

THE FREETHINKER

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Our Freedom

WE are a free people. That has been said before; but it is worth repeating since one of our leaders (Mr. Duff Cooper) has publicly stated that we are the greatest people that ever lived. Only a controlling modesty could have prevented his presenting himself as a sample from bulk. We hope that so modest a champion will, for the sake of Britain, be rewarded by a succession of twins and triplets. Yet in this free land of ours papers may be suppressed and public meetings prohibited without open trial before or after. Our people do not know just where freedom lies. (The last word is written without prejudice.) But our freedom exists. It has been stated, with all the impressive rotundity of a High Court decision, that an Englishman's house is his castle. In that house he may say and write what he pleases; but outside—that is another question. The legal decision ran that though the rain may enter the poor man's house, though the wind may enter, the greatest in the land may not enter without the poor man's permission. Let us be fair to the "greatest." They have never shown the slightest desire to "swap" domiciles. They are content to envy from afar.

We have touched but the rim of a great subject. In this great country religion is free. Any man save the King may survey the vast procession of gods and adopt whichever one he pleases, defying the remainder like a democratic Ajax defying the lightning. The free-born Englishman may live without religion and, dead, be buried without a parson. He may be married without a medicine-man operating, and when children are born to him they need not be sprinkled with magical water by an official magician.

These be great things and rare privileges, but they are not purchased without price. The English citizen, born to freedom, is not compelled to attend church and shout "Hallelujah" at its ceremonies, but that does not prevent his being compelled to pay for the upkeep of the religion he does not believe in. He has the freedom of an Englishman to disbelieve in the religion of the Church and Chapel, but he is nevertheless compelled to pay a share of the

taxes that should be paid by these said houses of God. His freedom extends to not allowing his children to have religious teaching, but there is no allowance for this in the rates he has to pay. The free-born Englishman has the right to dismiss every Christian belief in one blast of withering contempt, but if he offends the susceptibilities of a hot-headed, narrow-minded Christian he may be sent to prison for blasphemy. The disbelief in God cannot be prevented legally, but if one is inclined to a political career custom decrees that he must keep it dark and see that his complete disbelief is not known. If he happens to be what the Christian calls "aggressive" he will not be permitted to rise in the public service. No religious objection is raised to hypocrisy, but honesty of thought and speech is dead against the tradition of the old school tie, good form, political acumen, high society and Church tradition. If one happens to hunger after a journalistic career he may write about what he pleases, attack quite a number of admitted evils, but he must beware of attacking religious beliefs. If he breaks the rules he will offend the big advertisers and his genuine Christian readers. I emphasise these facts because in this country any god, other than the Christian one, seems as well able as one can expect to look after himself. It is the Christian god who requires a police force, blasphemy laws, boycott and humbug to protect him against the attack of unbelievers.

With these exceptions, and one or two others that might be named, we are a free people. As the music-hall humorist has it, we can all do as we like provided we do as we are told.

To be quite just, there is one part of English law and one part of English custom that is rather complimentary to the non-believer. On entering a prison as a resident one of the questions asked is "What religion?" The answer given by the guest, on compulsion, is properly labelled and the newcomer duly receives "spiritual" consolation till such time as he resumes his normal life. Every branch of the Christian religion is catered for; but if you say you have no religion, or that you are an Atheist, the officials are lost. There is no arrangement for dealing with them. Their visits are so rare that the Prison Commissioners have never been called upon to deal with the matter. The news of the arrival of one who does not believe in "gawd" spreads among the inmates, and the man who is doing a "stretch" for burglary will agree that if people did not believe in a "gawd" no one's property would be safe.

The one matter on which the law compliments the Atheist is with regard to legal testimony. In all cases where an oath is concerned, and where, apparently, a Christian cannot be trusted to tell the truth without feeling enforced by the anger of God if he tells a lie, the testimony of a Freethinker may be accepted on his word of honour. In his case a plain, non-religious "I promise to tell the truth" is held to be sufficient. In spite of the

Christian insistence upon his own weakness, I see no reason why the Christian, in this matter at least, should not rise to the level of the unbeliever. I have known many Christians who were quite truthful.

Freedom on the Air

No society but the greatest that has ever existed (for proof see Mr. Duff Cooper's speech—and portrait) could have developed the religious policy of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Its influence enters into the majority of homes and is felt in most places of public resort. At home we turn it on as we turn the tap when we want water. Its influence is greatest where the intellectual quality is lowest. "It was on the wireless" has become a phrase which to the more unenlightened section of the community is second only to "God saith——"

Now, the B.B.C. is not a Government institution. More conveniently, it is an instrument of the Government and a mouthpiece for certain forms of Christianity. No citizen is compelled to subscribe to it; but neither is he compelled to use the electric light or gas, or send his letters through the post. We are a free people, and, being a free people, our form of freedom is adapted to ourselves, while we are in turn carefully adapted to the form of freedom we are permitted to have. The greatest people that the world has ever seen cannot be fooled—at least, not if they know it.

The B.B.C. is not exactly a Government institution. It is merely a convenient instrument for, in politics, voicing the opinion of the Government of the day, and in religion keeping Christianity well before the people. The Conservatives submit to Liberals using the air because it looks forward to a time when they will enjoy the pleasure of limiting the other Party. The Socialist remains silent because one day he may use the same machinery and the same methods. A few years ago Mr. Churchill was refused "the air" when he wished to speak on India. To-day Mr. Churchill is on top and "the other fellow" is silenced. The British broadcasting system is markedly different from the policy of the United States, where many different opinions may be heard. But from the glorious days of King George III. the Americans have had a very poor conception of how to work a democracy.

The controller of the religious section of the B.B.C.—a well-paid job—is the Rev. Dr. Welch. Addressing a meeting of the National Sunday School Union, he said (one could feel the tears of rapture in his eyes): "In no country in the world are such splendid opportunities given to the Churches as are given by the B.B.C. in this country," and, like the buccaneer of old gloating over the number of cargoes he had stolen and the number of people he had compelled to walk the plank, Dr. Welch proceeded to point out that there were provided by the B.B.C. special Friday morning services for children in school, there were broadcasts to public schools, secondary schools, direct addresses on religion, etc., etc. We may add there are also the 7-55 terror, the religious lessons given during the "Children's Hour," the intrusion of religious propaganda into what are called "historical lectures," courses of lectures that are apparently devised for the express purpose of introducing religion, the letting loose of intellectual crooks such as the Government-paid roving padre, arranged discussions in which prepared doubts are given by obvious believers to another believer playing the part of a sceptic,

with the Christian having the last and, of course, victorious answer, religious epilogues, etc., etc. I have likened Dr. Welch to the old-time buccaneer. I think I ought to apologise—to the buccaneer. His was a quite straightforward piece of blackguardism. He never claimed that he was cutting throats for the benefit of his victims, or sinking ships for the spiritual profit of the owners.

The work of the religious section of the B.B.C., says Dr. Welch, is educational. Of course it is. So was the education of the famous university run by Fagin. No one could insist more than that gentleman on his students studying the "lay-out," on being careful with those with whom they had business, and the care that must be taken in collecting handkerchiefs, watches and snuff-boxes. In the earlier stages of the B.B.C. there was no attempt to cater for much more than the Church of England and one or two of the more "respectable," or acceptable, dissenting bodies. People took so little interest in these services that the B.B.C. announced that unless more appreciation of the services was shown they might be abandoned. The clergy took the hint. Church and chapel attendants were "advised" to write in expressing their approval of the services. The order was obeyed, and a shower of letters of the same quality and origin that enables the Lord's Day Observance to snow under the Government with thousands of letters from Sabbatarians who object to a free Sunday followed. These letters and telegrams cost a lot of money, but they do the trick.

I may now reveal a secret. Knowing how many there were who objected to this use of the air for sectarian propaganda, I created, many years ago, a "snowball" campaign by inducing Freethinkers to express their opinion on this matter. The number of letters sent to me was greater than I had dared to hope. The Rev. Dick Sheppard was then a person of influence with the B.B.C. Driven to say something he declared, in sheer desperation, that the number of protests sent in did not exceed 200. He was bombarded by shoals of letters of protest. Very foolishly he explained that there had been a slip of the pen. The figure he had intended to give was 2,000. Dick Sheppard should have been made of stronger stuff. Some might have believed the figures before the explanation.

There is now a society that aims at getting established freedom on the air. We wish it success and trust it will never be corrupted by dishonouring compromises. But the organisation will have to attack very strong entrenchments of vested interests and fight through the powerful barbed wire of religious lying.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

RURAL LIFE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

IN medieval centuries uncultivated soil was widespread in Southern Britain. The commons provided pasturage for the sheep and cattle indispensable as food for the general community. Waste land abounded in regions such as the then largely undrained fens of Cambridge, Lincoln and Norfolk, where the vast array of bird life, including several species no longer resident in our island, was a conspicuous feature. In addition to the nutritious pasture, reeds flourished luxuriantly which were utilised for thatching houses and protecting hay and corn ricks from the rain.

With its wealth of woodland scenery and wide expanses of open country, earlier England presented a far more picturesque appearance than in our industrial age. The enormous sites now

covered with bricks and mortar in such cities as Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester still remained much as they were in Celtic and Saxon times. Moreover, in several instances, the forests had been enlarged by the Crown and subjected to onerous laws.

These royal encroachments on the customary rights of the agricultural population to pannage and the pollarding of trees in the woodlands proved deservedly unpopular, and as the years rolled by the King sometimes deemed it advisable to grant concessions. Royal forest extensions were the cause of serious complaints, and their boundaries were reduced both by Henry III. and his son, Edward I. The wide range of these royal preserves may be realised from a perusal of Professor Neilson's essay, "Medieval Agrarian Society in its Prime," in the "Cambridge Economic History" (University Press, 1941). "Windsor forest," she writes, "once included all Berkshire, parts of Hampshire and extended into Surrey as far south as Guildford. Long struggles took place over the Surrey portions of the forest; perambulations were ordered but not made by Edward I.; when made they were disregarded; the authenticity of records was disputed." Indeed, Surrey was not relieved of its burden until the early 14th century. Subsequently to Edward's reign, some 60 to 70 forests remained in England. Apparently Wiltshire and Hampshire were the most afforested counties, while the important forests of the Duchy of Lancaster ranged from Lancashire into Derbyshire and Yorks. These enclosures seemingly congested the rural population, for country districts now nearly deserted are shown in the medieval manorial records to have contained numerous inhabitants.

The forest laws were ferocious and, although slightly mitigated, were still oppressive. Red and fallow deer enjoyed special protection. The wild boar, the roebuck and the hare were almost sacred. We are assured that: "Lesser beasts of the chase and warren were the coney, foxes and other 'vermin.' Cats were of two kinds, those big as a wolf and almost formed as a leopard, and the common wild cats which were not favourites. 'If any beast hath the devil's spirit in him it is the cat, both wild and tame.' The forest law protected the food and refuges of its beasts by forbidding the cutting of any green wood that casts a shadow, by enjoining the distribution of browsewood to feed the deer in winter time, by excluding undesirable animals, to whom the deer were said to object, like goats and sometimes sheep, from entry into the forest region."

The more open clearings of the wastelands were converted into stud-farms and grazing grounds for the King's horses, while the commoners might only allow their best beasts to crop these spaces "lest the King's mares should breed with those of low estate." Also a roll of honour was kept for the steeds that had most distinguished themselves in the monarch's service.

The forests formed a valuable part of the King's possessions, and special officers were appointed as wardens, rangers and verderers, while the revenues of the forest courts were substantial. Poaching was frequent, and the peasantry were not the only offenders. Thus, the heavy fines imposed upon transgressors amounted to a considerable sum. Again, the royal foresters seriously incommoded the rustic community by encroaching on their common rights, their wood gathering and other customs on the verge of the King's domain.

Vaccaries with their large herds of cows formed a striking feature of this period. These were frequently maintained in the Crown lands, and Bagshot, Eversley and Savernake furnished outstanding examples. Lancashire was also notable for dairy-farming and the production of hides. Pannage for pigs also yielded high rents, both to the Crown and the manorial lords. Yet, as goats were very seldom allowed to enter the forests and the welfare of the deer was ever the primary princely concern, it appears probable that the dairy-farming, with its kindred avocations, was mostly confined to the boundaries of the royal woodlands. Far more important than cow-keeping was the sheep-

breeder's art, for these woolly quadrupeds played a double part in agrarian life. Their castings were splendid fertilisers for the soil, and in many countries the villein was constrained to fold his sheep over the lords' land. Then, and long later, wool was England's leading export, and in pastoral regions sheep-farming was the chief occupation. Indeed: "The famous English wool was so superior to that of the rest of Europe as to make it essential to the fine cloth manufacturers of Flanders and Italy. . . . The top grades of English export wool came from Shropshire and Herefordshire, followed by the best of the Lindsey and Cotswold wools. The Midland wools formed a middle grade, and the chalk downlands of Southern England produced coarser qualities, though all were exported except those of Devon and Cornwall."

In Saxon days England possessed large flocks of sheep, but this branch of agriculture increased greatly in the 12th century, partly owing to improved agrarian economy, but mainly in consequence of the growing demands of the Flemish weavers. This accretion continued, and nearly 2,000 stone of wool was annually produced at Fontaines Abbey alone. But woollen export was not restricted to monastic and manorial activity, for it is recorded that at one village in Wiltshire the peasantry possessed nearly 4,000 sheep, while the Glastonbury Abbey flock totalled 670 only.

The wide domestic utilities of rural life were either produced locally or supplied by craftsmen who wandered from place to place. Cottage furnishings were primitive. Dr. Neilson states that: "All lay on pallets of straw or straw mattresses or rough mats; pillows, even at a comparatively late date, were 'meet only for women in childbed,' chairs, chests and stools were home-made or occasionally bought from others. Lamps were made of bits of wick burning in oil, but more often the peasant used tallow candles or, very occasionally, beeswax; cups and jugs were roughly made from wood and earthenware; spoons and knives were used, but not forks; trenchers of thick bread served to hold meat."

Superior cookery was reserved to the more opulent classes. Salted meat, fish, bread, berries and other frugal foods were the peasants' simple repasts washed down by copious potations of home-brewed beer when barley was available, or that supplied by the village inn. This exhilarating beverage then cost little, and tea and coffee were unknown. The doctor was seldom seen in rustic surroundings and ailments were cured or alleviated by the ministrations of the wise women of the village skilled in herbal and other traditional treatment. Dr. Neilson assures us that there was far greater rural intercourse with distant urban areas than is usually conceded by historians to medieval times. The constant transport of commodities from Hampshire to Colchester, London, Cambridge, St. Ives and Ipswich denote the efficiency of the carting services of the period. Therefore, "the old picture of the static, self-contained medieval village must be modified, and place must be made for a more active agrarian life." Yet, at least in England, the 13th century, although a prosperous period for the landholder and the Church, left the toiling peasantry stranded in the mire of poverty and oppression.

T. F. PALMER.

JESUS AS WAR LEADER

(Being a sermon preached by the Most Highly Reverend Bishop of Moloch in the Church of Blood and Destruction in London on Easter Sunday, 1942, upon the text: "There Shall be Wars and Rumours of Wars." Reprinted by the special request of his faithful congregation of pseudo-Christians and approved by the then Government under Regulation 8,654,721 k.)

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHERN,—To-day, the Feast of the Resurrection, reminds us—does it not and should it not?—of the highly-Christian duty of inflicting pain, suffering and death upon

our fellow-men if they happen, through no fault of theirs but by the curse of their Maker, to be born in certain countries outside our glorious British Empire.

Against the stupendous fact of Resurrection what does it matter if we kill such enemy-vermin as Germans, Italians, Japanese, Rumanians, Hungarians, Slovaks and Finns, as well as incidental Frenchmen or accidental neutrals, since they will all rise again? Rise again, indeed—but not, we hope and trust, until the war is over! For any premature Christian resurrection would be excessively awkward from the war effort point of view and raise grave man-power problems. I feel sure that our God, the Lord of blood, destruction and war, has that situation well in hand and will not permit any enemy “after three days” to rise from the dead. It would make the war supremely ridiculous instead of being the sublime spectacle it is. Believe me, my brethren, the Deity does not perform the miracle of Resurrection for the purpose of raising a smile, but for the purpose of raising the happy and holy dead who are at peace.

If our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came on earth again, can we doubt that he would be a most enthusiastic supporter of the present war? “I am come not to bring peace but a sword,” he would declare as before, and slightly improving another of his words, he would warn neutrals to come in on our side by saying, “Those who do not take the sword shall perish by the sword.” (It was because their mothers and themselves were unarmed, while the soldiers of King Herod had prepared, that those baby boys, the Holy Innocents, were slaughtered—a lesson to us all of the folly and wickedness of disarmament.) Jesus would tell us parables of the man who hid his talent in a napkin instead of putting his shirt into War Savings. As a sportsman and an English gentleman (for in the truest and best sense of those words that is exactly what Our Dear Lord ever was!) Jesus would have been keenly interested in our aeroplanes “scoring direct hits,” for “it is better to give than to receive.” He who “withdrew himself from the multitude” would have understood and sympathised with many “withdrawals” from the enemy and would have rebuked those unpatriotic British citizens who criticise Singapore and similar happenings.

Above all, we may be very certain that Jesus would have issued some adequate explanation of those unfortunate words—now happily almost forgotten, like the lies of yesterday’s politicians—“Love your enemies. Pray for them.” Ignorant folk, like Quakers and Freethinkers, think Jesus literally meant what he said. But I cannot too strongly point out that Jesus was addressing the Jews of his day about the Romans—not English folk of to-day about Germans, Japanese and Italians. Just as the laws of Parliament often need explaining by lawyers and Courts to show that they don’t mean what they say, so every saying by Jesus needs explaining away by the clergy and the Church. If Jesus were here, he would point out that he was merely indulging in Oriental exaggeration, as many scholarly critics have suggested, and his disclaimer would be much appreciated by our great Prime Minister as a real contribution towards “winning the war.” How he would rebuke such pestilential critics as Mr. McGovern and Mr. Maxton, who have suggested that the war is being fought for greed and not for Christianity and freedom!

Some egregious Pacifists are so avid of peace that they fondly imagine that in a better and future life there will be no more pain, suffering and war. These foolish folk have not read Holy Writ: “There was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the Dragon and the Dragon and his angels fought.” Milton described finely the fall of Satan or the Dragon:—

“Him the Almighty Power

Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky

To bottomless perdition there to dwell

In adamant chains and penal fire.”

You perceive that just as Satan was defeated of old, so will Hitler be; and if war broke out in Heaven in ancient time,

why should it not do so again, giving our splendid soldiers, sailors and airmen fresh work and more glory, winning celestial medals and titles? What an inspiring thought, my brethren, that there will be bigger and better wars hereafter and that death is not the end but a mere transfer to another “front” and to more “Active Service”!

What in our national life would give Jesus especial pleasure (as it does all of us, does it not?) is the very important action of the Government in conferring the title of Lord Lang of Lambeth upon our dear former Archbishop of Canterbury. The inability of that great and good man to live on a pension of £1,500 and a King’s house—“behold such are in King’s houses”—would have appealed to One who had nowhere to lay his head and who knew poverty so intimately. As a sensitive rhetorician Jesus would have liked the alliteration of “Lord Lang of Lambeth,” and equally he would have appreciated the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Temple’s, distinction between “killing” and “murder” (which gave much Christian comfort to English widows and orphans made so by German air raids) as being not only in harmony with the Common Law of England and a whole series of judicial decisions, but also in accordance with the Sixth Commandment and the spirit of love in the Gospels.

Speaking of those much-misinterpreted Books, the Gospels, you, my dearly-beloved Brethren, realise the importance now of never taking the words of Jesus therein recorded in a merely literal sense. They need interpreting and altering by critics, scholars, theologians and other learned men. They were not intended to be understood by ordinary minds or by the vulgar to whom they were spoken, and that perhaps is why they were addressed to the vulgar: “that hearing they might not understand.” For instance, “Blessed are the peacemakers” can hardly apply to a peace offensive in war-time, for that is covered by Defence Regulations. “They shall be called the children of God” is not applicable either, for they are called quislings and fifth columnists, and very properly so. To-day, Jesus would hate and denounce pacifists and peacemongers—indeed, it would be his bounden duty to do so by law—and would realise the folly of the doctrine of non-resistance to evil. Following His Blessed Example who died for others, let us take care that others die for us. Then millions of enemy dead may proudly say: “We died for the British Empire” on the Day of Resurrection.

With regard to Warship Weeks and the “Dig for Victory” campaigns, would not Jesus have been first and foremost in these great causes? Sea supremacy, you recall, was first established when he ruled the waves, as Britain does to-day, on the Sea of Galilee. In agriculture he would have cursed the barren fig-tree, nowadays an allotment not properly cultivated. Next to Lord Woolton, no public benefactor has ever provided such rations as Christ with the loaves and fishes. To-day he would direct the Gadarene pigs into the Ministry of Food instead of into the sea. And his ability to cause a fish to bring tax-money in its mouth is an inspiration to us all when we fill up our income-tax returns for Sir Kingsley Wood, teaching us that we, like the fish, must contribute our little mite to the State Treasury.

The views of Jesus on the “Home Front” would be sound. He would not have called for “Equality of Sacrifice” like many misguided and superficial chatters, for he did not expect you and me to die on the Cross for others as he did. He would have bidden folk, especially our splendid women—here let me pause to pay tribute to the noble work women are doing in war so well suited to the tenderness and gentleness of their natures and their natural rôle as guardians of life!—to “leave all” father and mothers, husbands and children, and “follow Him” by getting into war-work and making munitions at high rates of wages. I feel sure he would preach patriotism with the vehement enthusiasm and zeal of the late Horatio Bottomley in the last war. He would uphold the Government and would be a fervent admirer of such men as Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison, Lord Halifax (who would return the compliment, I feel sure), Brendan

Bracken and, above all, our glorious Winston Churchill, whom He would recognise, as we all do (and indeed, almost must, by Regulation 2 D), as beyond criticism and reproach.

Finally brethren—I have said enough to show that we must all realise that the words and conduct of Our Blessed Lord, though they appear at first sight to favour such sentimental qualities as pity, gentleness, tenderness, self-sacrifice, peace and concord between mankind, are really capable of a more robust interpretation in accordance with the fighting spirit of our day. Only a slight adjustment (and regard for the welfare of the Church) is necessary to show how emphatically Jesus was really in favour of wars in general and this war in particular. If, in spite of the Church's teaching, some of Christ's words still seem so definite and dogmatic as to be incapable of meaning their contradictory opposite, there is comfort in reflecting that he was miserably ill-educated and probably misreported, not one of his Apostles being able to write Pitman's shorthand.

Let us pray—and continue to pray—on our fellow-men until God gives us the Victory in his own good time. That Victory which it is in his power to give us to-day, but which in his inscrutable and ineffable wisdom he withholds until we have a preponderance of guns, munitions, tanks and men, over the enemy! Once we have attained complete command of the air, complete command of the sea and complete command of the land, we may safely, in humble faith, leave the issue in the hands of Him Who is the Only Disposer of Victory.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

IS THE UNIVERSE EXPANDING?

READERS of the controversy between Mr. Chapman Cohen and Sir Arthur Eddington, which may be found in that fascinating book, "God and the Universe," will be aware that the eminent astronomer is one of the leading scientists still to be found on the Christian side of the theological fence. I think that many Freethinkers (who will, naturally, not agree with his general philosophic outlook) will want to know a little more about the practical and theoretical background on which the astronomer bases his belief in the co-relationships between philosophy, religion and science, and I think that the new Pelican Book (now priced 9d.), which reprints his "The Expanding Universe," is worth consideration. Starting from the generally known fact that the distant nebulae are receding from the Solar System, and that the recession appears to become greater with the distance, Sir Arthur Eddington works out a thoroughly coherent and logical system, involving the theories of Einstein and Planck. But there is one vital point which is nowhere answered, and this, I think, must be the Freethinker's answer to Sir Arthur Eddington's general claims. Professor H. Levy, in that masterpiece of scientific exposition, "The Universe of Science," points out that we are sometimes inclined to think that a mathematical paradox making itself obvious in the general theory of the universe means that there is something peculiar in the working of the universe, instead of something peculiar in our mathematical theory. Now, Eddington's principle of the recession of the nebulae is based on spectroscopic observations. Certain shifts in the spectra of these nebulae are shifts which, if observed within the Solar System, would mean a recession. But in the immense distances of space, can we be sure that the general laws of spectroscopy apply? I would say that we cannot be sure, and rather than embark on theorising of the paradoxical order, it would be better to make sure that the bases of our theories are firm and sound.

One word more. Some readers may think that it is foolish to waste time on such matters as this in the midst of a terrible war. But is it? The philosophical foundation on which we aim to build our lives remains important no matter what happens to the world. Art, science, religious thought—these are things which have perennial interest and importance. It matters not what is going

on outside (although, of course, this does not excuse us from the duty of playing our part in practical life); we must still try to work out our mental lives in a way satisfactory to ourselves; and so, even to those busy with wartime duties, I say that ninepence spent on Eddington's book, and a few hours spent on thinking about it will be worth while.

S. H.

ACID DROPS

WE venture on a prophecy. The Churches and the religious press have been either silent or they have joined—not very loudly—in the general praise of Russia. Not one of them, any more than the general press, has had the decency to apologise for the avalanche of lying and misrepresentation, which made the crusade of Baldwin and Chamberlain and other interests use Hitler as a bastion against the spread of the Russian system in Western Europe, and so contribute—unknowingly, we grant—to the conquest of Europe by the German hordes. That piece of history is now as plain to the man in the street as it is to the average Member of Parliament.

But the Churches cannot permit a country of which the Government is avowedly Atheistic, and which at most cannot be expected to help the Churches in Russia, to be held up to admiration by this country *when the war is over*. Already the Roman Catholic papers are setting an example. In a recent issue, the "Catholic Herald," in a leading article, says: "It is high time something effectively was done to counterbalance the ridiculous adulation of the Soviet and all things Russian which is still sweeping the country and affecting apparently nearly all classes." Similar articles are appearing in other directions, and once Germany is definitely on the road to an uncompromising defeat we shall find the lead of the "Catholic Herald" followed by many. Perhaps we ought not to call this a prophecy. It is too obvious.

We have quite a number of books issued from 1919 onward depicting the licentious "orgies" of the Russian leaders, the extravagant and costly jewels—once belonging to the Czarina—worn by Lenin's wife, the practice of the Community of wives, etc., etc., which would probably fetch a price for reprinting as ammunition for the Christian crusade which will set in.

Of course, none of the criticisms of Russia, not even the praise for Russia as a fighting machine, ever touches the real lesson that Russia has taught the world. That lesson is, and we say not for the first time, that Russia has taught the world how much can be done in a single generation to transform the life of a people. Whether the Russian transformation is for better or worse is quite beside the point. In 20 years we could transform the dwelling houses of the "poor" of this country. We could so arrange it that old age would lose most of its terrors and the healthy ambitions of youth be strengthened beyond our—present—wildest dreams. We could ban poverty and have our schools from the lowest to the highest in the land open to all. It is the possibility of this that gives to the Russian experiment its tremendous importance. Whether we follow the Russian plan or not is quite immaterial. To fix on the Russian plan in itself is the policy of those who fear change and hate the social equality of man.

Major Cazalet, M.P.—a Roman Catholic, we fancy—who was recently in Russia, says what every informed person knows, that in Russia religion is free under the constitution. He adds:—

"In practice this is true, but from a Christian point of view—and this is an important 'but'—there exists in Russia a mere handful of people, and these the more elderly, who have read the Bible or heard about God or Christianity. The Christian religion as we know it plays no more important part in the lives of the majority of the Russians than does the Mohammedan or Buddhist religion here."

We wish these Christians could agree upon this point. One moment we hear that Christianity in Russia is dead, the other that Atheism is rapidly dying out.

We imagine the truth lies between the statements. We believe that the overwhelming mass of the new generation are not interested in either the Christian or any other religion. They have seen what a country can become minus religion, and they can know from their elders what Russia was like as a Christian country. It is this that makes the re-establishment of the Church so improbable as to be nearly impossible. As to the mere handful of people who have read the Bible or have heard about God and Christianity, it is too ridiculous for consideration. We have heard from Christians and non-Christians of the crusade against Christianity and the Bible that has been carried on. It would indeed be a miracle if a crusade against Christianity and God could be carried on and no one hear about the subject of the agitation.

Some of the greatest in the land are willing to learn. In announcing that the tea ration—the same as that of adults—for children under five would be discontinued, said that it never ought to have been allowed, and he was "informed" that young children do not take tea. Now that Lord Woolton has discovered that babies in arms are not brought up on tea, someone should inform him that the inmates of nurseries do not drink whisky or chew tobacco. Lord Woolton is evidently willing to learn.

Huddersfield Education Committee is the latest of these bodies to demonstrate how much it needs itself some of the education it is supposed to purvey to others. The committee agreed to provide special financial arrangements for parents of Catholic children who decide, on religious grounds, to send their children to a Roman Catholic college. The Town Council have approved the proposal. Councillor F. Wrigley pointed out that the Council would be unfairly subsidising one section of the public if they agreed to the proposal, and would lay themselves open to claims for a similar privilege from other denominations; but the thick skulls of hard-headed pious Northern councillors cannot be penetrated by the formula "Fair Play," when that other formula, "Catholic Vote," is floating in the atmosphere. A goodly number of our English councillors are more terrified of the Catholic vote than they are of Nazi bombers. Yet the Catholic vote cannot represent more than one-eighth of the total electorate. But it is a solid vote and works to order.

The Rev. A. R. Wallace, headmaster of Sherborne, says that the religion of the public school is "thinly disguised Confucianism." That is a compliment to the "public schools," but rather a "come-down" for Confucianism." We daresay that the educated Chinese will take the insult, as they have taken so many others from the white people, with a smile.

For quick decisions there is nothing like a Government department. Many months ago an order was given in a Government department that black-out curtains should be drawn at 6 p.m. This was done, and the rule enforced until two or three weeks ago, with the Government shrieking for economy in lighting. According to Mrs. Tate, M.P., it was a woman who brought about a change. Our Government departments may be expensive, but they get things done.

It has been announced that motor-car journeys for the purpose of attending church will qualify for petrol under the new regulations from July 1. As "The Austin Magazine" remarks, "... it makes the sacrifice of 'basic' sound somewhat trivial." Of course, it is typical of the Church that it should seek, or even accept, a privilege which is denied all other organisations. The Church has always believed in sacrifice—by, and of, other institutions. This constant pandering to the Church on the part of Government departments and Cabinet Ministers, can easily do considerable harm to the war effort. The concession provides a splendid loophole for religious twisters (and there are many), but, worst of all, the concession is bad in principle and unfair to the great mass of motorists who are loyally accepting, in the national interest, an unpalatable situation.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is very wide awake where his professional interests are concerned. He recently made known to the world that "without definite religious faith to sustain it

any educational system tends of necessity to become Atheistic." We agree. But it is only another way of saying that unless children are caught very young, given definite, unexplainable doctrines, and controlled by teachers who will, where religion is concerned, stand no talking back, inevitably they will become Atheists.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was one of the original partners in the plot, with the Board of Education, to repeal that section of the Education Act which forbade religious teaching that was characteristic of a particular sect. The new plan is to make a teacher's efficiency in teaching a definite religious part of the qualification for a certificate, and making it the duty of inspectors to see that the *proper* religion is being well rubbed into children. Which really gives rise to another possibility. If it is right to force religion on children at the expense of the State, why may the State not see to it that adults do not lose it in after years? That is, of course, what the Churches are after. They must have the adult if they are to survive, and they cannot have the adult unless they are allowed to manipulate the child while it is too young to understand quite the nature of the religion they are being taught.

But all is not going well. The Roman Catholics by all the saints that decorate the truthful calendar of the "great lying Church," swear they will keep their own schools under their own control. All they ask is that the State shall pay for them. And as the Church has organised heaven and scheduled the population of hell, it seems to be only logical for them to seek control of the earth. After all, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and the Church has always claimed to be the chief tax collector for God Almighty.

Now the Church of England is jibbing. The Church controls about 900 schools, among which number there is not one that—other things equal—is better than the majority of the State schools, while they are not nearly so good either in staff or products. Churchmen are complaining, and the Archbishop, Dr. Temple, is explaining that he has no intention of giving up Church schools. What he wants is more money for his schools and some guarantee that many of those who escape his sectarian net, as children, may be roped in when they come out in the world.

Finally a cloud, at present not much bigger than a man's hand, appears on the horizon. The Government is beginning to look to the future, and Governments are more concerned about their future than they are about the future of the people. The Board of Education is being a little more careful in the "push." And the teachers are beginning to grumble—audibly. They realise that it means poorer schools, poorer education, and a return of the wicked old days when the clergy bossed such schools as existed. What is needed now is for the general public to lift up its voice. The papers have been well worked by the other side. Now let the public, apart from the Church brigades, play their part.

For the Churches the Archbishop summed up the situation well. No Atheist could have done it better. He said that without definite religious faith to sustain it any system tends of necessity to become an Atheistic system. In other words, if you cannot get religion firmly planted before childhood comes to an end, the whole tendency of life and knowledge is to make for Atheism. It has never been put in a neater form.

At the York Convocation the Bishop of Wakefield said that the influence of the Church was to-day lower than it had been in the memory of those now living. We have said the same thing many times. No man of first-class intelligence and even a moderate degree of intellectual honesty can to-day preach Christianity. The Church is bound to have either clever men who are not honest or honest men who are not clever. But one cannot have men of marked ability and intellectual sincerity in the pulpit to-day.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. M. HATTIE.—Thanks for cuttings. We are feeling well enough, but could do with a holiday for a week or two. Have not had a break since the war began.

E. D. SIDE.—Quotations will be useful. Hope you are keeping well. When in London give us a call.

E. DUNCAN.—Your information is not quite correct. Mr. Cohen neither "invited" nor "challenged" Canon Lyttleton to a debate. It was the Canon who asked for a discussion in the pages of "The Freethinker." This was agreed to, and the discussion was conducted with perfect good will on either side. The discussion was afterwards printed, but has been out of print for years. It ran to about 150 pages. We are afraid there is no prospect of its being reprinted in these days of paper shortage.

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

MR. W. HENRY, a subscriber to "The Freethinker" of nearly six months, writes to express his appreciation of this journal. He is particularly interested in the articles and notes that bring the principles of Freethought into touch with current events. In the course of his letter he puts a question, thus: "I should be pleased to know what was your attitude to the Russian revolution in its earliest stages." We might have replied, "Substantially what it is to-day." But a better reply is to repeat what was said in "Views and Opinions" in the issue for 20th January, 1918. We will add only that what follows was written when the revolutionists were accused of every crime in the calendar by the English Press, with some specially filthy ones by religious writers. Here it is:—

"It is for these reasons that the one event of profound significance in this War is the Russian revolution and its outcome. This may have been a set-back to the Allies' military operations; the duty of an army is to beat its opponent, and anything that stops this is properly enough regarded as a disaster. But with this aspect we are not concerned. In the Russian revolution, and, for the first time, a great idea has come definitely and commandingly to the front. It has already borne fruit. It has drawn from President Wilson the clearest and finest expression of war aims yet published, and one on behalf of which, so long as it is fairly interpreted, soldiers abroad and civilians at home, may fight without misgiving. For the first time in this War all the peoples engaged therein have a clear-cut idea before them. Are we to continue to live in a world dominated by the glamour of 'possessions,' of alliances cemented not by mutual esteem and confidence, but by distrust of others, or are we to work for a new world that shall take the form of a community of nations in which the presence of a standing army shall serve as a reproach, if not as an actual disgrace? Whatever be the outcome of Russia's present plight, she has set this ideal before the world. And nothing can undo that. It is the 1789 French Revolution over again. Monarchical and Christian Europe hurled itself against the French people. Every country—our own included—strove by wars and

repressive laws to prevent the ideas of 1789 gaining entrance. But with only very partial success. The Revolution might be suppressed at home, and much of its advance lost, but the ideas lived on. They were all over Europe; they were persecuted, but they defied annihilation. The Freethinking revolutionary leaders of Russia are doing to-day for the world what, over a century ago, France did for Europe. These leaders may be false to their own ideals, the revolution may be crushed, but the work it has already done will remain and fructify."

We commend to our readers, particularly to those who are Christians or semi-Christians, a new pamphlet, "There Are No Christians," by C. G. L. Du Cann. For the rest, Freethinkers will find the pamphlet useful for their friends and acquaintances who are wavering. The essay is clear and precise, as is usual with Mr. Du Cann's writings, with a definite target before the author and a definite issue raised for the reader. Its persuasive quality may do what more "violent" writing might fail to effect. The pamphlet is well produced. The price is 4d.; postage 1d. extra.

It is not often that we praise a Bishop. But that is the fault of the bishops. Still, the Bishop of Bradford deserves a compliment for what he said recently concerning the foolishness of that ultra-Vansittartism which finds expressions that all Germans are alike, and the true Germans are represented by the present governing gang. Large numbers of Germans who were bitterly opposed to Fascism escaped from Germany. Many thousands of them were killed for opposing Hitlerism. Many more thousands were sent to concentration camps, and one may safely say that for every one who escaped, was killed, or sent to a concentration camp, there was at least another one—probably more—who were at heart anti-Hitler. And we are constantly making appeals to Germans to be ready for an open revolt when the time comes. We chronicle cases of sabotage in Germany, as well as in annexed territory. The unprecedented cruelty and bestiality of the German army, and at least most of the German military leaders, ought not to hide or drown the facts named. They have behaved like criminals, and should be treated as criminals when the war is over, but the reconstruction of Europe will be the easier if we have enough sense to make the most of the better elements in present enemy countries.

Mr. W. Carroll, in the course of an interesting letter to us, says: "On the religious side, as our squadron is on 'operations,' we are spared the mental degradation of the 'church parade.' The N.C.O. in charge merely asks for 'volunteers for church parade,' and, although most of the chaps would be insulted if you were to suggest that they weren't acting like Christians, the appeal for volunteers merely meets with a strong silence. Occasionally a subtle press gang element, emanating from the padre's office, I presume, is at work, and you find your name on 'orders' to attend the church parade. This is very rare, however, on squadron work. After all, if there is a 'sweep' over enemy territory on Sunday, then we have to get the 'kites' in the air on Sunday. This seven-day week is a 'poor do' for the padre, and to save his face (if that is possible) he organises lectures, discussions, groups and recreational work generally. Ah, well, I think if we had forgotten to mobilise the clergy in the first place we might have progressed as far, for instance, as the Godless Russians have done. Still, with God on our side, you never know how we'll end up."

The joint plot of the Board of Education and the Churches to capture the school has not proceeded as smoothly as was expected. Teachers are beginning to face the fact that if successful, the plot will mean dishonesty towards children, and parson rule for the teachers. Here is a letter—one of many which have appeared—taken from a recent issue of "The Schoolmaster":—

"Sir,—The letters appearing in 'The Schoolmaster' pulling me to pieces are typical of the usual trend of religious discussion. A course of Plato for me (the value of which I admit) and the fact that Mr. Mohan has never heard of Dr. Couchoud, Edouard Dujardin, J. M. Robertson, Coulange, are merely red herrings. What we are trying to

find is what we, as teachers, have to teach as Christianity. As a philosophy it is a vague collection of pre-Christian ethics of certain Jewish sects. As a religion it is impossible to assess its value as it ranges from the super-mysticism of the Ultra Montane Catholics to the semi-agnosticism of the Modernists and Unitarians. Where then do we stand?

Regarding the Old Testament. We are to teach it—but not as fact, yet we must not deny it or suggest it is mere myth. Is it not obvious that our silence will tacitly admit that we accept it as truth? Incidentally, how much of the Testament is now abandoned by the Churches? Also, have we reached finality?

Considering the New Testament, we are faced with deeper problems. Must we teach the mystic story of Bethlehem? Or, have Christians now abandoned this part of the Bible also? Hermes, too, was born (of Maia) in a cave, and the stable cave myth is a fundamental in the birth ritual of Krishnaism. It has its roots in the Winter Solstice (Sun Worship).

Can I teach my children that the Crucifixion is a common feature in all religions of Fertility and Vegetation and that we have no greater reason for accepting it as true in the case of Christ than in that of Attis, Adonis and others? In any case, must we teach the ghastly doctrine of the dying son appeasing the anthropomorphic Father God's wrath?

In referring to the Resurrection, can I draw attention to the Dionysos legend, or emphasise the cave burial as part of the ancient rites associated with the Vernal Equinox (Sun and Fertility worship)? Or, finally, can I mention that the Ascension is a prominent feature in all religions having their roots in Sun and Fertility worship, e.g. Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Krishna, Adonis, Heracles, etc.? Or, have the Churches also abandoned the Crucifixion Resurrection and Ascension theories? Possibly we could teach sun and sex worship in all its entirety.

A moment's thought to the open-minded will show that we, as teachers, are wanted for one purpose only. Our task is to uphold a dying religion. Without us the Churches know they have no to-morrow. Our task is to blind our intellects, irrespective of our supreme trust—honesty to our children.

Heath, Cardiff.

H. L. DAVIS,

As we have said many times, the teachers have the game in their hands if they will only stand firm. They know what rubbish the religious talk is. Let them act on it.

Mr. J. W. Barker, the energetic secretary of the Kingston Branch, N.S.S., is willing to help form a branch of the Society, or open up outdoor meetings in Richmond, Twickenham, Isleworth or Sheen. Will others prepared to co-operate communicate with Mr. Barker at 100, Walton Road, East Molesey, Surrey.

“THE RISE OF CHRISTENDOM”

I.

WHILE writing “Antiqua Mater,” Edwin Johnson took for granted—more or less—the current chronology. It did not come within his purpose then to question orthodox dates, but it is very obvious to any reader of this work that he was by no means satisfied with a good deal of what Christians call “Church” history—and certainly with a great deal of what Christians call “literal” interpretations of that history.

In dealing with the witness of Tacitus, he took for granted also the authenticity of the “Annals,” but received his first big shock when he read Ross’ “Tacitus and Bracciolini”—that able and still unanswered book which, though not the first, proved that Christian forgers had been at work with their usual thoroughness, carrying with them the credulous believers in both the Christian and Rationalist camps. But it was the learned Father Hardouin (1646-1729), referred to by Cardinal Newman in the “Grammar of Assent,” who first showed Johnson the way to “truth and light,” as he came afterwards to believe; and he

embodied his theories in a new work, “The Rise of Christendom.”

Hardouin must have been a remarkable man, for in his “Prolegomena,” written in his old age after a lifetime of study, he contends that the whole of the Christian Fathers and most of the Latin and Greek classics were forgeries of the 13th and 14th centuries. I do not know if there is a French or English translation of his work, which from its complete title, appears to have been written in Latin. If there is not, it can easily be seen why we hear so little of his book these days. When it appeared, the foremost scholars of the day came to the rescue of orthodoxy, and possibly secured the same kind of easy “victory” which some people assume these days—dismissing a mass of solid argument with a snap of the fingers, so to speak. Hardouin went so far as to claim that even the Greek Septuagint was a forgery, and this was too much for his superiors. He had to retract—on his knees, like Galileo.

In “God and His Book,” the late W. Stewart Ross devotes a few pages to Hardouin and gives a number of instances of the way in which people accepted as genuine old writings, modern spurious ones, and please let it be remembered, these people were not obscure nobodies but eminent scholars and specialists. And it should cause no surprise to readers to learn that quite a number of “genuine and divine Gospels” purporting to be almost as old as “our Lord,” have been easily palmed off on an unsuspecting public within the last 50 years. It is very difficult indeed to make some people believe that these “Holy” Gospels were written without Divine Inspiration by men eager for money or publicity.

Hardouin described with a wealth of argument the way in which the Basilians and Benedictines sat in their “scriptoria” with “6th, 7th, 8th, 9th or 10th century ink and parchments, and with corresponding alphabets, to write works in the names of imaginary authors.” And he called “the producers of the medieval Church literature a conspiracy, a wicked and impious crew of Atheists, whose virus had infected the Missal even, and the Breviary.”

Johnson insists that Hardouin “as a critic of the Church literature of vast experience has never been refuted, and that his critique, in effect, cuts at the roots of the claim to antiquity on behalf of the Church.” Whether this is right, one would have to study the Jesuit’s own arguments and then read those of his critics; but in the few notices I have read of him in modern Encyclopedias there is no hint that he was “refuted.” And it is remarkable that “the Benedictine literary historians of 1754 have treated his memory with respect.”

The work of Hardouin appears to have settled any doubts Johnson may have had about the wholesale forgery of Church “history.” But he went further. He claimed that both Jewish and Christian history were more or less stolen from the Mahomedans, whose Koran came before the Old and New Testament. The Koran was made up somewhere about the 10th century, the Old Testament about the 11th, and the New Testament about the 12th century; and he did not hesitate to cross swords with Gibbon, complaining that that great historian “wrote too much on the faith of representations at second-hand.” Gibbon was, in fact, “guided by great Church collectors like Tillemont; he verified the references given him; he detected and exposed some falsehoods, but the rest he treated as genuine narrative.” I suspect that most people will find it difficult to agree with Johnson, whose arguments, all the same, should not be too lightly dismissed. That forgery was rampant throughout the Christian Church is a fact too solidly based to be denied, however extravagantly put.

We know very little of the history of the Arabs much before the 8th or 9th centuries, when mosques began to be built, and Johnson puts forward the theory that it was not till then that “a people akin to the Arabs formed themselves into a new religious organisation” under their Muslim masters. These

were the "Sephardim," whose early "literary activity was based on the traditions of the Arabians." It is now being increasingly admitted that Hebrew, the sacred language of the Sephardim, was, as Johnson put it, "the daughter of the Arabic." It was in fact a language made up, like Esperanto, from surrounding languages and dialects. Johnson ridicules the Rabbinical claims to great antiquity for the Jews. (He says, "Scholars should have taken their stand at the time of Maimonides and strictly confined themselves to the question how much did he and his compeers know of the origins of his people.") It would prove very interesting to find an answer to this question.

Certainly it is not easy to find genuine history in the story of the Jewish race for centuries before Maimonides. Legends and miracles abound, of course, and a great deal of what we know appears to come from Christian sources—but who vouches for these?

The great landmark in the history of the Synagogue was, according to Johnson, Maimonides (d. 1205), "their true law-giver," after whose time "a new world began." It was then that the real foundation of Christianity began to be formed, and "the proud theory of a State or Church of God, a Christian Empire, founded in the reign of Augustus and destined to survive all other empires, the theory so long and so massively supported by the great sacerdotal Orders, is a theory not merely unsupported by facts, but massively refuted by them."

H. CUTNER.

NEW ATTITUDE IN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

(Continued from page 248)

THE development of "Modern Religion" into a "Political Religion" which "is to make plain the way to the world theocracy," and the details given in this connection would, if taken alone, lead to the impression that the germ of it is sociological rather than spiritual. There are obvious dangers in identifying even the most advanced religious ideas with any particular social, political or international reforms. To do so adds bitterness to controversial questions by setting up an extramundane authority to which both sides may lay a claim. Perhaps all that ought to be asked of "political religion" is to maintain such freedom for the discussion of such questions as will keep that side of them alight. Any religious system or Church which ceases to do this deserves to be ignored. It was the failure of the Church of Rome which led to the Reformation. The political conscience of the individual revolted against the conscience of the Church.

Whatever may be thought of his position, there can be no question that the author of "God the Invisible King" has faced the great and growing difficulties in connection with the orthodox conception of God as Creator, Sustainer and Controller of the Universe, the infinite and all pervading Spirit of Power, wisdom and love.¹ Hitherto the attempts to meet them have been mostly made on the lines of reconciliation between God and Nature. This is the theory which has been strained to its utmost limits to keep pace with the march of Science. Does a science reveal to us a world governed by invariable law? Then it is this kind of law which has been ordained by God the Creator. Must the theory of special creation give way to that of evolution and all its waste of species? Then it is God the Creator who selected this method for the production of life. When the Churches had fully realised their powerlessness to combat all that is implied by the term "evolution" they adopted it as part of the Divine

¹ It must be regarded as a sign of the times that these difficulties found expression in a play, "The Unknown," by Mr. Somerset Maugham—produced in 1920—the plot of which centred round the "moral character of God." The play was widely discussed at the time, and a special performance was given, to which the clergy were invited.

Scheme, and this process of adaptation of the Divine Ideal to the changing conditions of human knowledge goes on all along the line. Meanwhile, the theory of Natural Selection loses none of its theological unpopularity.

The new attitude marks a new departure in meeting questions of this kind. For ideas of identification and reconciliation between God and Nature it substitutes those of severance and dissociation. By relinquishing the belief that God must be conceived of as responsible for all that happens in the world and in human life, it disperses into nothingness that feeling of antagonism towards the Deity which is undoubtedly in the air nowadays. The attitude of challenge is not absent even among the classes which are least given to habits of abstract thought. "Don't talk to me about God," exclaimed a quite uneducated working woman, during the war, to a friend who was pressing upon her the claims of religion, "if there were a God above he wouldn't let this dreadful war go on."

Or, as an example at the opposite end of the scale, take the following passage from "L'Anneau d'Améthyste" (Anatole France).

"Monsieur Bergeret" and some friends, among them a doctor, are discussing the subject of immortality:—

"... Docteur, répondit M. Bergeret, je pense à ce sujet comme Madame D. . . . Comme elle était malade . . . son curé l'alla voir et lui parla de la vie future. Elle répondit, avec une petite moue dédaigneuse, qu'elle se défiait de l'autre monde. Vous m'assurez, dit-elle, que celui qui l'a fait est le même qui a fait ce monde-ci. Je ne sais que trop comment il travaille.

"Eh bien! docteur, j'ai, pour le moins, autant de méfiance qu'en avait Madame D."

This sense of divine injustice ceases to exist if the God idea is associated with all that is in the nature of human ideals. If this position seems, as some contend, only a glorified form of Positivism, it must be remembered how largely Hebrew religion, as well as the Christianity which grew out of it, is permeated by the idea of God in man.

"And God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him."

But whatever name is given to it, if this changed aspect in religious thought could be accepted as one which brings mankind nearer to an unseen power, it might prove a help in restoring to religious faith some of the comfort which has gone out of it. The time has indeed gone by for the short-sighted view that suffering is due to sin.

"... in the realm of nature," writes Huxley, in "Evolution and Ethics," "ignorance is punished just as severely as wilful sin." The problem of suffering, merited or unmerited, does not originate in human life. Scientific observation of the instincts implanted by nature, not only to serve the vital ends of preservation and reproduction of species, but occasionally for something much less than this (take the case of the cat which kills its prey slowly for the pleasure of it), shows an indifference to suffering as such which profoundly shocks the finer instincts of humanity—if, that is, we are asked to regard this indifference as part of a divine scheme of creation. In this relation it is difficult to understand the attitude of theologians in clinging to the theory of special creation. They apparently fail to see what a big load they are keeping on their shoulders.

A notable exception to this attitude, by a clergyman, is to be found in the courageous utterance of the widely-known Rev. F. W. Robertson, who was—perhaps more instinctively than intentionally—a pioneer of Modernism in religion. The following quotations are taken from a letter, written more than a generation ago, by him to a correspondent who had drawn his attention to a passage in one of his own Addresses. It will be

seen from this letter that the problem of reconciling the God of Nature with the God of Worship is no new one. He writes:—

"The passage 'To believe in God is the most difficult thing in the world' is, I think, true. By God, I mean . . . not a first cause, nor a machinist, Creator Mundi, but one whose name is love immanent to us, meaning good and not evil, and having a right to our supreme adoration and intelligence. . . . There may be a First Cause, intelligent, designing, etc. . . . but *so far* I only believe in Him as I believe in electricity, gravitation, or any other cause which assuredly has a good deal to do with my destiny. Believe in the sense of Trust, I do not. . . . Nay, I am ready to acknowledge, that of the intellectual conception of God as Creator, Cause, Immanent Life, Lord of the World, etc., I know nothing. . . . I can affirm the contradictory, as well as the assertion, of any of these theories. . . . My God is not the philosopher's God; and in the most vigorous graspings of the intellect, I am often conscious of most losing hold of the Lord of Right and Love.

"The evidence of goodness and wisdom in the external world is very questionable, in some moods at least. I found a caterpillar the other day writhing in anguish, and perforated by a dozen maggots, which had come from the eggs of an ichneumon fly. It penetrates the skin of a living animal leaves its eggs, and the grubs eat the creature alive by degrees. Is that goodness? Wonderful contrivance, certainly; but I should not accuse the understanding of anyone who preferred to believe in the 'fate' of the Stoics necessitating this, rather than an Omnipotent Will."

The then Bishop of London, commenting in the "Daily Express" on Mr. Arnold Bennett's article in the "My Religion" series, writes:—

"The beauty of nature has never been explained yet, except on the hypothesis that it is the result of a beautiful Mind which meant to plan a pleasant home for those who were to be created. The fact that animals feed upon one another does not disprove this, for every naturalist will tell us that the animal creation is a happy one."

If the Bishop would study facts—presumably vouched for by naturalists—he might find less ground for his cheerful optimism.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that about the same time when the Bishop of London's letter appeared in the "Daily Express," there was an account in "The Times" of a discourse given by Sir J. Bland-Sutton, in which he told of a fish with powerful teeth which when swallowed alive (the method by which many animals "feed upon one another") gnaws its way out and escapes that way.

The attitude of religious thought which is indicated here takes its stand on the old principle that religion is "born of the spirit," but at the same time it recognises that there are many progressive aspects of religious faith to be reckoned with if it is not to fall behind in the race of human ideals. In the introduction to "Appearance and Reality," Mr. Bradley points out that this progressive element belongs also to metaphysical conceptions and problems. He writes:—

" . . . I . . . deny entirely that the problems have not altered. The assertion is about as true and about as false as would be a statement that human nature has not changed." And, in a subsequent passage:—

"For whether there is progress or not, at all events there is change, and the changed minds of each generation will require a difference in what has to satisfy their intellect."

"The phase of definition," writes Mr. Wells in "God the Invisible King," "is manifestly at hand." Necessary as this phase may be from time to time, to get rid of the rustiness of ideas that have become merely conventional, any attempts to frame new conceptions of Deity show the futility of language when it falls short of poetic symbolism.

"The highest and most ineffable truths," says a writer in the Hibbert Journal, "can never be translated into the prose of proposition, because by that translation their subtle spirit would be lost."²

The question remains. Will a new attitude prove a help in getting rid of some of the difficulties which have become associated with our religious symbolism, and in reading into it new meanings? Will it help people to forgive God?³

If the main argument of what has been said or quoted here were to be summed up, it points to a conception of Deity not as manifested in material force—which is, apparently, blind in its relations to life—but as spiritual force, the power working in and through humanity.

MAUD SIMON.

[The above article shows that as regards conceptions of Deity, the same problems are repeating themselves during the present war. The writer is, however, not re-entering the same "lists."

[An article headed "The Idea of God: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion," was contributed by Dean Matthews, now Dean of St. Paul's, to "An Outline of Modern Knowledge," published about ten years ago, but that covers different ground.]

² January, 1922: "Logic and the Imagination."

³ The question, much quoted at the time, "But who is going to forgive God?" was asked by one of the characters in "The Unknown."

DID JESUS CHRIST EVER LIVE?

THOSE who are interested in discovering whether a real person is behind the impossible Jesus Christ of the Christian Churches will be interested in reading "Jesus Not a Myth," by Mr. A. D. Howell Smith (Watts and Co., 15s.). The position of the author is not well indicated by the title, since he writes as a Freethinker, and Christians may be misled by it. But he does believe that a personality lies behind the myth. In the attempt to substantiate this the reader will find a running criticism of those who see in Christianity nothing more than an attempt by the Christian Church to turn a myth into an historic reality, and his own conclusion that there was a real Jesus who was taken as the central figure for the historic Christian religion. The book should be interesting to both the supporters of an historic Christ, and they who, we think rightly, believe that if the Jesus Christ of the Churches never existed, the whole thing reduces itself to a question of purely literary interest. On the part of the author it is only fair to say that he does not dodge difficulties. Whether he surmounts them is another question that every reader must decide for himself. Mr. Smith argues well, but in our judgment the verdict must be "Not Proven."

In any case, Mr. Howell Smith's plea is not for the God Incarnate on which Christianity is founded, but for some human person who was used as a figurehead by the Christian Church, or more correctly, for those who laid the foundations of the Christian Church. At its best, he argues for the existence of a brotherhood that used the ethical teacher as a lay figure. In carrying out this suggestion Mr. Smith leaves out many considerations which we consider of weight, and which make it impossible for the Christian brotherhood to have been struck by the superiority of what Christians have come to call "the great teacher." There was nothing new about the moral platitudes that are put into the mouth of Jesus. That they did not impress the people is shown by the fact that they who, hypothetically, knew him at first hand were not impressed by him to a greater extent than a Christian monomaniac achieves the task of getting a handful of followers. That the end of the world was believed to be approaching among this brotherhood is clear from the New Testament, and with that in view, there is hardly likely to be any attraction in a mere ethical teaching; and there is always the fact fronting us with any

people who are not at a very low culture stage, ethical, or as the Church came to call "mere morality," worldly teaching must receive some attention.

Mr. Smith thinks the Gospels "may enshrine many personal memories." Why? That they are given as personal memories is beside the point. Sufficient allowance is not made for the ease with which legends are, in certain conditions; handed down as personal memories. Most of the histories of Saviour gods are handed down as though they were more or less personal memories. There was a life written of Archbishop Beckett some years ago in which the writer cited personal testimonies to the miracles that occurred at his grave, and which were parallel to the Jesus legends, even to raising a man from the dead; and it is worth remembering how near we came to have the Mons Angels handed down as an actual occurrence, and how hard some of our clergy—including the late Bishop of London—fought for it. The fact that the Jesus legends are found in connection with other god-men is enough to discredit the whole account, including the originality of a non-social ethic such as the New Testament gives us.

Mr. Howell Smith concludes that what Jesus claimed to be we shall never be sure. A propagandistic "mystic" (a word that so often stands for rationalised nonsense), he says, "such as Asia not infrequently produces will talk of himself and his work in language that elsewhere may sound ridiculous." Quite so, but the propagandistic mystics of the type of Jesus do often talk in a ridiculous manner.

It is interesting to trace the history of anything, even of a delusion. But we are quite sure that no investigation will ever be able to prove the existence of a Christ who, 2,000 years ago, gained followers by repeating current moral commonplaces. That Jesus went preaching to the poor is one of those sayings that embody a fallacy. Wandering preachers usually do preach to the poor. It is their surest ground for converts.

Still, we must repeat that Mr. Howell Smith has written an interesting book and has crammed into his 200 pages a large amount of reading. C. C.

CORRESPONDENCE

HITLER AND JESUS

SIR.—There is such a thing as overstating a case. In your issue of June 7 "Candid" refers to "Jesus's wholesale damning of those who thought differently from him." If "Candid" will look up the Gospels and find out what sort of things Jesus really "damned" people for, he will make some interesting discoveries. They include calling a brother a fool (Matt. v. 22); not forgiving trespasses (vi. 15); "blasphemy against the Spirit" in the sense of attributing beneficent cures to diabolic agency (xii. 31-32); hypocrisy (xxiii.); indifference to the wants of others (xxv. 31-46); but not, generally speaking, mere difference of opinion. There are passages which condemn disbelief as such, but one of these (Mark xvi. 16) occurs in a section which is missing from the oldest manuscripts, and the others (John iii. 18, 36, etc.) occur in the Fourth Gospel, which is generally admitted to give a very different picture of Jesus from the three first. It seems, then, that Jesus (or, if we prefer the myth theory, the people who first used that name as a peg on which to hang their propaganda) should fairly be acquitted of this charge.

That the Church from the second century (when the fourth Gospel and the appendix to Mark were written) laid increasing emphasis on theological orthodoxy, and became in the end revoltingly intolerant, is notorious. But we must not judge the beginning by the end.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

PROPAGANDA

SIR.—Having read the excellent report of the conference, I feel you ought to know what is going on in this district for a number of years now. I have been selling eight copies of "Freethinker" every week. Recently I ventured to take a

meeting room. I have now a Forum which meets every Sunday evening at 7 p.m. I am practically alone in this home of sickly nonconformity. My ideal is, of course, to start a branch of the N.S.S. Could anyone help? I should be glad to hear from those with opportunity. I might say I could provide hospitality for any speaker who might be good enough to come. In the meantime I shall keep the fort intact and no retreat!—Yours, etc.,

H. B. FLANDERS.

7, Hubert Street,
Salendine Nook,
Huddersfield, Yorks.

"THE CHURCH AND ARMY MORALITY"

SIR.—What does the Archdeacon of Beaconsfield, who is so much concerned with the sexual morality of the army, think of the prevalence of pederasty among the clergy? Prosecutions for this offence are not published, I believe, in war-time, but during the past few years the number of clergymen convicted (the maximum sentence was five years' penal servitude) has been out of all proportion to the incidence of cases among other sections of the community. Most of these cases were especially deplorable in that they were committed with young boys.—Yours, etc.,

E. S.

IS GOD DEAF?

You speak to me of God, and say:

"In him we move and live;

Our every breath, our food, our all,

'Tis God to us doth give."

Why should pale sickness, racking pain,

Hard toil, be still our lot?

You say that God can cure it all—

Tell me, why does he not? —E. W.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead), 11-0, Mr. J. G. LUPTON; Parliament Hill Fields, 3-0, Mr. J. G. LUPTON.

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, RENNIE SMITH, B.Sc.: "The German Religious Front—Implications and Consequences."

COUNTRY

Indoor

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

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Blackburn (Market Place), Sunday, 6-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

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

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