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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Nose of Wax

I THINK it was with reference to the epistle of St. James that Martin Luther used the expression "a nose of wax." Who St. James was no one appears to know with any certainty. "James" is the equivalent of Jacob; and Jacobs were as plentiful as Joshuas—to which crowd belonged "Jesus." One commentator remarks that James, or Jacob, "is said" to have died A.D. 62, and thoughtfully remarks that the epistle must have been written before that date. But we do not quite see the necessity of this; for if Jacob, or James, was, as some think, the brother of Jesus, and as that member of the family got into this world without the assistance of an earthly father, there seems nothing very surprising in another member of the family writing an "epistle" after he was dead. Both Joshua-cum-Jesus and Jacob-cum-James were members of a very peculiar family and out-of-the-way doings may have run in the blood.

Anyway, Luther's phrase might be applied to a large part of the New Testament—and the Old. Luther meant by his phrase that anyone might make what he pleased of the Epistle. That possibility surely rests with the whole of what the ex-Archbishop of Canterbury called "the oracles of God." "Oracles," by the way, is also a fitting term. Its original meaning was that of a message from God or inspired by God. These oracles appear to have been originally fairly clear as to their meaning. But with the development of man they became more and more doubtful in their forecasts, and in the classical period of Greece and Rome their double or multiple meaning was notorious. Thus, if a man consulted an oracle as to whether it would be safe or not for him to go on a lengthy sea voyage, he would be told that the voyage carried with it danger. If he returned safely, this was a proof that the God had protected him. If he was drowned, or killed in

some other way, the oracle scored just as easily. The Archbishop's "oracle," the Bible, is a triumphant example of this method. It can mean, and is made to mean, anything that fits the occasion. If we win the present war, it will be God's work. He gives us the victory. If we lose the war, it is also his work; he is punishing us or disciplining us for our spiritual betterment. Heads I win, tails you lose. The godite, like the camel, kneels to receive his burden. They are, so far as we can recall the facts, the only two animals that do so. Even the ass kicks sometimes.

A New Jeremiah

In a recent issue of the "News Chronicle" we came across another example of "a nose of wax" that is worth noting. The article was important enough to be given the principal place in the paper, and was written by Mr. Hugh Redwood, who writes up religious articles for the "News Chronicle." Mr. Redwood gives us a first-class "nose of wax" in his title. He tells us that "Britain is Waiting for a Prophet." That last word stands out in its "waxy" quality. For "prophet" happens to have the same sinister origin and history by means of which our leading clerics, our office-loving politicians and our circulation-hunting newspapers fool the people. A prophet was always one who interpreted the will of God—the tribal or national god—to the people. It was prophets that led the way in the religious wars of the past and the present. The worst massacres in the Bible, the greatest brutalities of Christian teaching in the New Testament, the greatest of the medieval denunciations of the Jews, the illusion of a chosen people, upon which Hitlerism is built: these and many other evils we owe to these messengers of the Gods. Whatever other and, perhaps, more scientifically based causes may be put forward as explanation of these evils, the operation of the religious factor is clear.

But Mr. Redwood is—on the surface, at least—dissatisfied with the power of the genuine religious motive. Perhaps that word "dissatisfied" is too sweeping, but he at all events finds he cannot evade its failure and its growing weakness. He begins his article by quoting a clergyman "with a reputation for his work among young people," who says that "the lads whom the National Youth Movement has brought into his club cannot at any price be persuaded to go to church on Sundays." These lads, says Mr. Redwood, detest Sunday worship, the whole atmosphere of which is unreal to them. But in another place Mr. Redwood saw "the largest available hall in one of the London dormitory districts packed to the bearable limit with youths of both sexes, eager to hear their own kind, again under first-class leadership, *discussing the part of religion in the world that will be their world.*" The italics are mine. It was their world they were interested in, not religion.

Further, Mr. Redwood notes that "Church congregations are at a low ebb and, generally speaking, are still dwindling." The President of the Methodist Conference has just called attention to the continued precipitate decline in Church membership. Most unkindest cut of all, considering the extent to which the B.B.C. has prostituted itself in the interests of the churches, is the comment that "most broadcasting nowadays is so dreadfully dull, even to religious listeners, that as a means to quicken the soul of the nation it can almost be left out of account." This after many years of double-dealing, elaborate lying, careful watching that nothing which seriously reflects on the value of the Christian religion should be said, and its careful watchfulness to prevent even the shadow of Freethinking falling across the Brains Trust. It looks as though Mr. Redwood thinks the religious game is up.

The Church and the Future .

Why, then, give to these notes the heading "A Nose of Wax"? Mr. Redwood, apparently, believes that religion has had its day. At any rate, the Churches are emptying; and if people are really sincere they will go to one church or another, and if there is none existent to their liking they will make one. That has always been the rule among believers. Even the younger generation, he points out, while ready enough to have clergymen and others discuss problems in which young men and women are interested, cannot be brought to church by any bait that may be held out to them. The Roman Catholics would be the only apparent exception to the rule. "Apparent," we say, and that is the fact. For the Roman Church, which must keep up its age-long reputation for untruthfulness, does not disclose the number of its followers; it does advertise its converts but says nothing of its losses. There is not one of the old religious bodies that keeps up with the growth of population. Why, then, a nose of wax?

The "waxiness" of the essay—a very small one—lies in that word "Prophet." For what Mr. Redwood means—he is careful not to say it in so many words—is that what Britain is waiting for is a great religious leader who will inspire the people. Obviously, he is not longing for a British Lenin or Stalin, even though their economic and social ideals were plainly a development from the admittedly valuable phases of British political and social history. What he is suggesting is that this country is waiting for a revival of religion—not of any religion, but of the Christian religion, and when he says the Christian religion he means—What? For there are so many forms of the Christian religion. Mr. Redwood just indicates that it is a religious revival we require and lets it go at that. But that is marching direct into waxidom, and we can quite imagine a man so sturdy and forthright within his limitations as Luther saying to the writer of the "News Chronicle" article: "What prophet, Mr. Redwood, are you looking for? Is it some member of the Roman Church, or of the Presbyterian Church? Until we know the opinions this leader must hold, you are putting before us a nose of wax which can be shaped to suit every man's prejudice. Mr. Redwood, there are falsehoods by insinuation as well as by open and honest language." But Martin Luther lived four centuries ago, when men who said they were looking for religious revivals knew what they meant when they spoke

of "true religion." In those days, as in these, there were plenty of people who were religious, but they were days when people could be honest in their religion without running the risk of being called foolish.

To be quite just to Mr. Redwood, he does name two men whom he appears to regard not, it is true, as 100 per cent. religious prophets, but who may stand as substitutes for such. One of these is Dr. Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, the other is Sir Stafford Cripps. Of the latter we are not sure what religious ideas he entertains, but we can hardly picture him as a Christian, honest in both mind and action. Moreover, I rather fancy that his admiration for the Russian model, and his insistence that "Atheistic Russia" must play a very prominent part in the new world that is to be created, would not commend him to the vast majority of sincere Christians in this country, and certainly not to the insincere ones. The other one he names is Dr. Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, a man of ability when measured by the type we have to-day of Christians in high office. But if Dr. Temple ever had either the intention or the desire to lead Christians in a social revolution he would never have accepted the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Revolutions for the benefit of a whole people do not come from an established Church.

Why, as a matter of fact, bring in religion, or even introduce a religious leader under the guise of a modern prophet? Is there any quality of social life that cannot be praised or cultivated without religion? Can men not be loyal to their families, honest and considerate of others, true to their word and clean in their lives as individuals and as citizens without having any religion at all? Is a happy family life dependent upon the belief in Jesus, or honesty in word, speech and act upon the belief in a future life? Must we have an Archbishop with a colossal salary to realise that the workman should be able to live a clean, happy life? Is there any quality in life that is of value which depends upon genuinely religious formulae? Cannot even a Christian be brought to say: "I do not care whether there is a God or not. I do not care whether Jesus Christ ever lived or not, I still believe that truth is better than a lie, kindness better than cruelty, intelligence better than folly." What good thing is there in life that we cannot have and enjoy and yet laugh at the resurrection as a fantasy, and belief in gods as the perpetuation of a primitive blunder?

Now there is, as it happens, one man who does at least take one aspect of Christian teaching seriously, not because he is a Christian, but because he thinks it is a way of conquering what he regards as brute force. That man has been reading the New Testament, and he has read there— it was said, so Christians believe—by God himself:—

"For I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also. And if any man sue thee at the law, and taketh away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

That man's name is Gandhi. So far he desires to put in force against what he considers an unjust government the instrument commended by the New Testament. But I do not think Mr. Redwood is inviting that kind of Christian to get us out of our present trouble and lead us to a "Brave New World." I feel sure even Dr. Temple would condemn Gandhi.

SOCIOLOGY AND RELIGION

THE issues surrounding religious controversy have changed from those which agitated the last century. Encounters with physics, biology and Biblical criticism were lost long ago so far as supernaturalism was concerned. To recall them to mind is to gaze back over past victories. In spite of such orthodox apologetics as those of Dr. J. Y. Simpson or the late Father Waggett, the warfare between religion and science led to the emphatic conquest of the field by the scientific method. In due course, psychology undertook to explain the mind of man. It cast a flood of new light upon the causes of human behaviour. Conscience could occupy its old Victorian throne no longer. An exploration of the sub-conscious showed the highly disreputable origin of many irrational prejudices; the hatred of the curate for boiled beef could be a conscious rationalisation of a sub-conscious desire to elope with a waitress. Anti-social or immoral acts might be, in fact, the outcome of some unco-ordinated activity in the *libido*. The whole orthodoxy centring in such subjects as those of sin and salvation was overthrown. The sinner is in need of a doctor or a psychologist; a priest or a supernatural redemption is of little use in meeting his case.

But the final battle with science has yet to be fought. Sociology is still a youthful study. The scientific exploration of social action, of the structure of society, or of the art of living together, originated as a separate branch of knowledge in the middle of the last century. Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer were among its founders. In spite of obvious limitations, due to the environment within which they worked, they laid the groundwork of a fertile study. Whatever may be thought of their conclusions and prophecies, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels used the background of the same period in order to undertake brilliant social analyses. Since those days sociological research has developed at an astounding rate. Such work as that of Professor Ginsburg, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, Dr. Graham Wallas or the social histories of J. L. and Barbara Hammond, has made clear the motives and causes which underlie society. It is probably the last stage of activity necessary for the completion of a coherent view of the universe.

Although sociology has still far to go, its effects have been devastating at every point where it has encountered orthodox religion. Psychology is utilised in order to explain social motives. The question of sin is referred to the larger issues concerning environment. Anti-social acts may be caused by hunger due to economic circumstance; they can also be accounted for by a fear generated through the pressure of social circumstances. In either case, it is merely foolish to talk about the outraged honour of Yahweh. Sins of this kind can be cured only through a setting right of the environment. Perfection in man is idle dreaming unless some attempt is made to secure proper balance in social relationships. Sociology has its own approach to questions of right and wrong, but it is not that accepted by orthodox theology.

The point at which sociological research has done most to weaken the claims of historic religion is seen in its exploration of ecclesiastical origins. To traditional theology the Church is a divinely originated society. The words which Jesus addresses to Peter in the Matthaean Gospel, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church," have been the foundation-stone of ecclesiastical claims through the centuries. Even among more liberal believers the Church represents a society of persons, inspired by goodwill and drawn together through a common aim. Such a claim is made by the broad-minded American modernist, Dr. H. E. Fosdick. The institution may therefore be regarded as transcending social limits by a striving to achieve the highest good as conditioning human society.

A scientific sociology has put the historical facts in a very different light. A valuable piece of research, "The Social Sources of Denominationalism," leads the Rev. H. Richard

Niebuhr to some interesting conclusions. In every case of a splitting away from the parent body it is safe to look in the first instance for social, economic or political causes. The theological reasons were found later whilst the division was in process of accomplishment. Dr. Niebuhr draws his examples from American sectarianism; his thesis may be tested in the case of English Methodism. The pioneer work of a Methodist minister, Dr. Wearmouth, "Methodism and the Working-Class Movements: 1800-1850," indicates very clearly that causes for the manifold divisions and splits must be sought in other motives than those of theology. The secession of the Rev. J. R. Stephens in 1834 was due to Chartism and not to any fresh view of the Gospel. Ernst Troelsch opened out a new field for research in his work, "The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches." In the first part of an important study cut short by death, Max Weber showed the Protestant ethic of the 16th century, with its stress upon individual responsibility and salvation, to be heavily influenced by the contemporary spread of individualistic economic theory. His work was followed up by Professor Tawney in a classic study, "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism." The Roman Catholic, Dr. Fanfani, promptly utilised the results for a polemic against Protestantism; his case was demolished when Dr. Coulton pointed out that the same tendencies were present in the later Middle Ages, and that their roots must be sought during the declining years of "the ages of faith." Whatever may be thought of private capitalism, it is at best a purely secular economic theory—an undignified source for a religious ethic! This attitude has been confirmed by J. M. Robertson in "The Dynamics of Religion" and by J. A. Hobson in "God and Mammon." Dr. Needham has illustrated it from the English Commonwealth period. The sociological approach to ecclesiastical origins is a devastating exposure of the motives underlying the foundation of Churches and sects. It strips from them the halo of supernaturalism or the transcendent goodwill of a disinterested morality.

The extent of the conflict between traditional religion and scientific sociology affords warning against the trifling efforts of such ecclesiastics as Cardinal Hinsley or Dr. Temple to shape a Christian social order. Their attempts can only attain success in terms of ecclesiastical domination; a society co-ordinated along scientific lines must utilise sociological findings which shows every sign of opposition to Church claims. The history of the universe and of man has been rewritten within the last century in terms which allow no room for a supernatural revelation. Psychology has chased away explanations concerning conduct which rely for sanction upon human depravity and supernatural redemption. It now seems that sociology will crown the work of destruction. In an informative treatise, "The Culture of Cities," Mr. Lewis Mumford has indicated theological division as a cause for decline in the civilisation of megapolis. It may be that sociological science, by destroying the figments which still cling to organised ecclesiasticism in many minds, will assist the healing of these divisions through an endorsement of the spirit of a tolerant humanism.

"JULIAN."

THE SPACIOUS DAYS OF THE SPINSTER QUEEN

DESPITE his indebtedness and admiration for Dr. Freeman, Froude's constant detractor, the historian, John Richard Green candidly acknowledges that Froude's survey of the Elizabethan Age is a solid contribution to history. Also, Maitland's researches into Reformation times in England, while discounting certain wild assertions of ultra-Protestant writers, serve to confirm the general conclusions of Pollard and other discriminating investigators of the Tudor period. A more recent survey of Elizabeth's reign is that of Professor J. E. Neale, of the University of London, "Queen Elizabeth" (Jonathan Cape, 1933). Composed to celebrate the fourth centenary of his heroine's birth

in 1533, this fine work is evidently the product of a prolonged study of the time. This volume is noticeably free from bias, and its author's verdicts are those of an essentially modern mind.

In an age when women rulers were deemed anomalous, and when a young and untried princess succeeded her half-sister, the persecuting Mary, whose political and religious policy had reduced England to the verge of ruin, it was no easy task for the new ruler to compose the differences of resentful Catholics and iconoclastic Protestants and to satisfy the ambitions and cupidity of an all-too-human Court.

When selecting her Ministers Elizabeth displayed sagacity, and Cecil and Walsingham, her most trusted advisers, retained her confidence to the last. Differences of opinion concerning policy were apt to recur, but the spectacular downfall of Wolsey, the execution of Thomas Cromwell and Sir Thomas More under her masterful father, Henry VIII., had no counterpart in her reign. Certainly, the Duke of Norfolk went to the scaffold for treason and, in the closing years of her rule, the rebellious Essex shared his fate; still, their death warrants, like that of the arch-plotter, Mary Stuart, were very reluctantly signed and then only in deference to the constant pressure of her Ministers.

One of the most glorious features of this romantic period was its magnificent literary achievement. Other outstanding events included the attempted invasion of England by Philip II. of Spain and the rise and rapid progress of the Puritan movement. With her accession to the throne, most of Elizabeth's ardent supporters had discarded the Catholic creed. Trained as a Protestant herself, in the divided state of the realm, the Queen was constrained to pursue a compromising policy. With at least half the population wedded to the old faith, and with Catholicism strongly entrenched in the north and west, it became imperative to promote a mode of religion broadly comprehensive in character. For the first 25 years of her reign there were no executions for heresy and, at a later date, when the law was enforced, punishment was practically confined to Catholic priests and their adherents for treasonable offences committed after the Pope had absolved Elizabeth's subjects from their allegiance. Even then the declared policy of the State was the permission of freedom of conscience, if dissidents outwardly conformed to the Anglican establishment.

The revolt from Rome, however, was intensified by Alva's atrocities in the Low Countries and the horrible massacre in Paris and elsewhere of the French Huguenots in 1572. In any case, Romanism declined, and the concluding years of Elizabeth's rule of nearly half a century saw the Reformation fully established, both in England and Scotland.

The events which led to the abortive Spanish invasion were very involved. Political, economic and sectarian factors were intertwined. The financial resources of the English Crown were meagre and loans were costly. Moreover, the Queen was constitutionally parsimonious as well as adverse to the imposition of heavy taxation. As Neale observes: "To-day the problem would have been met by the National Debt. There was no such way open to Elizabeth. England was less modern than France and Spain, where—in the days when Henry VIII. was wallowing in his father's legacy and afterwards in the spoils of the monasteries, and was relatively immune from distress—the monarchs had hit upon the device of raising money by creating rentes, or permanent annuities, a form of Crown debt by means of which they could keep tapping the wealth of their subjects, diverting money from economic enterprise into the prodigal ways of war and royal extravagance, until they could no longer pay the interest they owed, and defaulted, spreading ruin about them. Having no system of rentes to tempt her along the rake's progress, Elizabeth had to have recourse to short period loans raised at Antwerp."

For these the City of London usually stood security, but the prompt payment of heavy interest and other difficulties made them an embarrassment. So, considering the costly Court she was compelled to maintain, the expenses of the Irish insurrection,

the monetary assistance sent to the revolting Netherlands and other payments, it is wonderful that she managed to escape insolvency even with the money raised by her successive sales of Crown estates.

Open conflict seemed imminent in 1585, when English grain cargoes were seized by the Spaniards. As a reprisal, Drake sailed on a marauding expedition in the West Indies, but even the subsequent singeing of the King of Spain's beard left its owner irresolute while the Dutch trouble remained.

But at last he determined to strike the blow, and the huge Armada was prepared. England, however, specialised in recently improved small, fast, sailing ships well mounted with guns. To experienced privateers "like Drake and Hawkins the amazing potentialities of the new ships and the new warfare were a commonplace, and fortunately for England, Elizabeth was intelligent and adaptable enough to use their experience." "Corruption," continues Neale, "was rooted out, scope given to the new ideas. Drake was very much in Elizabeth's favour, not less because he was a free lance who did not mind his actions being disavowed in the interests of diplomacy."

Money was scarce, but Drake set sail with his squadron to attack the Spanish fleet in its home ports, inflict as much damage as possible and prevent it from assembling at Lisbon, which was to be its place of departure. This attack proved brilliantly successful, immense damage was done and the Spanish plans were seriously deranged. Then, sailing to the Azores, he seized a rich carrack returning from the West Indies carrying a cargo worth £114,000, a very substantial sum with the then purchasing power of money. At last, however, in 1588, the invincible Armada approached our sea-girt isles and every possible preparation was made for their defence.

Before the Armada started on its mission for the conquest of a wickedly heretical kingdom, much time was devoted to prayer for its speedy success, the Spanish King kneeling before "the Sacrament two or three hours every day." Yet, all the processions, fastings and self-denial; all the endless supplications to heaven were as futile in those days as in ours. The earliest reports that reached Spain were ominous. The gigantic Armada had been scattered in a storm and had sought shelter at Corunna for repairs.

Later, the main struggle of the contending ships took place in the Channel, where the cumbrous galleons suffered severely. Many would have been captured save for a squall that enabled them to flee. "As it was," narrates Neale, "with severe casualties, their ships badly injured by gunfire, and short of water and stores, they fled north before the wind and tried to make Spain by sailing round the north of Scotland and the west of Ireland." Many suffered shipwreck and the majority of the soldiers and sailors who escaped from the sea were plundered and slain. Barely half of the once proud Armada ever returned to Spain, while the English casualties were negligible.

On the eve of the Armada's departure for invasion, the Pope's excommunication of Elizabeth was reissued, and a defamatory tract was circulated in England "concerning the present wars made for the execution of his Holiness' sentence." The easy triumph of the Armada appears to have been taken for granted by the Catholics in exile, and their venomous hatred of the heretic Queen vented itself in their spokesman's denunciation of her as "an incestuous bastard, begotten and born in sin of an infamous courtesan, Anne Boleyn."

The earliest tidings concerning the battle that reached the Continent announced a Spanish victory and Drake's fleet was reported at the bottom of the sea. This alleged success was gaily celebrated with promenades and bonfires in Spain. But, when the truth of the terrible disaster was made known, Philip secreted himself in the Escorial in solitude and melancholy prayer, while in England several days were dedicated to excited elation and thankfulness for the overthrow of the enemy.

T. F. PALMER.

CHURCH PARADE

Twelve Company can booze and curse,
 But they all mend their ways,
 When once a week they all parade
 To church to pray and praise.
 We all Right dress and dress again
 And stand like blocks of wood,
 Then we right dress some more
 Like all good Christians should.
 The sergeant-major strides ahead,
 Wearing a solemn face,
 As if to wear a Sunday smile
 Would be a damn disgrace.
 If any dare to raise a song
 He'll fix them with a stare,
 "You're going to worship God," he says,
 "Not to a bloody fair."
 So we put on a holy face,
 As other Christians do,
 Then solemnly march into church
 To fill each family pew.
 The C.O. and his officers
 March in, in single file,
 We stand as if the Holy Ghost
 Were coming up the aisle.
 We sing with gusto and we pray,
 It is a sight to see,
 Each soldier from the wet canteen
 Upon the bended knee.
 The troops confess how they have strayed,
 Like other mortal sinners,
 But most of all we sit and think
 How bad we want our dinners.
 Outside we booze and tell our tales
 Of Jane and Nipigon Nan,
 But here we sing of saints in heaven
 As only soldiers can.

E. A. Dowson.

ACID DROPS

HERE are two gems recently bestowed on the public through the B.B.C. Department of Misinformation. First, the would-be bed-time philosopher Lord Elton (July 15):—

We should never expect to survive the war as victors unless we had achieved something like a Christian belief in the schools.
 Poor China and poor Russia, and poor India, who will not have achieved Christian belief in the schools. But are we really so much poorer in intelligence that while the countries named can do without the artificial prop of Christian belief, the others can do very well with their normal human nature. The B.B.C. ought not to encourage this deliberate belittling of the English people. We believe we are as good as the other peoples mentioned.

Second gem. The Archbishop of York (July 15), this time from the House of Lords:—

Moral teaching in the schools depends upon religious instruction.
 That is quite clear. Children cannot be taught that there is any wisdom in being truthful, helpful, honest, etc., unless they are also taught there is an Almighty Policeman watching them. It is a pity that these Christian leaders can never get much higher than the ethical atmosphere of a thieves' kitchen.

With characteristic impudence Lady Astor (Liverpool "Daily Post," August 3) explained to the world that "the Russians are not fighting for us, but for themselves." We may say with equal truth that we are not fighting for the Russians, but for ourselves. We have warned our readers, more than once, not to forget that when this war ceases the internecine war will be resumed. Lady Astor may be cited in evidence. Russia will offer an acid test.

An apt reply to this characteristic tirade, coming from one whose conduct did much to strengthen the die-hards who object

to women in Parliament, was given by Lord Strabolgi. He reminded his hearers at a public meeting that Lady Astor was the lady who was "one of the strongest upholders of the mistaken Munich policy of Mr. Chamberlain. We should have had Russia as an ally before the war broke out if the Chamberlain Government had not broken up the League of Nations, the system of collective security, and done everything to cold-shoulder and snub the Russian Government, an attitude which eventually threw them into the arms of Germany." As we have often said, we shall have to keep our eyes skinned when this war is over. The war of self-interests will then begin. That war is, to some extent, in abeyance at the present.

The Bishop of Chelmsford is wise in his generation. He told an audience at Barkingside, "I never argue about religion. I don't believe it does a bit of good. I don't believe it has ever done any good." Now that shows real wisdom, parsonic common sense, the awareness of a man who wants to keep his job and who knows that if he does a certain thing he is likely to lose it. It is not often that we so cordially agree with a Bishop. So we repeat to the Bishop the advice which Zeus gave to his follower who was arguing with an Atheist in the streets of Athens. "Give him hard words. Begin to reason and you will be as dumb as fish." Gods and their defenders have not altered much in the last two thousand years.

And yet, somehow one feels that this Bishop has got himself tied in a knot. How can one argue against argument unless one discredits the instrument that is being used? We fancy the only reality about the Bishop's remarks is the consciousness of his own inability to set forth an argument for his creed that can withstand criticism. Perhaps all the Bishop means is, "I have a good job, and why should I risk it by publicly arguing with those who do not believe? I know I can't convert them, but they might convert some of my followers. So I will say 'nuffin' and hope for the best. I agree with Zeus: if I start reasoning I shall soon be as dumb as a fish." So far we agree with the Bishop.

There was a conference recently held in Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham, on the desirability of creating what they called a Christian Press. The Bishop of Birmingham presided, and it was agreed that a Christian newspaper must be "free." All that was said sounded well; but if our newspapers are to be really free they should include all sorts of opinions that could at all claim to be of public interest, and that must include the publication of reasoned opinions against Christianity as well as for it. So far as we are able to judge from the report in the "Birmingham Mail," this was one aspect that was ignored. The objection to the present Press was that they might be an instrument of tyranny because they "manipulated opinion." A strange objection for a Christian gathering to make.

So far we agree with the speakers, including the Bishop of Birmingham. But the plain question we put to him is this, and we should greatly appreciate an answer. Would he advocate in the Press articles not merely on behalf of Christian beliefs, but against them? Would he advocate that the Press should permit the same expression of anti-Christian opinion that is now given to Christian and religious opinion? If he will not do that, we put a further question. If anti-Christian opinion is not given something of the liberality in the Press that Christian opinion receives, would he not, in completely Christianising the Press, be doing anything else but dishonestly manipulating? A copy of these notes will be sent to the Bishop and to Carrs Lane Church. If no reply is received, we have no alternative to concluding that all the talk about freedom is so much hypocrisy.

One of the papers we picked up the other day gave us the news that "Men of all sects realise the need of some sort of a religion." We rather liked that. First, there is the "men of all sects"; they realise the desirability of what they already have. That reads like a truism. Then what they desire is "some sort of religion," which shows a charming catholicity of outlook much to be admired. It is not a question of having what used to be called the "right sort of religion" or the "true religion," but some

unspecified religion. Anything will do so long as it can reasonably be called a religion. Gone is the day when one had to have a particular kind of a god and a special kind of religion. Nowadays some kind of anything will serve. No one can say that 20th century religion has not its liberal aspect.

We do not know whether a visit of "Our Lady" will make Carfin the Scottish "Lourdes." It may, and that for two reasons. First, Lourdes is not at present a very good business proposition, and the Church cannot bother itself very much over places that pay no dividend either in fame or cash. In the next place, there is no reason why the appearance of "Our Lady" at Carfin should "strike oil." This is that the vision of the virgin came to a child of eight years of age, and it will be remembered that a great many of these visitations have come to young children, ignorant country maidens, and men who have been indulging in fasts, or a solitary sojourn, or as a reaction from a "wicked life," so there seems no reason why this last escapade of "Our Lady" should not be profitable—for the Church.

From the Roman Catholic Press we learn that in the Argentine Roman Catholics believe that Cardinal Hinsley is pro-Nazi. Of course. It is not to be said that the Cardinal is a supporter of Hitler but, as we have often pointed out, there is no fundamental distinction between the philosophy of Fascism and that of the Roman Church. The trouble is that as the aims of the two are fundamentally identical, there arises a clash as to which shall administer the poison. The Roman Church, of which Cardinal Hinsley is the chief representative in this country, cannot submit to German Fascism controlling the Church; the Church cannot submit to the rule of Hitler. So we have what is practically an internal war, each struggling for the same end, and each determined that the other shall not conquer. We shall find this fact illustrated by the behaviour of the Roman Church when the Allies have gained a complete victory over Germany.

Looking over "The Freethinker" for 1928 we came across notes on the B.B.C. which bring home the lesson that that institution was as dishonest in its dealings with the public then as it is to-day. Readers may not have remembered that when the religious services were increased in numbers the excuse was made by the very truthful John Reith, who was brought up in a manse, that the week-day services were increased because of the shower of requests for them. That in itself was very remarkable, because as only just over 10 per cent. of the people go to church, it was touching to find the 90 per cent. clamouring for services over the air. But very soon the B.B.C., which was never consistent with its lying for the greater glory of God, complained that so few letters of approval were received, that unless greater appreciation was shown by the public the broadcasting services would be discontinued. Then the clergy ordered their followers to send in letters at once, and the services went on. "Hundreds of letters"—from a population of forty-five millions of people—approved the services. That was indeed a wonderful result.

Then the truthful Reith had it broadcast that certain addresses were declined because the B.B.C. bared controversial subjects. Along came showers of letters—only a few were acknowledged, but we happen to know the large number sent in—that of all subjects religion was the most controversial. But even the B.B.C. could not keep up that silly attitude. So "controversial" subjects were admitted but, as the manuscripts were carefully censored and nothing was permitted of a "dangerous" or "disturbing" character and only fairly safe speakers were permitted to use the microphone, the B.B.C. was able to continue their bamboozling policy. Of course, it shut out many who would not sell themselves for a few guineas and the publicity the microphone gave, and the somnolent soon forgot the exposure that had been made.

As things stand, we have no hesitation in saying that there is no more dangerous instrument of misdirection in this country than the B.B.C. It is an instrument of whatever Government may be in power; it can send abroad lie after lie with no possibility of either adequate exposure or correction, and it reaches a multitude of people who have no means of even guessing what

the truth really is. We do not often adopt the robe of a prophet, but we do prophesy that the B.B.C. will be doing its damndest when the war is over and the time has arrived really to re-plan the country.

Is there any adequate reason why the British public cannot be placed on the same level as Canada and the United States and have a choice of what broadcasting system it may use? Failing that, must we take it that the British public either have no desire to hear both sides of a case, or cannot be trusted with it? Perhaps someone will manage to get a reply from the B.B.C. If they are badgered enough it might be given.

A letter from a Christian reader opens by calling us a "blasphemer." We plead "Not Guilty." How can one "blaspheme" a thing or a person in the existence of which he has no belief? In its theological sense, to blaspheme is to speak or act disrespectfully with regard to God. In its widest sense, to speak disrespectfully of a person. But in either case it must be some conscious being that is being treated with disrespect. But if we don't believe that John Jones or God exists, how can we speak disrespectfully of some one who—to us—is non-existent? Off-hand we should say that the real blasphemer is the fat-headed fool who in either pulpit or elsewhere rears himself up and assures the world that he is made in the image of God. If there is a God that should make him real mad.

Really, as we have so often had to say, the Atheist is one with whom a sensible, self-respecting god will have no quarrel. The Atheist, for example, does not believe that plagues and diseases, wars and earthquakes, bad seasons and wars are caused by God. He does not believe that when a man is killed by lightning, or a number killed by an epidemic, that these things are "acts of God." He does not believe that God "calls" a bishop to his job or a preacher to his pulpit. This is not speaking disrespectfully of God, it is defending him against the calumnies of his followers. In a world riddled with foolish superstitions the Atheist declines to find God guilty of the things mentioned without the strongest evidence. The Atheist is about the only real friend God has—that is, of course, if he exists.

The "Sheffield Telegraph" appears to have just discovered the existence of the Secular Education League. It now confesses that it might be useful if the League would plunge into current controversies. The League has been doing that for many years, but it has to face the boycott of the Press. The "Telegraph" is of opinion that "it would do the Christian Churches no harm to have to fight a serious opponent."

If the "Sheffield Telegraph" really means what it says, we should be happy to furnish one side of a serious discussion, provided it would open its columns for that purpose. The difficulty nowadays is to get a representative of the Churches to enter into a serious discussion and to find a prominent newspaper that is not afraid of offending the Churches by throwing open its columns for a discussion between responsible people on subjects affecting the utility of religious beliefs and practices.

The "Church Times" makes Miss Dorothy Sayers responsible for the assertion that there is at present "a boom in God." We haven't noticed it. All we have noted is that a certain number of evangelists—professional and amateur—are shrieking more loudly than is normally the case the need for more believers in God. But we have not heard of churches having to put out a "House full" card, nor noticed people lined up waiting for the church doors to open. Of course, in certain circumstances it is possible to fill a hall when a well-known boxer, or novelist, or actor is announced as one of the speakers, and when a number of the clergy can be brought to bring up their congregations. Otherwise things seem to be much as they were—only more so. That is, the decline of Godism was never more marked than it is at the moment.

One of the B.B.C. speakers recently remarked that "Man must worship the god within him." We do not agree that a man must do this, so just point out that a considerable number of men and women do worship the god within them. The difficulty is for them to find a god to worship who is outside them.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. SPROWSON.—Many thanks. We are preparing a new edition of the Bible Handbook—the ninth. The difficulty is the paper shortage and the cost of production. The latter is a serious matter since to publish at "commercial" price would be to restrict its circulation, and we do not wish to do that. The same difficulty meets us in the case of a new edition of Paine's "Age of Reason" But we are doing our best.

N. GASTON.—Many thanks for address.

W. JOHNSON.—We never tell others in such situations as yours what they should do. We are content to point out what we consider the right course and leave it for those concerned to decide whether they will follow it or not. The road reformers should tread always involves some kind of what the world calls "sacrifice." But reforms are not brought about by everyone waiting for someone else to act.

C. W. HOLLINGHAM.—Will appear next week.

I. SANDERSON.—A film such as you suggest would be useful, but the film industry is concerned with financial propositions. The trouble is that strictly scientific films would not make a very strong appeal to those in control, and the opposition to make the anti-religious inferences clear enough to be of propagandist value would meet with strong opposition.

G. GIBBONS.—As you will have seen, the matter has been dealt with.

H. DAY.—A capital letter, and one that should do good. Our Secretary will be writing you.

C. WILLIAMSON.—Probably the best way to describe the character of the B.B.C. religious advocates is to repeat a saying of Sheridan and say that they are indebted to their memory for their reasoning and to their imagination for their facts.

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

"CHALLENGE to Religion," by Chapman Cohen, price 1s. 3d., postage 1d., is now on sale. The work comprises the four lectures delivered in the Leicester Secular Hall. The booklet has been out of print for some time and was originally published under the title of "Four Lectures." The new title more adequately indicates the substance, since it is actually a challenge to the religious position, with a positive statement of the case for a world without God. There are large numbers to-day—never have there been more—who are dissatisfied with their situation with regard to religion. This book should clarify their outlook. It also provides Freethinkers with a useful statement of their own position.

The "Daily Express" appears to have dropped the phrase "Christian name" and substituted "First name." We congratulate whoever is responsible for substituting accuracy for a misstatement. For our own part, whenever the question has

been put to us: "Christian name?" our reply has been: "Haven't one." Then the official has to explain—with an air of wonderment at our stupidity—that we must have another name beside the surname. We agree, and then humbly explain that what he is after is our first or personal name, and mildly suggest that an official should be accurate when asking questions.

From the "Daily Mirror" we gather the information that in the West Riding of Yorkshire less than 3 per cent. of boys and girls in the 16-18 age group (48,000 in number) declared themselves as unconnected with any church or church organisation. Alderman Hyman, Chairman of the Wakefield Education Committee, described the figures as "frightening."

We congratulate the 97 per cent. and wonder what the Chairman of the Education Committee is "frightened" about. He will not have the impudence to say that they are not as good as the 3 per cent. that are connected with the Churches. We invite Mr. Hyman to answer the question—without much hope of his being candid or courageous enough to state his reasons.

There is no mistaking the aim of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to the educational plot which is being carried on by the Churches and our semi-Conservative Government. The target is complete religious control of the schools. In this combination the Roman Catholic Church is more open in its aims than are the Protestant Churches. Not for the first time do we find (as in the "Catholic Herald" for July 31) the following:—

The State has no right to educate, but the parent has the duty and right to decide how their children are to be taught; and for the State to provide the means for them to be taught as the parents desire.

We hope that those interested will note the above very carefully and bear all the implications in mind. It has the usual leaning to falsehood and deception that the propaganda of religion in the modern world must involve.

For example. Consider "It is for the parents to decide." The dishonesty in the use of that word by a Roman Catholic lies in the fact that the Roman Church "claims," in virtue of its divine authority, absolute control over education. It orders its followers what education shall be given to children, and even what education its followers shall acquire as adults. An honest expression—if it is not too fantastic even to dream of the "great lying Church" speaking the truth when to do otherwise—would run:—

The State must not be permitted to interfere in education. Its sole business is to provide the financial and other means for educational purposes. What education shall be given to children may be formally demanded from the State by the parents, but the parents will, and must, ask for what the Church says is necessary. The sole function of the State is to provide buildings and pay teachers. The Church alone has divine authority to determine the quality and extent of the education given.

That is the real policy of the Church. Not many degrees removed is the aim of the Protestant Churches, although they do not make the same monstrous claims.

An interesting reminder of how loyally the Church helped medical science in the days when God's Church ruled the roost. It is taken from Johannes Noll's book on the "Black Plague" which devastated the whole of Europe.

"It was the first duty of the physician on entering the house to ask the relatives of the patient if he had confessed and received the Holy Sacrament. For this he had the following locution. The soul is more worthy than the body, therefore its salvation goeth before all things. The patient must, in the name of God, be induced to seek the salvation of soul, and if he has not yet done so he must do it at once or promise to do so, for most frequently sickness is a consequence of our sins. Thus the enlightened physician was obliged to play a double role in accordance with the prevailing opinion of the time. Indeed, in the twelfth and

thirteenth centuries he had to unite the clerical profession with medical science so as to escape the envy and persecution of the clergy. It did not suit the Church that men enlightened by the knowledge of science should enjoy the intimacy of princes and the great men of the country. The priests pushed and crowded round the sick bed and endeavoured to prove the efficacy of their appeals to the saints, their intercessions and relics, their consecrated candles, endowment vows and other pious means. If a patient attained a good cure it was attributed to the saints, the vows and prayers of the priests. If the cure was a failure the physician was rendered responsible for the death of the patient and the lack of trust in God, and the saints were stated to be the cause of death, which was regarded as a punishment of God, for which the relations had to do penance by an excess of masses for the repose of his soul."

The reader will notice the manner in which the Church pocketed profits whether the man got better or worse. This kind of "Heads I win, tails you lose" is a very favourite game of our clergy, whether it be a matter or not. There is really not much difference between priests, save in outward decorations.

It was Artemus Ward who said that directly war was declared, he volunteered to stay at home to look after the wives and sweethearts of those who had gone to the front.

Most people who can lay any claim to taste will be pleased to learn that, animated by a spasm of reform, the B.B.C. is to give us less of the crooning, groaning and moaning which take the place of musical performances. We hope we may take this as a "token" that we are beginning to realise that the mass of even the English "lower caste" are not altogether deficient in taste where the arts are concerned, and that the "lingo" that was said to characterise the "common folk" is not characteristic of the "people" to-day. We do not think it is characteristic even in the days of Dickens—he drew "types" rather than providing pictures of the "people." And for sheer and essential vulgarity we think the "upper" classes could always hold their own, and can do so now. Also, speaking as one who knew the East End of London half a century ago, for intelligence it could always hold its own with the more fashionable section in the West.

Here is a passage from Dorsey's "Civilisation" that contains much for those who have sufficient wit to apply it properly:—

Papyrus in use at the Papal court up to the eleventh century began to be replaced by rag paper, but not until the fourteenth century was this in general circulation in Europe—twelve centuries after it had been invented in China.

When the Crusaders were fighting Saladin for the Holy Sepulchre, China was printing a commentary on her Classics in 180 magnificent volumes. And she was printing playing cards and paper money with movable type five centuries before Gutenberg "invented" the printing press. What China knew the Moslem world learned—and Europe borrowed.

It has taken a world war, and our need of China's help, that has driven our Christian world to recognise the wisdom of a peaceful people—or at least to foreign appreciation of the Chinese character. How long that appreciation will last after the war remains to be seen.

Is there any sufficient reason why parsons and parsonettes should be put outside the law of conscription for the Army? They do not come within the category of conscientious objectors, for only a few of them would take up that position. But while other men are compelled to forsake their businesses and leave their homes, the clergy are exempt. They are willing enough to induce other men to go to war; some of the younger clergymen even forsake their "holy orders" and enlist. But legally they cannot be compelled, or the clergy would have to meet the same obligations that others must face. It is time this quite unnecessary privilege ceased. It should be added that there is nothing to stop young clergymen enlisting if they wish to.

THE MOABITE STONE

I.

ONE of the commonest theological tricks with which I early became acquainted was the way you were blandly asked to read a few hundred books by "authorities" on some particular point. This was very much in evidence at the time Robert Blatchford was writing his "God and My Neighbour," when, for example, one of his opponents, Frank Ballard, tried to reply in a small book on Jesus. According to Ballard, to really understand the case for Jesus, it was necessary to read more than 100 religious books, the titles of which he gave and which he confidently expected would change an unbeliever into the credulous type he himself represented. I did indeed read a few of the books he recommended, and they all immeasurably strengthened the case against Christianity; so much so, in fact, that I have often felt it was these very Christian books which strongly helped to make me an unbeliever.

This habit of quoting a large number of "authorities" and asking an opponent if he had read them appears to have descended to not a few Rationalists in opposing the more advanced views of other Freethinkers. The idea is exactly the same as with Christians—your advanced views must be reversed or at least modified if you only read what I have read, is obviously the thought behind all this, with the plain implication that, thinking as you do, you could not have read these books, and "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

I need hardly say to anyone who reflects upon that oft-quoted aphorism that a little knowledge is not a dangerous thing, I would rather—I don't want to go into all the pros and cons—deal with a man who knows a little of the Freethought case than with one who knows nothing at all; or in art, for instance, with one who can appreciate Rembrandt a little, than with one who cannot see the difference between the work of that great genius and the scribblings of a child of four.

However, let me descend to particulars. On occasions I have expressed in these columns the conviction that the Hebrew language as we see it in the Pentateuch was a made-up "sacred" language, and never was a spoken one like Greek or English. I came to this conclusion after an intensive study lasting many years, and especially when I found almost all the "experts" and "specialists" on the question enjoying themselves in vast areas of "speculation" and never producing a tittle of evidence as to when or where Hebrew was first spoken, or as to how it ever became a language at all.

On two occasions one of my friendly and erudite opponents hurled the famous inscription of Mesha known as the Moabite Stone at my head, and asked me to explain how an inscription in the Hebrew language could have appeared as far back as the 9th century B.C. if that language was not in common use.

Now this would be a very fair criticism if it came from a Christian—or a Jew for that matter. I do not expect a believer to worry very much about such a sceptical word as "authenticity." He is told what to believe, and that it is heresy to doubt the oracles; and in any case if he were to try and find out the truth about the Moabite Stone from modern books and encyclopædias, he would find that the blessed word "authenticity" was, as Macaulay might say, conspicuous by its absence.

For my part, I have been blessed with a very sceptical nature, and I like to find out things for myself. I am not dissuaded from extending my own researches even when a Rationalist confidently tells me that I am wasting my time. Even Freethinkers can be wrong, and it is not a bad rule for readers of this paper to find things out for themselves whenever they are in doubt about a particular point.

My own suspicions about the Moabite Stone were aroused first because so many "authorities" seemed unable to state clearly and unequivocally exactly what was the language in which the inscription was written. My opponent claimed at first it was

"Hebrew," implying that it was the Hebrew of the Pentateuch; he later put in a little reservation—it was Hebrew, of course, but "dialectically" different from the Hebrew of the Old Testament—a point of view held by Canon Driver in the "Encyclopædia Biblica." I asked a learned Jewish friend of mine whether the inscription was in Hebrew, and he confidently said yes at once. "Really the Hebrew of the Old Testament," I inquired further, "pure and unadulterated?" His face fell a little. "Not quite that exactly," he admitted, "but you know I can almost read most of the words—they are so like Hebrew," he added, brightening up. Driver says that the vocabulary "is identical with that of Hebrew." Harmsworth's "Universal Encyclopædia" says the inscription is in "primitive Hebrew script in the Moabite dialect of about 850 B.C." Professor Eadie, in his "Biblical Encyclopædia," says nothing about the language, but only the inscription is written in "the old Phœnician character." The Schaaf-Herzog "Encyclopædia of Religious Knowledge" says it is written in Hebrew-Phœnician characters, but says nothing about the language.

The Moabite Stone was discovered by a Church missionary in 1868 and it was later broken up by the Arabs, but not before a "squeeze" or "rubbing" was taken of the inscription upon it. Most of the pieces were put together, and this is now in the Louvre. It has been intensely studied and a translation can be found in most Bible dictionaries. But the interesting thing about the whole matter is that while the latest and most modern encyclopædias and Bible dictionaries dare hardly breathe the word "spurious" in connection with it, the nearer we get to the time of its discovery the more are the doubts expressed about its authenticity. By this I do not mean that the stone was manufactured in Birmingham in the 19th century; I mean that no evidence was then produced that it dated from the 9th century B.C., and that there were a number of writers who claimed that it is of a much later date altogether.

Why was it dated so far back? Simply because the inscription records something of the events we find in the early part of the Second Book of Kings. It by no means agrees with "holy script," but if this portion of Kings is dated the 9th century B.C., then, of course, it is inferred that the inscription must have been made at that time. It is just as if somebody made an inscription now, describing something about Shakespeare, and this being found 2,000 years hence the discoverer would say that, dealing with Shakespeare, it must have been written while he was alive. So far as I have read, no scrap of evidence has been produced which proves the Moabite Stone is a product of the 9th century B.C. It is all just "speculation."

In my next article I shall deal with some of the "contra" arguments.

H. CUTNER.

THE DECLINE OF WELSH NONCONFORMITY

IT has been claimed by Welsh Christians, of all denominations, that Wales is the most religious country in the British Isles. Is not Wales the country of crowded congregations, and do not the people gather in their hundreds, and even thousands, to special preaching meetings? And did not religious fervour sweep over the country, like fire in stubble, during the great "religious revivals"? Whatever truth might have been in the claim in the past, it is certain that the claim cannot be substantiated to-day. During the last 25 years—or say, since the Great War—the statistics of the Churches in Wales show, year after year, a steady decline.

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist denomination prides itself on being the only indigenous Welsh religious body—the others being originally, imported from England. So typically Welsh does this denomination claim to be that one of our novelists—himself a Calvinistic Methodist—dubbed it "the John Bull of Wales." One would think that if any religious body could hold its own in Wales this denomination could. But apparently it cannot. At

its Annual General Assembly, held at Morriston on June 22-24, 1942, it was reported* that "there is a decrease of 2,730 in the number of Church members again this year, and a decrease of 7,057 in the number of the members of the Sunday school." At the same Assembly a resolution was passed in favour of more facilities being given to religious teaching in day schools. Naturally!

Things are also unsatisfactory in the churches of the Baptist denomination. In his report to the district meeting of the Baptist churches of the three counties of Denbigh, Flint and Merioneth, held recently, the secretary stated that whilst the number of members in the churches concerned had increased by three during the year, the Sunday schools were in a parlous state. Let me quote from his report in "Seren Cymru," the official organ of the denomination:—

"In the Sunday schools there are 623 teachers and 4,942 scholars, a decrease of 47 in the number of teachers and 231 in the number of scholars. These figures refer to the names on the books, and not to the average attendance each Sunday. We are afraid that these figures are not as accurate as those relating to membership of the churches. Only a kind of estimate is given in several cases, and we are afraid that the numbers given in these cases are too high.* But, taking the figures as received, here is the position:—

	No. of Churches
Without a Sunday school	9
With under 21 scholars	41
With between 21 and 40 scholars	26
With between 41 and 60 scholars	12
With between 61 and 80 scholars	8
With between 81 and 100 scholars	4
With over 100 scholars	9

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"Two or three of the churches, where there are no Sunday schools at present, ought to be able to hold them. There are 41 churches where the number of scholars is not over 20. As we have stated, these are the numbers on the books, and they are seldom or never all present in the school on the same Sunday. It is probable that the number present averages about ten or twelve. Indeed, we are afraid that in some of these churches no school is held on many a Sunday. . . . There are 26 churches where they have between 21 and 40 scholars. From the 40 whose names are on the books, perhaps about 20 will be present, and of these the majority will be adults. The number of children is very small—only three or four."

It should be remembered that in Wales it is the custom for adults as well as children to attend Sunday school.

At the West Glamorgan Baptists' District Meeting, held on May 26, 1942, it was reported that there was a decrease of 151 in the membership of the churches represented, and that the number of Sunday school teachers and scholars had decreased by 873 during the year.

At the East Glamorgan Baptists' District Meeting, held on June 17, 1942, a decrease of 1,097 in the number of church members was reported. No statistics to Sunday schools were given.

I mentioned above that the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists have declared in favour of more religious instruction in day schools. The same remark applies to the Welsh Congregationalists. Here are a few quotations from the presidential address of Professor J. O. Stephens, M.A., B.D., Carmarthen, at the Annual Meeting of the Welsh Congregationalists' Union at Penmaenmawr, on June 17, 1942:—

"Another matter in regard to which Congregationalists have a special responsibility is the question of religious

* Specimens of Baptist "truth," apparently.

instruction in the day schools. Nothing is more heartening than the national awakening in connection with this matter."

"With the weakening of the Sunday schools we see to-day a large number of children who are utterly devoid of any religious knowledge."

"Owing to the apathy and indifference of parents and other causes, many of our youths are lost from the Sunday schools, but all parents are compelled to send their children to the day schools."

My italics. But what a significant phrase, coming as it does from a prominent person in a denomination which boasts of its "stand for liberty" in years gone by, and whose ministers and laymen took a prominent part in the struggle for Welsh Disestablishment! Now that Disestablishment has been secured, we find the clergy and the ministers in Wales conspiring together to "collar the kids." Verily, "Herod and Pilate" are become "friends"! (Luke xxiii. 12.)

The ministers of the various denominations endeavour to put on a grave face when dealing with the decrease in membership, etc., but a few of them are candid enough to give utterance to grave concern regarding the future. One Congregational minister, the Rev. J. Idwal Jones, Rhydyfro, is outspoken, and very pessimistic on the matter. An article from his pen appeared in the April, 1942, issue of "Yr Ymofynnydd" ("The Inquirer"), the organ of the Welsh Unitarians. The article bears the heading "Changing Our Technique," a significant phrase. Here are a few extracts:—

"One of the principal changes which have taken place in our time, so far as we religious people are concerned, particularly in Europe, is the change in the status of the Churches and the Christian faith."

"During these last few years some good people have been endeavouring to set forth on paper the resources of the Christian Churches as compared with the rest of the population. That, surely, is utterly impossible, as the annual reports never tell the truth regarding the number of members in the Churches. We have had estimates varying between 2 per cent. by one, and 20 per cent. by another. Even if we were optimistic enough to accept the latter estimate, that 20 per cent. of the people of this country are Church members, and even if we were more optimistic still and accept the view that each Church member is genuinely endeavouring to be a Christian, we can see at once that we religious people are in a huge minority."

"Some 50 years ago—less than that—it was taken for granted in every country in Europe that, whatever form the life of men would take in the future, it would be modelled on the Christian ideal. . . . Fifty years ago the accepted view was that the Carpenter's Son had come to stay in the history of the world. But now the Carpenter's Son is an exile from some of the largest and most important countries of the Continent, and his name, 'the greatest name,' is anathema amongst men. Even in the countries which still open the door to him he is looked upon as some sentimental idealist—a harmless creature. The change is thorough and complete."

"Now the Carpenter's Son is not on the map so far as the world is concerned; and we cannot be too sure that he is on the map where the Churches are concerned, either."

"Facing the facts always removes languor, whilst to struggle blindly in the midst of difficulties without facing them and realising them causes more and more dejection and depression, as we, as Churches, have known by experience in these recent years. Christianity in the next few years will be the movement of a small minority; to yesterday belong the overcrowded chapels and the great preaching assemblies; a very few in each locality perhaps being

persecuted, even in Wales, or being tolerated as people rather odd in their ways and opinions—that is what to-morrow has to offer us. How long will it last? It is not for us to know the times nor the seasons, but unless the Christian Churches will wake up in every country in a way different from which they have done for many centuries now, there will be no change for some time to come."

"After all, the Gospel started in a very small minority, so it was more than once in its history, and so started each of its golden epochs. Perhaps, also, that that was the intention of the Carpenter's Son Himself concerning it."

"We, as Churches, must realise first of all that we are few, and put on one side the old idea of large crowds. It is possible that we may see our numbers so reduced that to support causes like the present ones will be beyond our ability. In the poverty, which is already being preached at us, that we can expect after this massacre, it may be found that to maintain a permanent ministry will also be impossible."

That, in all conscience, is taking a pessimistic view of the future. I don't think, however, that Mr. Jones need be so apprehensive as to fear persecution. I am more inclined to accept the view of a young friend of mine who is a doctor and also the son of a minister. He said to me recently: "A friend of mine, a Catholic, told me a few days ago that he was afraid 'his people' might yet see persecution in this country. I told him that so far as 'Protestants' were concerned, most of them did not take enough interest in religion as to think of persecuting anybody."

THOMAS OWEN.

THE GREAT MOTHER OF THE GODS

THE worship of the Great Mother of the Gods and her lover or Son were very popular under the Roman Empire. Inscriptions prove that the two received divine honours, separately or conjointly, not only in Italy, and especially in Rome, but also in the provinces, particularly in Africa, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and Bulgaria. . . . The ecstatic frenzies, which were mistaken for divine inspiration, the mangling of the body, the theory of a new birth and the remission of sins through the shedding of blood, have all their origin in savagery, and they naturally appealed to all in whom the savage instincts were still strong. Their true character was indeed often disguised under a decent veil of allegorical or philosophical interpretation, which probably sufficed to impose on enthusiastic worshippers, reconciling even the more cultivated of them to things which otherwise must have filled them with horror and disgust. . . .

An instructive relic of the long struggle (between Mithraism and Christianity) is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival. In the Julian Calendar the 25th of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the Nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the Sun to increase from the turning point of the year. The ritual of the Nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, "The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing." The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun by the image of an infant which, on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to the worshippers. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the 25th of December was the great Oriental Goddess whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte. Now Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the unconquered Sun, they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the 25th of December. . . .

† What unusual and refreshing candour!

What considerations led the ecclesiastical authorities to institute the festival of Christmas? The motives for the innovation are stated with great frankness by a Syrian writer, himself a Christian. "It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same 25th of December, the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. . . . Accordingly, when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnised on that day, and the festival of the Epiphany on the 6th of January." The heathen origin of Christmas is thus plainly hinted at, if not tacitly admitted, by St. Augustine when he exhorts his Christian brethren not to celebrate that day like the heathen on account of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun. In like manner Leo the Great rebuked the pestilent belief that Christmas was solemnised because of the birth of the new sun, as it was called, and not because of the Nativity of Christ.—"The Golden Bough" (abridged edition), by SIR JAMES FRAZER, pp. 356-9.

CORRESPONDENCE

"EVEN SHAKESPEARE"

Sir,—Prior to reading your article in "The Freethinker" dated July 20, 1942, I had some days ago been reading the play, and consider that quoting the lines you refer to without reference to the preceding lines gives a wrong impression.

Under similar circumstances (a father saying farewell to his son who is going away), the advice, in full, would be quite appropriate.

Quoting from my Leopold edition of "Shakspeare,"
Scene III.:

POLONIUS:

Yet here, Laertes? aboard, aboard, for shame!
The wind sits in the shoukler of your sail,
And you are stay'd for. There,—my blessing with you:
(Laying his hand on Laertes' head).

And these few precepts in thy memory
See thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act;
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar;
The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unledg'd comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Bear't, that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man;
And they in France, of the best rank and station,
Are most select and generous, chief in that.

Neither a borrower, nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all,—to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell; my blessing season this in thee!

LAERTES:

Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

—Yours, etc.,

FRED C. WYKES.

[The preliminary lines are excellent, but we do not see that their excellence nullifies in any extent the criticism we offered of the concluding lines.—C. C.]

RELIGION IN THE U.S.S.R.

Sir,—Since the U.S.S.R. has been our military ally there have been many instances in the Press and elsewhere to promote the idea that religion in Russia is not so weak and oppressed as we

have been led to believe. The primary object of this move is to calm the uneasy speculations and misgivings of those Christians who view with apprehension and dismay the alliance with "those Atheist monsters." Now your contributor "S. H." reviews a pamphlet written by a clergyman "who puts the issue fairly and squarely when he points out that the Soviet State is not necessarily opposed to religion"! "S. H." believes that the clergy in England have been used by politically reactionary folk and are not altogether at fault. Since when has the tail wagged the dog?

Lenin said that "our programme thus necessarily includes the propaganda of Atheism." M. Kalinin, President, said at a meeting of the Godless League, reported by "Izvestia" in June, 1929, "war against religion is a necessary and efficacious means for opening the way for Communism." The paper, "Communist Education," stated in 1937: "Bolshevist anti-religious education is an essential part of Communist education," and mentions of children being well grounded in militant Atheism. Atheistical propaganda and the exclusion of religion are bound up with the establishment of the various Republics, because it is believed that religion is a fraud, is ridiculous and superfluous, and is opposed to the interests of social progress. As regards the churches, these remain open if 20 worshippers sign an application each year.

In Russia religion is regarded as most suitable for primitive peoples because it is antediluvian.

One wonders how the leaders in the U.S.S.R. regard the effort to put halos around their heads. I'll hazard a guess that they would willingly trade these halos for any number of tanks and aircraft that can be got from Britain.—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

AIRMEN AND MASCOTS

Sir,—I must apologise for my breach of good manners in writing "a British airman" when I intended to refer not to the Force in general but only to its more superstitious members. The letters on page 323, which very rightly draw attention to my fault, also serve to show that even in supposedly Freethought circles there are institutions and persons too sacred for criticism.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED BUNTING.

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