held at Woking, denied that it was the intention "of the Church of England clergy to enter all schools to give instruction." We are ready to accept this as true, although the qualifying phrase "all schools" leaves room for those of the clergy who are anxious to earn their salt to inflict themselves on the pupils. But in the main we believe that the bulk of the clergy will not wish to do any extra work. Why should they if the teachers are properly selected and trained to be obedient cat's paws?

The Roman Catholic "Universe" is having a hard time explaining to some of its readers why Catholic Italy and Bavaria are fighting on the opposite to the "professed" aims of Roman Catholics in England. The reception of a Japanese envoy by the Pope is another thing that is puzzling faithful followers of the papacy. If only a small part of the stories of Japanese atrocities are true—and all sensible people allow for exaggerations on each side during a war—there should be enough to warrant the Pope refusing friendly greetings with Japan on mere humanitarian grounds. But that consideration never took first place with Roman Catholic leaders. We ought not to forget the way in which the Church backed up the brutalities of Franco's religious armies during the civil war in Spain, and also the extent to which our own Government closed its eyes to them.

The priestly adviser to one of our Catholic journals is very disturbed that their textbooks on moral theology rarely mentions "the possibility of sins through the sense of smell." After all, why shouldn't the nose be a sinful organ?—especially as the great St. Augustine himself mentions temptation through the sense of smell in his "Confessions," and in the Sacrament of Extreme Unction the nose is anointed, God being asked to forgive whatever sin has been committed through smell. Rather nonplussed as to how the nose can sin, our brilliant priest suggests that some people use pleasant scents rather freely! It seems incredible that such balderdash can appear in any journal these days, but we have not plumbed the depth of Catholic stupidity yet.

Mrs. Grundy died during the last war. But she left behind a prim Miss Grundy, who endeavours to carry the banner of the Grundy tradition even in 1942. What a blow it must have been to Miss Grundy when the Government—yes, the *Government*—asked women to go barelegged this summer to save stockings for next winter! And women are now wearing trousers in such numbers as to have ceased to excite even a curious glance or a caty remark. Thus do we see how social needs develop moral ideas, and how little we rely upon the Bible for those moral ideas. Why, the parsons were not even asked about it—and, so far as we know, nobody has raised the question, "What would our Saviour have thought about it?"

The Rev. J. Israelstam, Jewish Minister in Bradford, recently asked the Bradford Education Committee if they would agree to Jewish children leaving school 20 minutes earlier, on two or three days a week, so that the children could have lessons in Hebrew at the Synagogue. The committee refused, as they did not wish to set a precedent, and did not consider it "wise" that instruction of this kind should be allowed to impinge on school time. The objection to "instruction of this kind" was, we understand, inspired by the sectarian nature of the proposed

instruction, which the "wise" committee was not prepared to support. So far, so good.

But one or two points need elucidating. The Jewish request did not contain the usual impertinence associated with Christian sectarian claims—that school premises and public money should be devoted to the sectarian object. Nor could the Bradford Education Committee impress even the pussy-cat with its pretence of making a stand against sectarianism; for the wise men and women of this committee have in recent years violently encouraged sectarianism by applying the "75 per cent." grant abomination, particularly favouring Roman Catholics by so doing.

Perhaps, however, the Bradford Education Committee really do wish to be fair, but are not quite wise enough to understand how. Here's a hint. They have already refused the Jewish request, with justification, if they are against sectarianism in the schools. Now let them withdraw the 75 per cent. subsidy to the Papal crowd, and any others that benefit by it; then rescind the religious instruction arrangements in their own schools, and finally, tell *all* the sects to do their own dopesthing, in their own time, and at their own expense. That would be fair all round. On second thoughts, though, perhaps the committee might know what they should do to be fair—but there is a disease known as "votitis" that has a disastrous effect on some administrators. The Jews, however, being a very minor minority in the city, will be delighted to know that they have an education authority which can be so strictly impartial and so honestly non-sectarian—to the Jews.

The St. Albans campaign for Christianity seems to have petered out, and those who organised the meetings feel that "evangelism in St. Albans will have to be continued in two separate streams." The clergy must deal quite differently with people "who have read widely if not deeply and are accustomed to argue about religion," and people who live in slums. We can quite understand this. Those who are always ready to discuss religion are, as a rule, quite competent to meet the average parson. In fact, God's representative on earth generally gets the worst of it, in spite of divine help. As for slum-dwellers, they can be kept in their place, so to speak, and just told what the Lord wishes. And the threat of Hell, which causes most intelligent people nowadays to laugh, can be made into a very effective weapon with the ignorant people—even with those who don't live in slums. From the reports of what has happened in St. Albans, we are pretty sure that the campaign has utterly failed.

Mr. R. B. Graham, headmaster of Bradford Grammar School, complained in his annual report that secondary education contains too many subjects. "Some day, soon, every subject in the curriculum will need to justify itself, or be ejected," he said at the school speech day.

Although we have not Mr. Graham's exact and detailed knowledge on this matter, we can thoroughly approve the main idea that he expresses. Education (secondary and otherwise) has for too long been a jumble of subjects, crammed into the minds of growing youths, with little regard for the personal aptitudes of pupils, and almost no regard for the idea of developing the young mind to think independently.

But what a calamity it would be for Christianity if Mr. Graham's idea should be adopted, efficiently and honestly, by education authorities! ". . . every subject . . . will need to justify itself, or be ejected." How would religious instruction fare under that rule? For almost half a century we have had an "agreed formula" for the teaching of Christianity, and if any subject has failed to justify itself, surely it is this, for the nation has become less and less Christian as the years have rolled on. To-day we can witness the self-confessed failure of the "Religious Instructionists" in their desperate efforts (reminiscent of the drug taker) to ease the pains by increasing the amount of dope. Happily, in this case, the pains for which the dope is prescribed are just the growing pains of human intellect, and our boys and girls find the dope more objectionable than the pain of a little thinking. Eventually, the thinking becomes pleasurable; the dope, never.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. H.—Your interesting letter will appear in an early issue. Very crowded at the moment.

W. WILLIAMS.—If the Rev. L. Weatherhead really said that "the thief who believes in God is a better man than the honest person who does not believe," it looks as though the W at the beginning of his name should have been an F. But it is good Christian doctrine, none the less.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—A. H. Williams, 3s.  
For distributing "The Freethinker": W. Carroll, 5s.

E. N. WARREN.—"Almost an Autobiography" will be reprinted as soon as possible, as will "Materialism Restated." It is the paper difficulty that is holding things up and getting printers who can undertake the work. Perhaps some of our readers have "contacts" in the printing world that might be able to lend a hand in this matter.

M. CHARLTON.—Pleased the meetings were so successful.

C. B. NAGLE.—No one objects to soldiers and civilians being taught to recognise the quality of the people with whom we are at war; and no one of any consequence advocates "loving" the Germans. We owe that cant word in such a connection to the enervating power of Christianity. But it is a different thing to brutalise the quality of our own men by creating an artificial bloodlust in soldiers during their training. That is what General Paget condemned—although the method did not begin with this war.

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

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

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

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

FOLLOWING the withdrawal of his boy from religious instruction at school, a "Freethinker" reader received an impertinent request from the boy's form master asking that the boy might at least be permitted to attend prayers, as "prayers could in no way harm the boy." The impertinent teacher (he had no right to make the request) must have regretted his Christian boldness when the parent replied:—

"As praying is, to my mind, the most abject form of mental humiliation, the withdrawal necessarily and obviously applies to prayers as well as to religious instruction lessons."

More shots like that from Freethinking parents would make some of the more pious variety of teachers realise that there are two sides at least to every question—even the question of "harmless prayer."

We understand that the Bradford Branch, N.S.S., organised a series of "Popular Science Talks," and that they are proving very successful. We are very pleased to hear it, and we hope the success will continue.

Our business manager informs us that he has had to refuse orders for bound volumes of "The Freethinker" for 1941. We are sorry to hear that is the case, but we are doing what we can to reserve a better supply for 1942. But the paper is in growing demand.

The late Harry Organ of Glasgow, whose recent death left a regrettable blank in the ranks of Glasgow Freethinkers, took a very keen interest in the Freethought movement. He had a long association with the Glasgow Branch N.S.S., where he was well known as an interesting and loyal member, proud of his convictions and principles. Under his will the Branch has received a framed photograph of the late G. W. Foote, books, pamphlets and other Freethought publications, also £5 towards local Branch funds. The literature is appreciated as a very useful addition to the Branch library, and will help perpetuate the memory of one who was always warm and loyal to the Society and its objective.

If the Russian leaders are not on their guard they will find themselves translated into saints before they are dead. At least so far as many Protestants in this country are concerned. A chirrup that better days are dawning comes from a writer in the "Church Times," who discovers that the anti-God campaign has fizzled out and that Stalin is ready to co-operate with the heads of the orthodox Church. What a change!

But there is, of course, no apology from the religious side for the gross lies and misrepresentations that flourished so richly in this country. The Russian revolutionary never did refuse to work with Christians, whether they were leaders or followers. But after the Revolution occurred and when the Revolutionists were fighting for their very existence, against forces partly subsidised by this country, the leaders of the Church—vile as that Church was—were working might and main for the Czarists and for the restoration of the old order. Hence the drastic regulations and the numerous trials and executions that followed conviction. We have a nice collection of books and pamphlets that were published in the country containing stories of the horrors of revolutionary Russia, from establishing community of wives to leaders such as Stalin, luxuriating in filthy palaces, expensive wines, etc., etc.; and one day we may spend a few columns in reviving them as a lesson in history for those who will take it as such.

But this country has cause now to thank Russia for these "purges." It was a clear out, right up to about 1936, of the German "fifth column." France was brought to ruin by it. So was Norway, so were other countries. We had our own fifth column here, and many of these are still at large. But if Russia had not had its purge, even though the revolution had survived the intense German assault, things would have gone very badly for this country. But the old guard of superstition and illicit interests never apologises, at most it substitutes a silent lie for the declared one. Still we are waiting for Christian readers to show they have elements of decency left sufficiently strong to enable them to say: "We were wrong in our judgment. We apologise, and regret that our zeal for the welfare of the Church should have misled us." That is, of course, a great deal to expect. It assumes a loftiness of character which few can display.

An effort is being made to form a branch of the National Secular Society in the Farnham, Surrey, district, and Freethinkers within range, willing to help in the formation are asked to communicate with Professor George Cunelli, "Naini," Echo Barn Lane, Wrocclesham, Farnham, Surrey.

Freethinkers who are motorists must frequently regret that petrol shortage has deprived them of a pleasurable pastime, but they might find a crumb of comfort in the knowledge that the shortage is also robbing superstition of some of its power. In certain parts of the country it is considered to be bad luck if a funeral cortege bends before the whole procession has left the house. This often meant that the cortege had to take a longer route to avoid bending. But now the superstition is bending instead, because petrol economy compels undertakers to choose the shortest route to the cemetery. The curious paths of progress!

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY Executive's Annual Report

NEVER before has the world situation, with its implications with regard to the position of Freethought, so strongly invited a detailed study of the outlook. The rise of a regenerated Russia with its official repudiation of religion as a factor of government, the forced recognition by the Christian world of 400 millions of Chinese, with their massed, and steady repudiation of Christianity and their dominant philosophy of life which places revealed religion in a very subordinate place, the forced recognition of the practical independence of a non-Christian India—the mere uprising of this half of the world's population is in itself of that healthy revolutionary quality that must have a powerful and, we believe, deleterious influence on the status of the Christian religion and of religion in particular.

The world outlook is very tempting, but this is a report of your Executive, and so we must be content with a very brief view of other matters.

In one direction the war has restricted the activities of both the Branches of the Society and of the Executive. Many of our most ardent workers have either joined the Forces or have moved into other areas, most of the halls we were in the habit of hiring for lectures are now in possession of the Government, even obstacles in the way of advertising meetings exist, and all have combined to make the number of meetings arranged from headquarters smaller than usual. The number, however, is still substantial; it stands at 228 against 454. This last figure is again smaller than the pre-war record, but with the return of peace a rapid increase may be expected. There has been no falling off in the number of new members enrolled—the opposite is the case.

This is, as already stated, a report of the Executive as to its activities during the past twelve months, with its statement of moneys received and expended. But it is but proper that the Executive should express its thanks and the thanks of the Society as a whole to those men and women who continue to work loyally and steadfastly, their only reward being that of seeing the great cause for which they labour gaining respect and strength. To this army of workers reform movements in general owe much. It is a form of service that cannot be purchased either by money or public distinction. It still remains true that the world would not have achieved even a moderate degree of development, conditions would not be as good as they are for "you" and "me" were it not for the multitudes of men and women who lead unknown lives and who sleep in unknown graves.

But wherever work has been carried on, even where no direct work has been done, there is ample evidence that the shock of war which has done so much to create a sense of the need for a reshaping of our collective life, the determination so to reorganise life that barbarism and unwarrantable privilege—whether of the Fascist type, or that of the glorification of militarism, or the greed for territorial annexations—shall cease, has directed the attention of multitudes to a re-examination of the influence exerted by the Christian Churches. That attention is naturally unwelcome to religious organisations. Their status was created by an outworn present and past, and they naturally dread the impact of a more enlightened future. Reports from all over the country go to prove that this new ferment is making strongly for the acceptance of ideas for which this Society stands.

During the past year the Executive has received notices of deaths of many members of the Society, as well as of others who were associated with us without becoming members. Detailed recognition of the passing of these men and women is unnecessary here as obituary notices have already, in most cases, appeared in "The Freethinker." But the Executive wishes to place on record its appreciation of the value of the voluntary work done by them. They will have helped to make the world better for their having lived in it.

It will be remembered that just before the last Conference met the offices of "The Freethinker" were completely destroyed. The offices of this Society and of the Secular Society Limited had also suffered much damage from fire and water. Very soon after the Conference suitable premises were found, capable of housing "The Freethinker," the N.S.S. and the Secular Society Limited. It has proven itself to be a change for the better.

A considerable quantity of literature has been distributed by both the N.S.S. and the Secular Society Limited during the year. The plan of sending copies of "The Freethinker" to men and women in the Armed Forces has worked well, particularly when it has been followed up with other literature. Although "The Freethinker" has been in existence for over 60 years, the paper was unknown to many, while others had merely heard of its being. The Christian boycott—which in its British form is one of the meanest and the most dishonest in the world—is in its way effective. It does prevent large numbers becoming acquainted with drastically new ideas concerning religion, while paving the way for those dishonouring compromises for which this land is famous. But the plan just described has worked well. It has brought requests for other literature, many have joined the Society and have become regular subscribers. The doves sent out from the Ark of Reason have found solid ground for the soles of their feet.

Ever since the war commenced your Executive has been engaged in correspondence with the Air Ministry, the Admiralty and the naval authorities concerning the attestation of recruits of their opinions with regard to religion. The legal position is that any man or woman joining any branch of the Armed Services has the right, in answer to the question "What religion?" to say plainly that he has no religion and to describe himself as Atheist or anything else. Yet this right is denied men and women, and often it is only after sheer persistency that a plain, honest answer is set down. For some reason or other, the superior officers of the Air Service are more insistent than the Army on some form of religion being acknowledged, even when doing so involves deliberate lying.

As to the very large number of paid chaplains, we have not yet heard of the case of one of them helping to secure honesty of expression on the part of the recruit. Sometimes officers are foolish enough, or impudent enough, to order the recruit to see a chaplain. Consider the insult of an educated Freethinker being examined by the poor specimens that figure on the pay list as chaplains!

Nevertheless, in this war a very large number have been registered as being without religion of any kind. Officials are becoming used to the fact. Let us hope that all officers will one day realise that a man will not make a worse soldier if he joins the Army with a truth on his lips instead of a lie.

Still, cases of obstinate refusal to grant recruits their legal rights occur frequently, and a great deal of correspondence has been carried on, in order to right a distinct wrong. It is only fair to say that where exact data can be furnished, and our secretary has been able to give the particulars, the matter has been nearly always set right. But it is useless protesting if exact data is not forthcoming. The reason why the name is not always given is that recruits fear victimisation, which often takes the shape of some disagreeable task. Meanness and bigotry have always run hand in hand. Perhaps the new Archbishop of Canterbury, who has had so much to say in praise of liberty and democracy, will publicly order his chaplains to protest against soldiers beginning their careers with a process of lying. On the other hand, he may not.

An extension of this paltry Christian tyranny has now been extended to the Home Guard. Essentially a civic body, church parade has been introduced; and it has been submitted to with that docility common to this country when tyranny operates in the name of liberty. It is being said that when this war is over

the task before us is to de-Hitlerise the younger generation of Germans. It looks as though our need will be to de-parsonise some of the public services.

One means of doing this would be to reorganise our broadcasting system. In the United States the air is free. In Canada there is also a choice of broadcasting. In this country we have Government controlled, chartered monopoly. The air is sacred to the B.B.C. Since the war commenced no body of speakers have used so much the words "liberty," "freedom," "a free people," "Democracy," etc., as those who are permitted to broadcast. Broadcasts to the public are liberally interlarded with full-dressed Christian services, and subjects are taken apparently with no other aim than that of impressing upon the nation the importance of belief in God and a future life. Paid hirelings in the shape of chaplains revel in the wartime lectures on the air. The Roman Church, the Established Church, the Nonconformist Churches and even that primitive "Blood and Fire" gang, the Salvation Army, are all busy. Faked discussions are staged and an easy victory is arranged for the Christian champion. Every device, honest and dishonest, is used, but no clear question of the utility of the Churches or the truthfulness of their teaching is permitted.

In politics the same policy is pursued. Serious criticism of the Government of the day is never permitted. Theories of social reconstruction, new views of family life, both of which subjects have an established literature written by responsible publicists, are never heard. Some time ago the present Prime Minister was refused the use of the microphone because his opinions on India were not agreeable to the then Government. To-day he selects his own time for speaking, and one may assume that others are in the same position he once was. Mr. Churchill was right in asserting a few years ago that the B.B.C. had no right whatever to claim to represent British opinion. That statement is perfectly true to-day. What should be a display-board of current opinion in this country is a machine for suppressing particular opinions and substituting others that are nearing extinction.

It will be remembered that when Russia became our ally the B.B.C., rather than offend by playing the Internationale, dropped all national anthems. Recently it has been driven to rescind its contemptible boycott.

It cannot be denied that such an instrument has the possible power to mis-educate and to fool multitudes of people. When peace comes the B.B.C., as at present constituted, may well be one of the things that lovers of liberty will have to fight. Years ago an attempt was made to induce a number of public men and women to refuse to submit to their speeches being read and amended by the unqualified censors of the B.B.C. Some few acted, probably on their own sense of dignity, but for the mass of publicists the prospect of a nation-wide advertisement, together with a not inconsiderable fee, seems too powerful to resist.

A move in the right direction has been the formation of a Radio Freedom League. This league has no aim other than that of obtaining "Freedom of the Air." It has no party or religious affiliations. It asks that, as in America, there should be liberty of the air for "liberty-loving Britons." Our freedom should manifest something more important than that of freedom to obey.

In the formation of this league your President and Secretary have taken an active part. In view of his commitments in other directions, your President has now resigned from the committee. Mr. Rosetti remains and will continue his useful work for the league.

This country is in the third year of the largest war in history. Its close should bring about a rattling of dry bones and a severe shaking of worn-out customs and obsolete ideas. So far as the Churches are concerned, they have already indicated some of the steps by which they hope to protect their interests. With the connivance of the Board of Education, a plan, or plot, has been formed which aims at restoring the control of the schools which the clergy lost in 1870. At present the clergy can exert no legal

or open power over the appointment of teachers, although a great influence is surreptitiously at work. Religion is not a subject in which teachers have to qualify, nor is the teaching of religion in any school compulsory. If religion is taught it must be in a form that is not characteristic of any Christian sect. Finally, the teaching of religion is outside the scope of school inspectors.

If the arranged plan between the Churches and the Board of Education succeeds, all this will be altered. Teachers may take religion as a qualifying subject, the clergy will dictate the form of religion that is taught, and inspectors will be ordered to see that the teaching of religion is satisfactory. It is easy to foresee the consequences if this plot succeeds. The teacher who does not qualify in religion will stand small chance of securing an appointment; he will stand none at all of promotion. That will mean a poorer type of teacher and less effectively educated pupils. There is no body of clergymen in this country, there never has been a body of clergymen anywhere or at any time that could be trusted to act with fairness or honesty where Christian interests are concerned. No amount of vague talk from the Board of Education about the final settlement of the Education question should hide this fact. Nor can one believe that our Education Ministers are so foolish as to be blind to the truth of what has been said. It is to the shame of Members of Parliament that no effective voice has been raised in Parliament against a move that 50 years ago would have brought discredit upon the Government. If this Government-eun-Church plot succeeds it will put back education in this country for a generation. There is indeed no such thing as an education problem for the country to solve. There is only a religious one, and the just plan here is to confine the secular State to its proper task and leave the Churches to secure converts and supporters by legitimate ways—if they can.

It is good to note that teachers' Associations are beginning to show alarm at the threat to their independence and to the welfare of the schools. The quality of both education and of the schools' staffs under Church control may be gathered from any reliable history of this country. For more than two generations the clergy have been—educationally—held at bay. It has been left for a Government which owes its continued existence to the war to take advantage of the situation and join with the clergy to strike a blow at the effectiveness of our elementary school policy. Common decency should have prevented such a manoeuvre. But where religious and political interests combine, justice does not usually flourish.

The Executive suggests, not merely to avowed Freethinkers, but also to all who believe that religion is something that should lie outside the scope of government, should avail themselves of the existing law by withdrawing their children from religious instruction. That is the existing right of every parent or guardian. No reason for so doing need be given. No reason should be given. A note to the head teacher is enough. The fear of their children suffering by being withdrawn is, we are convinced, certainly in large centres of population, largely a myth. Even if there were any substance for such fears, the withdrawal of a small proportion of children would be enough to prevent "persecution." Nor is it quite clear that to teach children at an early age the value of mental independence, and the importance of opinion, is likely to do anything but good.

The possibility of a rapid growth of Freethinking was never so obvious as it is to-day. As already noted, the close alliance we have with Russia and China—the first with a Government that is avowedly non-religious and the latter with a people mainly secularistic in their outlook, should be an important factor in the minds of thoughtful men and women. These two great nations numbering over 600 millions—and with both of whom the religious factor is certain to weaken, must exert an influence on the rest of the world. And with India offering 250 millions of non-Christians, the situation offers an interesting field for reasonable speculation as to the future.

But the fight will be a hard one. In this country we have the honour of representing a section—we might almost say the spearhead—of that great army that for a century and a quarter at least has been in the van of the great fight for Freethought. We are proud that the National Secular Society still holds that place.

Freethought began when some very daring individual timidly expressed a doubt of the power or the existence of the gods. In this respect the development of thought follows broadly the lines of the development of animal forms. It is easy enough for the naturalist to group existing animals according to their common and predominant characteristics. It is when the scientist turns to the search for origins, to fix the beginnings of a new type, that difficulties begin.

So with the development of Freethought. Revolutionary ideas do not begin with a blare of trumpets or an invitation to public display. They exist in the study before they appear in the streets. They commence quietly with but slight variations from the common forms of thought. Gradually the thought gets more definite, more independent in expression, and its advocacy shifts from the study to the market-place. What was the whispered heresy of the few becomes the open and everyday expression of the many; the expression of ideas becomes safe, even respectable.

At that point the reformer moves on to more urgent work, and to face a more dangerous situation. He has trodden a path with bleeding feet, but it is a solid road for those who follow him. The man who first hurled defiance at the gods is unknown. He will ever remain unknown. But the fruits of his defiance, the justification of his heresy, is to be found in a deeper, clearer thought and in the promise of better things to come. It is our privilege to be the trustees of this great Freethought tradition; it should be our first duty to see that this tradition is neither abused nor betrayed.

(Report of the Conference will appear in next issue.)

## SAVE LEAH

### I.

TIME was early morning in a small remote township of California. From scattered residences came inhabitants, centring on one house outside the village.

A timber-built structure, dilapidated and paintless, it was ornamented by Biblical passages scrawled and daubed without regard for neatness—prominence being the aim of the signwriter.

Chiefly they were monitory texts warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Others enjoined trust in God.

The assembling crowd was not noisy, but determined, trampling the weedy garden to mass round the door.

There was a pause, as often occurs while a throng assimilates its diverse units and coalesces them for the purpose in hand, synchronising varied ideas into one to get momentum for the final effort.

In that preparative wait conversation rose from murmurs to loudness. Listeners knew as much as speakers the common aim of this congregating, but reiteration of the causes and intent strengthened their resolution, knitting the individual consciousness into the single mind which is necessary for concerted mob action.

### II.

"None of 'em has been seen for 24 hours."

"That poor girl isn't likely to be seen again unless something's done to save her."

"Old Nathan won't have anything done."

"He told everybody who called she was in God's hands."

"God won't do anything if people won't."

"It's wicked; tempting Providence."

"Inviting Divine anger instead of help."

"Nathan says they're praying."

"Prayer's well enough, but God doesn't expect us to stand by shiftless the while."

"I blame the mother, as she doesn't take action."

"You know she's a poor weak creature."

"Entirely under her husband's thumb."

"He's as obstinate as a mule."

"And shows far less sense."

"The girl wants the best attention."

"She ought to've had it from the beginning."

"It's a shame and scandal. Leah's a nice girl, only she has the wrong parents."

"Pneumonia isn't to be cured the way they go about it."

"Double pneumonia, it is."

"Hopeless unless the child's had proper attention from the first."

"Instead of which they pray over her."

"Don't call that praying what Nathan and his wife do. Sheer mockery of God."

"A nurse'd do more good'n all their prayers."

"Nursing's what Leah needed, but Nathan wouldn't hear of it."

"Raved like a mad thing when Dr. Stone suggested a nurse."

"That's what he is—mad."

"Sure enough."

"When Dr. Stone said she ought to be taken to hospital Nathan carried on as if the doctor'd insulted him."

"So we heard. Said God'd given Leah to him and nobody should take her away."

"She ought've been taken away at first."

"By rights she should've been taken away from such parents years ago."

"Parents! These aren't parents."

"So we've got to act now."

"And quickly, too."

"We ought've run Nathan out of town years ago."

"No mistake about it."

"We may yet save Leah, which we couldn't do if they'd gone."

"Yesterday Nathan told Dr. Stone not to call again."

"Nearly turned him out of the house."

"Said his child was at the feet of God for his disposal, as were her parents."

"Disgusting!"

"Worse! Criminal!"

"He deserves thrashing."

"He looks like getting it."

"I'm itching to get at him."

"What a time that ambulance is!"

### III.

The crowd's attitude was becoming threatening, but seemed to be held back by watchfulness along the dusty road, with oft repeated queries.

"When'll that ambulance come?"

"Why doesn't it come?"

Suddenly there was a movement on the edge of the throng.

Exclamations of "The ambulance!" were followed by low, harsh cheers as the vehicle drew up at the gate. The driver leaped out of his seat and two men from the back.

People at the front cried "Blacksmith! Where's the blacksmith?"

The smith stepped forward swinging his sledge. A single blow demolished the door. Men and women surged into the big living-room.

They saw on a low couch a young girl in her nightdress, her face pale and drawn, her large eyes bright with pain and fear.

On his knees at her head a gaunt man shuffled round, throwing out his hands and crying, indignantly, resentful:—

"Go away! Our baby's on the altar and we're praying. Nothing more can be done. Human effort's useless. If God

wishes her to die, then his will be done."

His words were gasped and jerked out, for with a rain of blows he was swept aside, kicked and trampled on.

A woman kneeling at the foot of the bed shrank against the wall, moaning in terror.

The ambulance men forced their way in. A dozen eager hands lifted the girl on to the stretcher. This was borne outside and into the ambulance, which drove away to the nearest town hospital.

After cheers the crowd slowly dispersed, with backward menacing looks, muttering, curses and fist-shaking at the despoiled shack.

#### IV.

At his first appearance in his buggy next morning Dr. Stone was stopped by people clamant for news of Leah.

"No," responded the doctor gravely. "Too late. Everything was done that could be, but she died in the night."

A. R. W.

The following lines are inscribed on a picture of an Auto-da-fé:—

#### AUTO-DA-FE

Almighty God looked down on this,

He heard the crackle and the hiss

Of mounting flames from faggot fire,

It soothed His "sadistic" ire!

Gloating hounds of God stood by

To watch their tortured victim die,

And gazing down from Heaven's Gate

God fed and fanned the fires of hate!

This ghoulisn gang of profiteers

In death and sin and blood and tears

Would, if their former power return,

Still ply their trade and ban and burn!

Shall such things be? Or shall men say

Too long has this Foul Thing held sway!

It now shall pay its bloody score

And blight this tortured earth no more!

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### HITLER AND JESUS

Sir,—I suggest that you write an editorial for "The Freethinker" on "The Hitlerism of Jesus."

The precepts of Jesus regarding loving one's neighbour, sharing material things, etc., are agreeable to our best feelings, and are the basis of the average man's tacit acceptance of Christianity. But the weakness of Jesus on the principle of freedom of thought is glaring. This is a most serious thing: it is of paramount importance to the understanding of our present distresses.

Jesus's wholesale damning of those who thought differently from him indicates clearly what he would have done had he achieved temporal power—it was left to his Holy Roman Church to demonstrate that for us. It cannot be too strongly stressed that this aspect of Jesus's teaching can be no guide for a better new world.

My father (a clergyman) and I (an atheist) lived together in great harmony, but if he had been Jesus things would have been very different—I should have been "viper and serpent" and kicked out of the home.

There is a great and deep similarity between certain parts of the outlooks of Jesus and Hitler, and it is quite understandable that the Roman Church continues to count the latter gentleman as one of her sons.

The fundamental evils of Christianity are not due, as the Christian apologist is so fond of reiterating, to failure of Christians to follow Jesus—just the reverse!

Tolerance in the realm of thought was unknown to Jesus—and this unmistakable sign of fanaticism is the most sinister part of the make-up of the Christian of to-day.—Yours, etc.,

CANDID.

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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, 7-9, Mr. E. C. SAPHIN; Sunday, 3-0, various speakers.

###### Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), 11-0, Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.—A Policy for Post-War Education (1).

##### COUNTRY

###### Indoor

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

###### Outdoor

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

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

Burnley (Market), Sunday, 7-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

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

Edinburgh N.S.S. Branch (The Mount), Sunday, 7-30, a Lecture.

Higham, Thursday (June 11), 7-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Huncoast, Saturday, 7-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

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

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

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

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