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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Paine the Pioneer

THE war has brought home to millions the need for what Nietzsche called a "revaluation of values." Those who have not experienced this feeling must be poor dull dogs, or bigots so blind to the lessons of the past and the probabilities of the future that for them the world-war will have been fought in vain. The state of the future will turn largely upon our capacity for converting a conflict of physical force into one of ideas with human betterment as its aim. Physical warfare makes an appeal that touches nearly all, once there is a conviction of its necessity. But that other and more important conflict, the war of ideas, appeals to the smaller number. That war brings with it little of the popular enthusiasm that accompanies marching men and the glitter of military parades; for its soldiers there is small guarantee that even their names will be treasured by those who profit from their labours. The millions we spend so lightly on war contrasts but ill with the niggardly way in which we meet expenditure on human needs in times of peace. We sadly need a revaluation of values.

But the war—since our closer association with the United States—has done something to make better known to the general public the name of one of the greatest of Englishmen—Thomas Paine. He was also the most hated Englishman for the past century and a-half. But, not merely in England, in France, and also in America, those who love humanity in terms of human welfare have not forgotten that lonely figure who did so much to uplift mankind. Many must have opened their eyes when President Roosevelt paid Paine high tribute. That was some kind of repayment for the President's relative's description of Paine as "a dirty little Atheist"—three lies in three words; for Paine was neither little, dirty nor an Atheist. From even the B.B.C. studios, sanctified by lying Army chaplains, artful professional preachers and misleading social amiabilities, came words of praise for the man who was the first to use the term "The United States of America," and at a critical moment restored by his writings the drooping hopes of the American soldiers,

and so sped them to victory. Here is the opening of that famous series of pamphlets by Paine that restored hope to Washington's army—which, by order, were read round the campfire—and so on to victory:—

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he who stands now deserves the love and thanks of men and women. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph; what we obtain too cheaply we esteem too lightly. Heaven knows how to put a price upon its goods, and it would be strange if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated."

That might well be written of the situation to-day. And here is the testimony of Moncure Conway, the chief biographer of this great citizen of the world:—

"The whole circle of human ideas and principles was recognised by this lone wayfaring man. The first to urge extension of the principle of independence to the enslaved negro; the first to advocate international arbitration; the first to arraign monarchy and to point to the dangers of its survival in the Presidency. The first to expose the absurdity of duelling; the first to suggest more rational ideas of marriage and divorce; the first to plead for the animals; the first to demand justice for women."

The full tale does not end here. One would have to add old age pensions, family provisions, the land question and many other minor reforms. Had Paine stopped at these things even his "Rights of Man" might have been forgiven. But he laid hands on the Bible; and no book ever written against the Bible evoked such bitter hatred, such vile slander against its author. There were hundreds of replies, but no answer, to his attack. It was written, as all Paine's writings were written, in a style that opened up almost a new era in English writing. Clear in its meaning, simple in its directness, neither its friends nor his enemies could ignore it. No greater blow to the foolish Bible worship of the late 18th and of the 19th century was ever delivered. For years men and women were imprisoned for selling it; but, in spite of all that Christian malignity could do, the book lived on. And it is still doing its work. Time cannot wither nor custom stale the simplicity of its truth and the sword-like keenness of its reasoning. So long as the Christian superstition exists the "Age of Reason" will live.

Our own humble contribution to this century and a-half story was to print, a few years back, a very large edition of the "Age of Reason." The late artful Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Lang, had announced a "Back to the Bible" campaign. We lent a hand by placing before the public a new edition of Paine's "Age of Reason." By

way of help, we wrote a preface in the shape of a 44-page sketch of Paine's life. The book, running to just over 250 pages, printed on good paper, was sold at the price of 4d. per copy. It was not, of course, a commercial deal; it did not cover the printing bill. It was made possible only by the help of friends. The edition was soon exhausted; but the demand continued, and another large edition was issued at 6d.—prices of material had risen—and again there was a loss on each copy. Now that edition is finished. Still the demands come, and I do not see how we can repeat our miniature miracle. It looks as though we shall have to wait until the war is over—unless some millionaire makes a providential descent on "The Freethinker" office.

By the way, the last descent "providence" made on our office took the shape of a bomb. We hope providence will ignore us in the future.

An Undying Work

Why is it that of all Paine's works this one has met with the greatest hatred, the most sustained malignity? It has been constantly reprinted and is read to-day with a keen appreciation of its effectiveness. Paine's "Rights of Man" has also maintained its hold on real students of history, and has even achieved a place in Dent's popular "Everyman's" series. Much of what is at the moment being shouted from the housetops by our political leaders is derived direct from the "Rights of Man." Whether that shouting is continued when the war is over is another question. But that work of Paine's has not quite the strong appeal that the "Age of Reason" has to-day; nor has it been so frequently reprinted. Moreover, the intense hatred of the "Rights of Man" has died down. The fear and hatred of the "Age of Reason" still remains. A schoolmaster who, in any part of this country, introduced to his pupils the "Age of Reason" would be asked to resign. That book still remains the best hated and most feared of Paine's writings. Literally the herald of a new age, it has lost nothing of its effectiveness and its pertinence to the times.

There are at least two explanations of this. First, the book marks the appearance of a new literary form. Paine was at least one of the pioneers of this, and certainly a chief populariser. It was clear, simple, direct. Unquestionably, Paine was one of the leaders of a form of propaganda that appealed at once and directly to the people as well as to a class. Actually, there was nothing very new in what Paine had to say about the Bible. In parts it had all been said over and over again by Spinoza and by the Deists during the whole of the 18th century. I have always appreciated this because I first made contact with Paine in his historical sequence, and found then in him little that was substantially new. But if that be true the truth must not be permitted to obscure a more important fact, which is that Paine's way of saying it gave all the force of a new attack on the Bible. If it said nothing that was absolutely new, the way in which it was said brought, and still brings, to worshippers of the Bible the sense of a new revelation. No other book so fitted to do its work of liberation from a deeply rooted superstition has ever appeared. The clergy know this—they always have known this; and they have paid Paine the compliment of their slanders and their hatred.

And that leads me to just one more reason why the "Age of Reason" is as effective to-day, so far as Christians are concerned, as it was a century and a-half ago. We non-believers are apt to underestimate the number of people who believe in the Bible of our forefathers. Not even the majority of the clergy are freed from the conviction that the Bible, in origin and authority, differs essentially from other books. For them to admit it is to sabotage the foundations of their creed. The primitiveness of vast masses of the people could not be maintained and retained unless it to some extent reflected the primitiveness of those whom they regarded as leaders. As to attacks on the Bible written by the Freethinkers of to-day, good as they may be, useful as they may be, they have little direct influence on the vast number of people to whom the Bible is almost what it was in Paine's day.

But Paine himself had believed all that the Christians around him believed. He had lived in their mental atmosphere, had thought their thoughts, and was familiar with their language. He could approach a believer in a way that no hard-shell unbeliever to-day can do. There was between Paine and the Bibliolater a sympathy of understanding it is difficult to create to-day in circumstances when even the attempt to do so often runs into ineffectiveness or deception. Paine's approach to the Bible Christian of to-day could only be made by a man who had gone through the fire, who had believed sincerely in the real Bible, only to find how much he had been misled and deceived. Remember, too, that Paine began his "Age of Reason" while he was awaiting execution in a French prison cell. He had realised that if we were to establish the rights of man it could be only by creating the Age of Reason. The beginning of that work was a superb exhibition of humanitarianism. Moncure Conway well says of the origin and spirit of Paine's immortal work that it was an exhibition "of a heart breaking in the presence of a crucified humanity. . . . So long as a link remains . . . binding reason to heart, Paine's 'Age of Reason' will live. It is not a mere book—it is a man's heart."

If ever there has been a period since Paine's work was issued when it was needed it is to-day. It must be kept before a public that so sadly needs it.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

CONRAD NOEL

CONRAD NOEL has gone, at the age of 73, to a well-deserved rest. "The Times" of July 24 announced his death in a brief footnote; various papers recalled him as the well-known vicar of Thaxted, who beautified his church. Yet Noel stood for something more than art and ritual. His Anglo-Catholicism differed entirely from the pretentious piety of the suburban church with its collection of elderly spinsters and effeminate server-boys. He represented revolution pure and simple, even though his revolutionary propaganda was carried on from within the Church of England and his heretical thinking seemed to lead him to extreme orthodoxy of belief. Noel did not move from his stated position. He believed in creeds, sacraments, ceremonial, the Mass. But he was a generous opponent, a brave fighter for the causes which he espoused, a strong sympathiser with the underdog. Poetry and mysticism had no meaning for him unless they emerged into a practical striving for a better social order in which men might be free and equal. It never seems to have

occurred to Conrad Noel that his own Catholic bohemianism was not typical of ecclesiasticism; the Church which he served as a priest would probably be one of the first things which a revolution would be forced to overthrow as a reactionary element militating against human equality.

Conrad Roden Le Despenser Noel was the son of a poet and the grandson of a peer; his father, the Hon. Roden Noel, was a Victorian writer of liberal views, the author of a useful monograph on Byron and of various books of verse. His son adopted much of his outlook, including his strong philosophical mysticism and his reaction against the conventional and the merely respectable. As a young man Noel's thoughts turned to religion and he was ordained into the Church of England. A sensible Church would have made good use of the unconventional and clever priest; Anglicanism seemed to give him no greater scope than to quarrel incessantly with the authorities. He was a curate in Manchester when he served a short prison sentence for vindicating the rights of free speech. Coming to London Noel became associated with the set which clustered around Stewart Headlam in his struggles to awaken the Church to its sense of social responsibility. Conrad Noel was the secretary for some years of the Church Socialist League and well known as a Left Wing debater. In these early years he wrote several books. "The Day of the Sun" was a challenge to Sabbatarianism, "Byways of Belief" was highly praised by G. K. Chesterton and set out to do battle for Anglican Catholicism as Noel understood it, "Socialism in Church History" sought to remind the Church of the responsibilities which it was shirking. It is small wonder that Noel was unpopular with Bishops and dreaded by many of his fellow clergy. Most of his honey was gathered by Left political movements; it was too unpalatable for Church digestions!

When he was appointed in 1910 to the vicarage of Thaxted by the late Countess of Warwick, Noel took up his residence in a pleasant Georgian house which was to become his home for the rest of his life. He restored the magnificent medieval church and made it a place of beauty, instituting services which recalled the worship of its first founders. He brought together a small coterie of young men into the Catholic Crusade, which sought to propagate Catholicism and Communism at the same time. Above all, he became widely famed as the enemy of the bourgeoisie and respectable by flying a Red Flag in the church. The Essex village became a place of pilgrimage; it stood for an England that was no more.

Two books written during recent years represent Noel's attitude throughout the Thaxted period. His "Life of Jesus" described the Founder of Christianity as a leader of social revolution, the inspirer of all that was Left Wing in the Palestine of his day. "Jesus the Heretic" was a challenge to the formal Church and a claim that a living religion could only be recovered by an association of mystical and social values. It cannot be said that either book was really convincing. The whole range of recent New Testament studies was opposed to Noel's position. There is no real evidence that Jesus was intimately concerned with social reform; his portrait is too shadowy and material is lacking for its reconstruction. As Noel wrote "Jesus the Heretic," he must often have recalled his own struggles with his Bishops. The Church of England has shown few, if any, signs of taking the courses which Noel advocated. The sudden spurt of social reformism, instituted by Archbishop Temple, bears little or no analogy to the revolutionary Catholicism which thundered forth from the pulpit of Thaxted Church. It lacks both its poetry and its sincerity.

It is a matter of surprise that the old friend of Edward Carpenter and H. S. Salt should have clung so strongly to orthodoxy in religion. Perhaps Noel did not do so to the extent which he himself imagined. There was in him a streak of the pantheist; his doctrine of the Mass was based upon a belief in Divinity as immanent in all things not far removed from the

faith of Edward Carpenter. He had interpreted a pantheistic approach into Christian valuations and clothed it in a Medievalism which appealed to his romantic and poetical nature. Had his background been different, Noel would have fitted into the scenery of the Carpenter ménage at Milnthorpe or into the humanitarian propaganda of Salt, for both of whom he always cherished a warm regard.

The Established Church has profited little or nothing by possessing the fiery prophet of "Red" Christianity, Conrad Noel. It never used him to any great extent, and it has done its best to associate itself with the stuffy suburbanism which was his strongest dislike. Socialism has passed on into more exact and scientific forms than ever appealed to his romance-loving mind; to Noel, John Ball, the rebel priest, always possessed a greater meaning than Karl Marx. Yet he was a significant figure, a Bohemian personality seeking to wrestle with an obsolete system in order to make it into an instrument for social revolution. He cared for liberty and freedom, putting many in his debt who are far removed from his creed. In fact, he will not be remembered for the most part because he was a priest; he was a link with the age of Joynes, Salt, Havelock Ellis and Carpenter. Noel stood for high ideals; he was a poet and a mystic. But his sacraments and ceremonial symbolised a wider liberty than any conventional Church could ever contain.

"JULIAN."

HOW FAR WILL THEY GO?

HOW far—in the direction of denying what used to be regarded as the Fundamental Truths of the Christian religion—will the advanced guard of the Church of England go?

It is an interesting question, and the answers are surprising.

The truth is that the criticisms of modern-minded people, fresh studies in comparative religions, and the original Bible scripts, and finally the tenets of Freethought, filtering down to ordinary folk, exercise constant pressure on the Church which keeps yielding fortress after fortress and performing strategic "withdrawals." Anglican intellectuals even talk to-day of the "so-called" Apostles' Creed—and accept very little of it!

Take first the Virgin Birth. Two Anglicans, the late Professor J. M. Creed and the Rev. H. D. A. Major, D.D., that celebrated modernist editor of "The Modern Churchman," both say that it was a birth in full wedlock and only changed about A.D. 70 into the record of a Virgin Birth. They quote Romans i. 3: "Christ made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (i.e. Joseph's physical son); Hebrews vii. 14: "Our Lord sprang out of Juda"; Revelation xxii. 16: "I Jesus am the root and offspring of David," and the various passages in the Gospels where Joseph and Mary are called "his parents," and others his brethren. Anglicans even quote the repute of Merlin and Plato for being "virgin births," and the fact that Philo refers to Zipporah: "When Moses took her he discovered that she was pregnant, but not by mortal man." (They might also quote Jupiter and other ancient gods impregnating mortal women.)

Then what becomes of the Apostles' Creed, which says, "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary"? We are left with a "substratum of real spiritual truth in the birth of Jesus as an Act of God." But this is very different from the ancient dogma of Virgin Birth, still held tenaciously by the Roman Church and millions of other Christians.

Next take the Resurrection of the Body. The old view was that Jesus rose bodily from the tomb and that our bodies will rise, too, at the Last Day. Now many Anglicans and Nonconformists say that the risen Lord was not the old Lord, but a "wholly spiritual Jesus whose Presence is still with us." It is said that the earliest documentary evidence for the risen and living Jesus makes no reference to an empty tomb. Wider knowledge of biology and chemistry makes Resurrection of the body doubted, and it is pointed out that the Resurrection is

spiritual, for St. Paul said, "Thou fool . . . it is raised a spiritual body. . . Behold I show you a mystery." The "appearances" of Jesus to Cephas, to the Twelve, to Five Hundred, to James, and again to all the disciples, are said to be mental; not physical. Mary Magdalene had "physical and mental disorders" ("seven devils") and only thought she saw the Risen Lord. Matter is now known to be indestructible, but it changes at death, and in this sense we "live" again. Our "spirits" will go on living somewhere, somehow "in God." What a change is this "spiritual" resurrection from the old literally-believed Resurrection of the Body!

As to the Ascension, that is flatly denied as only a "spiritual truth," not a fact. It is like the Creation and the Garden of Eden in Genesis (which even Bishop Gore called unhistorical), now accepted not as a fact but symbolism. In a word, fiction. Heaven is not in the sky. Some clergy call it a state, not a place. Jesus is not perpetually in a sitting posture "at the right hand of the Father" (as in the Nicene Creed), from whence he shall come as a Judge. God has no hand: he is no longer anthropomorphic. Jesus never levitated into the clouds, as a fact. He is here—everywhere—now, "immanent" in his Church and our hearts. The Ascension has gone!

Birth, Resurrection and Ascension denied, what remains? The miracles, especially the casting-out of devils, were long ago rejected by educated modern Christians. The Atonement Doctrine is clung to, still, and so are the ethical teachings of Jesus, though these latter are uneasily felt not to be as original as once was thought. But when the modern world rejects the dreadful idea of a God needing the bloodshed of his own Son as a "propitiation" for others' sin, the Atonement will no doubt be proclaimed by modern-minded clergymen to be not a matter of fact but a "spiritual symbol" like Jonah's whale, Noah's Ark, Eden's serpent and the other race-childhood stories. Now astronomy teaches us of millions of worlds that may be inhabited, and the idea of Jesus being perpetually crucified on each planet to save its inhabitants from a loving Father's wrath is too incredible and too ridiculous. One crucifixion is a tragedy: a million crucifixions would be merely preposterous habit. So the Atonement will follow the rest, no doubt.

Then we are left with a Man, an Ethical Teacher. Or even with less. For some clerical writers seek to distinguish between "the historical Jesus" and "the eternal Christ" to show that faith in the latter would survive loss of faith in the former. Mr. H. Cutner, that frequent contributor to "The Freethinker," who thinks Jesus a mere myth, could still be, according to these writers, an acceptable Christian—much as this may surprise him! The Christ-principle rather than the factual Jesus is enough, apparently. The Church, they say, was not created by, nor is dependent upon, the simple earthly story of Jesus but upon the activity of His Spirit in the hearts of the Faithful. A few "Christian" apologists are quite prepared to concede that the Jesus of the Gospels is a mere Ideal Figure evolved from a mass of heterogeneous material, drawn from the flotsam and jetsam of Other Faiths and personified by the imaginations of the Early Church. This releases them from the bondage of the Bible and enables them to fight Atheism or doubt from a spiritual Cloud-Cuckoo Land by agreeing with its argument that the factual Jesus is a fiction.

So the Jesus of the Gospels goes! Jesus and his doings and sayings are not factually true, but are mere "symbols of eternal and timeless truth." Jesus not merely had no Divine father, but no human father, and he never was! But the loaves and fishes remain—we must have our parsons and Bishops. Still, even the Bishops are attacked, and Dean Inge makes a character in his dialogue, "Miracle, Myth and Mystery," say—

"The Bishops have to enforce a standardised orthodoxy which the more intelligent among them must know to be a pitiful jumble of petrified symbols. But most of them soon learn their trade and they have not much time to think."

Could Atheism itself use severer language?

Dean Inge and his fellow-modernists remind one of the Babu who said: "My wife being imperfectly devil-upped (developed) worships a stone Image. I, being perfectly devil-upped, worship Myself." For, after all, what may be the "Christ-Within-a-Man's Self" but his own feelings? The product (probably) of his last-eaten dinner with its second helping of rice-pudding!

One English churchman is said to have complained that his modernist vicar was always asking him to worship "a Scotch mist" and another said that his vicar made him think of God as "a sort of oblong blur." To such surrealist conceptions does flight from criticisms of the Old and New Testament reduce the cleverer Christian cleric. God is a kind of algebraic X, equalling the unknown quantity, and seeking him is like solving an insoluble problem in algebra.

Nor is the attitude of criticism confined to the clergy. Mr. J. Middleton Murry, the critic, writes a "challenging" book with the title of "The Betrayal of Christ by the Churches"—a fact that I have always insisted upon—and respectable theological publications advertise the title. In another theological advertisement by Messrs. Rider and Co. (true, the advertisement is in a dull quarterly unlikely to reach the Christian unintellectual laity!) the following questions appear: "Was Jesus Divine?" "Is Resurrection a Myth?" "Are the Creeds Credible?" "Did Christ Perform Miracles?"—all of which might be titles of articles for Atheists. Messrs. George Allen and Unwin, in another advertisement of a life of Christ even speak of "desperate harmonising" having to be done in "able and devout" lives of Christ "in order to clear up discrepancies" in the Four Gospels. Now if "The Freethinker" had said that, how religious folk would shudder! But educated clerics may well say amongst themselves what they would never say to the uneducated laity in a public sermon.

How far will these advanced Anglicans go? As the railway companies say, nowadays, to intending travellers: "Is the journey really necessary?" Apparently the flight from Jesus is necessary, for they are afraid of his life-story, his miracles and, above all, his social teachings—these last being so useless for money-making and in furthering the war-effort. The Christian era of the Anglican Church has ended. The sub-Christian age has arrived; and Dr. Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, whose words and deeds are the exact antithesis of Jesus Christ's, appears to be its major prophet, with Dr. Major, Dean Inge and Professor Boys-Smith as minor ones.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

A BIBLE PROBLEM

MAY a mere "man in the street" be allowed to air his, no doubt naive, thoughts after reading Mr. Howell Smith's admirably presented case for the historicity of Jesus?

On pp. 159-60 he adduces several verses which furnish "very much stronger evidence" and says that "The strong witness of these texts has to be explained away by the Mythicists." Mr. Archibald Robertson put the case concisely thus:—

"Mt. xvi. 28 = Mk. ix. 1 = Lk. ix. 27."

"Ascribes to Jesus a prophecy that some of those who stand near him at the time of speaking will not die till they see the Kingdom of God. (Slight variations in the three versions.) Now the Kingdom of God had not come when the Gospels were written and hasn't come yet. This prophecy has been falsified; but the person who first committed it to writing must have expected it to come true. Therefore, he must have written when there were still people alive who had known Jesus. Therefore, there was a historical Jesus."

This looks good, so let us try another prophecy on the same lines:—

Ez. xxvi. 7-14 ascribes to Yahveh a prophecy which would be fulfilled within the lifetime of the hearer/s. Now it had not

been fulfilled when "Ezekiel" was writing, nor when the hearer/s died. This prophecy was falsified. But "Ezekiel" must have expected it to come true. Therefore, he must have written when there were still people alive who knew that Yahveh spoke to him (xxiv. 19). Therefore, there was a historical Yahveh.

In this case we have a direct communication from the alleged speaker to a known writer—at least, he claims a name, a habitation and a date—who writes of a known historical event, but in the first case we have a nameless, homeless, dateless writer who is assumed to quote—at the best at second-hand—a statement on the meaning of which he, i.e. Mark, is in hopeless disagreement.

It is assumed (1) that the meaning of the writer is known; (2) that he wrote literally; (3) that neither the assumed teller nor the writer invented the saying when so much was invented; (4) that the teller transmitted the saying correctly and the writer repeated it truly; (5) that he must have written when there were still people alive who had known—who? Jesus! The actuality of that which has to be proved is calmly assumed after it has been admitted that the saying has only been "ascribed" to Jesus by the writer at 2nd (?), 20th (?) hand. I refrain from any remark on the "Therefore/s."

The substance of Mk. ix. 1 is absent from Harnack's "Q"; it does not appear in M. Couchoud's rendering of Marcion's Gospel, while in J. M. Pryse's "The Restored New Testament" it, together with Mt. xvi. 28 and Lk. ix. 27, is marked as spurious.

Both these "duds" have been allowed to stand in sacred books which were in the sole keeping of priests for c. 1,500 years, which goes to prove that the Gospel account, at least, is —?

History? With great learning and immense industry, R. Eisler has, from the dust of ages, dug up for us (he claims) the actual man Jesus; surely the sorriest travesty of a man who would be king in all—history? Perhaps one day he will explain to us how such a mass of myth—we could understand it in the case of M. Dujardin's "eel"—in so short a time; gathered round such a pinchbeck Messiah.

Though the Mythicist position may not be altogether satisfactory—but see G. Massey's "Ancient Egypt"—it seems to me that the contenders for a historical Jesus have a deal of explaining to do, e.g., if a man Jesus initiated the Xian movement c. A.D. 26, how account for such statements as Jh. iv. 38! Mk. ix. 38-40; Jh. x. 16?

On Mk. xiii. one might ponder on T. Inman's "Ancient Faiths," v. 2 p. 531ff.

CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

BROWNING AND THEOLOGY

All his life long Browning went on repeating, with inexhaustible fertility of illustration and ever-changing choice of language, the old shibboleths. The old leaven worked furiously in his veins, the cherished superstitions clung like mandrakes to the soil of his mind. Intellectual tinfidity runs through his work, bounding his outlook, shortening his hands, cramping the effort of which, had it been backed by more mental courage, such a genius as his might have been capable. Some of his poetry will survive, but his excursions into theology were belated when he wrote them. The orthodoxy of the Victorian era is to-day but a feast of husks, "vacant chaff well-meant for grain." Browning was too near in his theological standpoint, to the clever, shifty Bishop Blougram. In religious speculation, Browning never launched out into the deep. He hugged the shore, never directing the prow of his ship towards the illimitable ocean, but ever seeking safe shelter under the shadow of the land. It was the safe rather than the heroic course that he exalted. For this reason, Browning, as a philosophical and religious teacher, can never give the full satisfaction to intellectual minds which they can derive from those who have gone forward wherever their intellect may have led.

MIMNERMUS.

ACID DROPS

THE MODERATOR of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland says that what is described as "The King's call to prayer on September 3 will stir the imagination." If it does it will only be in the direction of reflections on the unlimited stupidity of the performance. If God exists, and if he is what the King believes—according to his official declaration—that God is on our side, things should have been better than they are. The Moderator says that on September 3 we must not forget to "render thanks for his goodness to us during the war." Of course, this might be "writ sarcastic," but we doubt it. It is just the usual idiotic, insulting Christian cant of which so many are now heartily tired. Even common decency should have prevented the Moderator, with the millions of killed, the much larger number of maimed, the terror that has reigned over the world, the torture of women and children, to have talked about God's goodness to us. Perhaps all the Moderator means is that he still holds his post with its emoluments. That supposition lets him off lightly.

We are writing this before September 3, owing to the date of going to press. But we feel certain that nothing will happen that would lead to any modification of what we have said; and we are quite certain that if "God" really did interfere none would be more surprised than Christians.

We are always hearing the evils of the world set down to the influence of "Materialism" without being told what the Materialism is like that is so powerful for evil. So far as figures will go, the number of people who profess some religion or the other leaves but scant room for non-religionists to do much. Some five hundred millions, or more, are written down as Christians, and there are all the other religions in addition, with many, many millions being set to the credit of "Heathenism." All we can say is that if "Materialists"—a pitiful handful—are so powerful, it looks as though religion in general, and Christianity in particular, must take so definitely a back seat that the money spent on its upkeep may be written off as sheer loss. But, of course, when circumstances suit, Christian apologists are loud in affirming that "Materialism" is completely discredited, and lack both status, influence and numbers.

We have said this because we note that Cardinal Suhard of Paris, has called for a united effort to kill the materialism "that has brought us to the pass in which we find ourselves." And the sugary pet of the B.B.C., Lord Elton, one who can always be trusted to pile absurdity on absurdity when dealing with religion, tells us that the kind of citizens we shall have in the new world will depend upon the religious instruction given to the children of to-day. But the children of *yesterday* had plenty of religion, and if these children, now adults, are unsatisfactory, it might be as well to see what the new generation will be like without religion. We do wish that some of our cheap publicists would give the present adult generation credit for enough intelligence to see through the futilities they are so fond of giving the public. As to the French Cardinal—well, we have said he is a Cardinal, and that should be quite enough to explain his outburst. Nor will either or both these representatives of bamboozledom pluck up courage to say to the present generation of adults: "You are really a rotten lot. All we have said about your bravery, your devotion and ability, is all so much bunkum. But there is a war and we have to flatter you. But we hope to have a better stock in the next generation."

We have not had time to do more than glance at "Broadcast Talks," by C. S. Lewis, but, judging from a hasty glance, it runs on the usual religious B.B.C. lines—that is, confused thinking—or worse—with nonsensical statements concerning the relations of science and religion. Indeed, its confusion is to Mr. Lewis precisely what bullet-proof armour is to a battleship. As it often happens that one is not quite sure what he means, it is not so easy to disentangle his argument so as to express it in a few words—such, for example, as "that scientific laws describe what is, and natural law what ought to be." The first is correct enough, but what is meant by the second? How can "what ought to be" take rank as a law? Mr. Lewis, we believe, claims

to have been at one time an Atheist. We very much doubt if he ever had the logical right to call himself by so distinguished a term. He probably means that once upon a time he doubted some of the most objectionable forms of religion, but has now recovered from those symptoms of approaching sanity of thought.

Lieut.-Gen. Sir William Dobbie has a sufficient faith in the power of prayer to figure at a meeting of the "Advent Testimony and Preparation Movement" as a witness to the value of prayer. The "Advent," etc., etc., represents one of the least intellectual Christian organisations and, of course, the value of Sir William's presence is that he is "in the news" on account of his fine defence of Malta. He would have been of advertising value to "Adventers" even if he had made a fortune building motor-cars, the millionaire owner of a world-famous face cream, or even a convicted murderer finally reprieved because three times the rope which was intended to hang him had broken. If the General had been Mr. William Dobbie, costermonger, his value would have been nil.

To do justice to Sir William, he did not say that prayer had saved Malta. He is content to say that the prayers of the people had been a "tremendous help to himself and his wife." That we can quite believe. So would a number of resolutions passed at non-religious meetings. But we fancy that the grit of the Maltese, and the skill and daring of airmen and seamen made some trifling contribution to the result.

But Sir William is in good company. Sir Isaac Newton appears to have thought that his meditations of the Bible prophecies were of much greater value than his theory of gravitation, and the great scientist Faraday belonged to a very ignorant and little-known body of Christians—the Sandimanians.

We have been overhauling a quantity of old magazines, preparatory to a "clear out," and we are surprised at the many good things we have found. Here is one, from one of America's prominent writers:—

"Nowhere in the world, so far as I can make out, are the rev. clergy more indignant about the Russian assault upon religion than in the United States. Not even the Pope himself has denounced the business more violently than certain Protestant divines among us. What moves these brethren so powerfully? My guess is that it is not so much a tender solicitude for their beleaguered colleagues of the Holy Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church as uneasiness about their own future. They sense, I suspect, the first pulsations of a revolt against their high puissance, deep down among the peasants of the land. Pretty soon they may confront an active anti-clerical movement, and maybe even an infidel movement. What it lacks so far is not suitable recruits, but simply competent leaders.

"Some day a bright young man in South Carolina or Mississippi, aspiring to Service in a soothing elective office, will heave himself upon a "To hell with the preachers!" platform. The first week he will have to dodge lynchers, but along about the tenth or twentieth week he will be leading a lynching posse of his own. I prophesy formally that the first altruist who takes this line will be elected with a bang. And that before he takes the oath of office a thousand more will be howling through the land."

The Bishop of Liverpool, Dr. David, in a Diocesan leaflet, says that in his judgment a whipping should be given after a juvenile Court has returned a verdict of "guilty." Very thoughtfully, he says:—

"The ideal punishment begins by inflicting pain. It should be short and sharp, but it should also bring shame."

A good religious doctrine. Dr. David believes that the education of the people should be guided by the Churches and the use of the whip.

"A Christian peace," says the "Catholic Herald," "is a Papal peace." That, we take it, is another way of saying that the Catholic Church will oppose, or at most not support, any peace that does not make for the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church. And the worst of it is we have a goodly

number in high places who would agree with the "Herald," and a large number also who would differ with the "Herald" only to substitute another Church for the Roman one.

"Candidus," who once upon a time was responsible for some very excellent articles for the "Daily Sketch," appears to be converting himself into a champion of religion. Not of any religion in particular, but of religion in general; and much as we dislike religion of a definite description, we dislike still more the dealing in double meanings with a profession of respect for just some unnamed variety of religion. "Candidus," for example, finds a reason for not dismissing religion in the fact that mankind must have "faith" in something. Quite so! The soldier must have faith in his gun; the assassin in his knife; the good man in his benevolence; the forger in his skill with a pen. That is an elementary aspect of everything a man does.

But it is quite another matter when we say, or infer, that because a man must have a faith in what he does that he must have a faith in god or in religion. That is double dealing with a vengeance. The man who argues in this way is offering the public one thing and then giving them another. That is all right for the pulpit, but not for genuine teachers.

"Candidus" seems angry with H. G. Wells because he sneered at Lord Gort as a "praying general." We are quite sure that H. G. Wells would have other grounds than that for "sneering" at Lord Gort. Any indictment of a General would really be based on his work as a military commander, and in such a case the fact that he was a prayer addict would have nothing to do with it, although it might, in given circumstances, be taken as contributory evidence. For it is dead certain that a General, in even the British Army, who placed more faith in prayers than he did in the equipment of his men and the strategy of his war-making would not hold his post for long even with the most religious of peoples. The recent Governor of Malta was very much devoted to prayer, but he had sure faith in our aircraft, in the bravery of those under his command, and the courage of the people with him.

Rev. W. White Anderson, of Edinburgh, selected for his Church the motto, "Fear God and Work Hard." Quite Christian, but not good enough. Sounds like a slave being lashed to work. One day Mr. Anderson will discover that the best work is willing work with no fear behind it.

Here is another vanished illusion. We always imagined that the Catholic Church not only believed in "the bodily assumption of Our Lady into heaven," but that, as admitted by a Catholic writer in the "Universe," it "would be dangerous to deny it." We are now told that "the dogma has never been defined," that the Vatican Council of 1870, after accumulating "much evidence"—this would be very interesting to examine—ended its meetings and the dogma was left in the air. That is all very well, but why does not the Vatican summon another Council now and make a dogma of this miraculous "assumption" or throw it overboard? Is it afraid of being laughed out of court?

The Bishop of Lichfield, Dr. Woods, does not believe that "Apostolic simplicity should characterise a father in God" or "be represented by the bishop living in a little villa." We agree. The "apostolic simplicity" of Christian bishops lasted only so long as they were hard up. But, to be quite just to them, they have never failed to preach to others the virtues of the simple life.

The "famous" church at St. Hilary, Cornwall, has once again shown typical Christian unity. A number of articles and altars have been removed by "Protestants," the vicar from the pulpit expressing, "with all the emphasis I could command, my entire disapproval and abhorrence of the dreadful and sacrilegious manner in which the work of taking down holy altars was being carried out." What a glorious time these "Puritan" storm troopers, as the "Protestants" are being called, will have when "Anglos" and Romans really try to come together, especially when genuine Roman "ornaments" will grace all Church of England churches as a step in the acknowledgment of Papal supremacy in England!

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. FARMER, Miss D. L. SAYERS and R. B. KERR.—Next week. Too late for insertion in this issue.

C. M. HOLLINGHAM.—Sorry for delay in publishing your article, but since the "blitz" we have not the control over the paper that we had before our machinery was destroyed.

The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: C. A. Saunders, 8s.; B. Cemel, 3s.

To distributing and circulating "The Freethinker": E. Drabble, 3s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

WE congratulate all concerned—and this embraces men and women of all shades of political opinion—on the belated withdrawal of the ban on the "Daily Worker." The value of the legal freedom of the Press is too great for it to be at the mercy of a Ministerial ukase which refuses any explanation and sets aside the protective power of the Court. It is one paper to-day; it may be another to-morrow, and we may be sure that where the Press is denied the ordinary right of protest and defence, talk of freedom is reduced to idle chatter. Nothing can replace the liberty of speech and publication.

The following letter was sent by Mr. A. Hanson to the editor of "The Times." We do not know if it appeared—probably not. At any rate, we cannot picture our leaders doing anything quite as decent as Mr. Hanson suggests. It is worthy of reproduction in these columns:—

"When the Chinese sage, Confucius, was asked if he could sum up the canon of human conduct in one word, he gave it as 'Reciprocity,' which I do not think can be improved upon. Well, may I suggest that this might well be adopted at the present time with particular reference to Russia? My point is this: Since the U.S.S.R. became our ally she has discountenanced the public propaganda of the Anti-God Society. Do you not think that we might with the same reciprocal regard for the feelings of our ally abandon for at least the time being any national manifestations of religious activities? Possibly this suggestion is now too late for acceptance, but it might serve the purpose for future anniversaries. I am confident that it would meet with the appreciative approval of our two greatest allies (in population)—Russia and China."

A new edition of Mr. Cohen's "God and Evolution," revised and rewritten, is in the press and will be published in the course of a week or two. We have had a great many new readers since the opening of the war, and these newcomers should find the booklet very handy. The bearing of evolution on religious beliefs is well brought out.

Mr. R. West writes: Apropos to a paragraph in "Sugar Plums" in your issue of August 16, concerning the aim of the Roman Catholic Church to secure "complete control of the schools," I would respectfully point out that (as, of course, you know) her aims are ultimately much wider than only schools. In the Encyclical "Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae" of Pope Leo XIII., of February, 1880, the following illuminating passage occurs:—

"If the Civil power combines in a friendly manner with the spiritual power of the Church, it necessarily follows that both parties will greatly benefit. The dignity of the State will be enhanced and, *with religion as its guide* (italics mine), there will never be a rule that is not just, while, for the Church, there will be at hand a *safeguard and defence* which will operate to the good of the Faithful."

In other words, the Church says to the State: "Let me direct you, while you protect me." What is this but degrading the State to a sort of policeman, while the Church, unhampered, does all the actual ruling of the people—the Autocracy Supreme.

The Church—Catholic and Protestant—has always used the State to its own sectarian ends, and the effort was never more impudent than the one that is being made under cover of the war—and with the connivance of the Government.

Some parsons are very disturbed at the way in which the standard of preaching has recently been attacked in religious journals. They are trying to give reasons, and, among others, the Rev. G. R. Renwick thinks that as "the foundation of preaching is theology," and as "the average theological course is totally inadequate," therefore "no man is capable of preaching a useful sermon without five years of systematic doctrinal study behind him." This should rule out a man like Spurgeon, who, whatever might be said against him, appears to have been a fairly hefty preacher in his time—and he started before he was 20. But the truth surely is either a man is a great speaker or he is not. A course in theology, no matter for how long, cannot possibly make a man hold an audience in the way a born orator can; and as the average parson is drawn from the ranks of mere nobodies why should great preaching be expected?

The original Brains Trust may have given people a great deal of entertainment—especially through the inadequacy of some of the replies—but, honest to goodness, we don't want to be swarmed with imitations which are not even entertaining. It appears that "Religious Brains Trusts" are being formed all over the country, all "concerned with imparting spiritual teaching"; and a pretty mess they are already making of it. The "Church Times," in fact, solemnly warns them that it is just as important "to capture the spirit" of the original Brains Trust, which "depended largely on the personality and gifts of the performers." We like that word "performers," for some of their verbal antics justify even such a word as the time-honoured one of "jesters." Anyway, it is not at all likely that a "religious" Brains Trust will have any performers or even jesters—though we may laugh heartily at some of the "replies."

The "Morning Advertiser" says that "Nobody in his senses ever believed in democracy as a religion." No one in his senses, we agree; but there are so many people who lack the courage to say they have no use for real religion that their timidity, or confused intellects, lead them to label anything they believe in as their religion and so establish their claim to "respectability." And when the "Advertiser" finishes its leading article with "The knowledge and practice of religion must be inculcated in the young so that in the future God must be placed first everywhere," we wonder whether it is not qualifying for a position among those woolly-minded individuals who call anything they may happen to believe in a religion. Or perhaps the "Advertiser" is just trying to gain friends for the Trade interests it represents.

THE WORLD AND "DEMOCRACY"

(Continued from page 352)

DURING last century considerable progress was made in the extension of democracy to other countries under varying conditions and resulting measure of success. Experience has shown the number of questions to be resolved arising out of its practical adoption, and the technique of government (including our own)¹ which would take us beyond the present limits. Now we have to deal with essentials, and the issue indicated at the outset—the bearing of a popular system on the finer interests of intellectual and cultural freedom and inquiry.

Here we must retrace a little. The assumption that democracy and mental freedom are at one turns on certain conditions. We have traced the rise of a consultative assembly to a function in the Constitution, sufficiently potent in the 15th century to change the succession to the Crown. But this body reflects the passions and prejudices of the age. Theocracy was yet in the ascendant, as the "spiritual" force in the State; and Parliament that gave the rule to the Lancastrian King, Henry IV., passed a fresh heresy law consigning such to the flames in face of the rising Lollard movement. . . . But other challenges were to come. The storms of the Reformation saw the end of the sway of the "Bishop of Rome." The Elizabethan settlement finally emerged with a National Church and amended liturgy in the mother-tongue. The theory of a unitary religious State continued; and "recusants" were subject to penalties, if less harsh than those of the old régime. Meanwhile, dissident Protestant sects and notions of Church government hostile to "prelacy" entered the arena of controversy. In the Parliamentary struggle with the Stuarts, and Civil War of the 17th century, which ended in the "glorious Revolution" of 1688, religious and ecclesiastical issues arise equally with contentions over taxation, etc. This disturbance favoured the expression of ideas of a more independent and critical character from bolder spirits.

The Printing Press had been laid under duress in all countries as soon as authority realised its utility as a means to spread knowledge and light. So we have Milton's clarion call in his "Ariopagitrea" for complete freedom of printing and discussion; "the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience and, above all, liberties." . . . Pleas for toleration were advanced, as that of Locke (1689), though his charity did not extend to "Atheists."²

The Press censorship was removed early in the 18th century. But following on a partial Toleration Act which covered certain sects, the High Anglicans, alarmed at these liberal movements, pressed for another Blasphemy Law in 1698 on the grounds that "many persons have of late openly avowed and published many blasphemous and impious opinions contrary to the doctrine and principles of the Christian religion." If not so ferocious as its medieval prototype, it remained a menace to open expression. Nonetheless, much exploratory work went forward during the 18th century onwards.

The activities of scientific associations such as the Royal Society greatly extended "natural knowledge," and created a mental climate inimical to the ancient pervading supernaturalism. The right of free canvass and discussion, once set in national consciousness as the basis of Parliamentary rule, could not be limited in its range. It was vigorously exercised through news-

¹The Proportional Representation Society of London (82, Victoria Street, S.W.) has given careful study to such questions, and publishes a valuable literature, pamphlets, etc., thereon, to which those interested may be referred.

²Though scepticism was in the air, it is doubtful whether reasoned Atheism then existed to any extent. As the term, having come into vogue, incited strong antipathies, it was a convenient missal for the orthodox to throw at an opponent's head.

papers, journals, debating clubs. When Parliament was largely a controlled corporation its policies and Ministers were subject to a scrutiny, to lampoons and critics not to be easily surpassed. Indeed, with a general popular enfranchisement political controversy has softened in tone. Despite temporary reactions set up by the French revolutionary and Napoleonic era, the tide of unrestricted debate and investigation on every human concern flowed steadily with emancipation of the Commonalty, in harmony here with the native humour and tolerance of English character, detached from perversion by alien fanaticisms and creeds sprung from foreign sources, and implies the separation of spiritual from temporal power.

"The Free Church in the Free State." . . . Yet Churches of all persuasions are organised, able therefore to exert influence not measured by their numbers amid the amorphous, indifferent majority: shown in their attempt over the schools. The Catholic Church plots ceaselessly to extend the sway; its hostile intervention re the Freethought Congress will be in memory. There is noteworthy, too, a fanatical and intolerant spirit exhibited by their supporters over certain dogmatic "economic" prescriptions for Utopia, derived from alien inspiration. . . . Things to be watched and countered by active Libertarians: *toujours en vedette*.

From the U.S.A. come further illustrations. Some of the first colonies were founded by zealous sectaries fleeing from European persecution. They carried a similar spirit with them. They set up theocratic governments from which all who did not belong to their own sect were excluded. Roger Williams had imbibed from the Dutch Arminians the idea of the separation of Church from State. On account of this heresy he was driven from Massachusetts, and he founded Providence to be a refuge for those whom the Puritan colonists persecuted. Here he set up a democratic constitution, in which the magistrates had power only in civil matters and could not interfere with religion. . . . To Roger Williams belongs the glory of having founded the first modern State which was really tolerant and was based on the principle of taking the control of religious matters entirely out of the hands of the civil government. . . . The Federal Constitution was absolutely secular; it was left to each member of the Union to adopt separation or not (1789). If separation has become the rule in the American States, it may be largely due to the fact that on any other system the governments would have found it difficult to impose mutual tolerance on the sects.³

This popular prejudice takes the place of authority in this struggle, as Paine found on his return to the U.S.A. from the French turmoil, after publishing his sceptical religious view that "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" did not necessarily include the pursuit of Truth!

"Full religious freedom was but slowly attained. Until well into the 19th century religious qualifications for the governorship persisted in four of the States. The persecutions of the Catholics that grew out of, or rather attended, the native American movement; the persecutions of the Mormons that sprung in the main from economic rather than moral motives and resulted in veritable anti-Mormon pogroms in Illinois and Missouri; the persecution of other sects, and of the Agnostics who stood apart from all sects whatever, were in various times and places supported by large sections of the population. But the word liberty is now interpreted in a fashion which increasingly renders such attempts at religious persecution furtive and shamefaced. . . . Freedom of social thought, including the liberty of individuals and groups, to investigate painful economic questions, to publish their convictions and to agitate for peaceful change, has found an increasingly firm foundation."⁴

³Professor J. B. Bury.

⁴Allan Nevins, 1940. Harmsworth Professor of American History, Oxford.

So it behoves the Children of Light themselves to be sleeplessly vigilant in the defence and advancement of this priceless possession in face of enemies within and without the gate . . . which leads us finally to the *ethos* of democracy.

AUSTEN VERNEY.

(To be concluded.)

CHARITY

He hath a tear for pity and a hand
Open as day for melting charity.

—Shakespeare's "King Henry IV.," Part II.

Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

—1 Peter iv. 8.

"SPARE a copper for charity's sake," says the beggar, thus proving himself an excellent practical psychologist, for who among us can resist a plea made on behalf of charity? Moreover, there are not many who would willingly be considered mean, for is it not usual to consider the mean as being also the contemptible?

The village preacher in Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" befriended beggars, spendthrifts and old soldiers without question—

"Careless their merits or their faults to scan
His pity gave ere charity began."

Which reminds us of a certain lady of our acquaintance who never refused a request for alms. "You give indiscriminately and without question," remonstrated her friends. "Some of these people who ask for help may be imposters. They are taking advantage of your generosity." Not a bit abashed, she replied: "That is quite possible. But how am I to tell who are genuine and who are false? I should feel awful if I learnt that I had refused a genuine case."

Mozart never refused a request for assistance from poor and needy musicians and singers. Often he would give music which was specially composed for their particular requirements. When, as was sometimes the case, the recipient of his generosity proved an imposter or a fraud, he would say, "The wretch!" and dismiss the matter from his mind. Poor Mozart, who was so often in need himself, and whose rich and rare genius found so poor a reward during most of his life! Like the poor village preacher, "his pity gave ere charity began."

The cynic said, "Charity begins at home—and ends there." A startling epigram and, like most generalisations, contains only a modicum of truth, for we may assume there are a few families whose "charity" is confined to the four walls of their houses.

Of course, religion has a finger in the charity pie. On turning to the New English Dictionary, edited by Ernest Barker, M.A., D.Litt., and published by Odhams Press Limited, the following meaning is given: "Charity . . . love of one's fellow, one of the theological virtues." The dictionary does not define a theological virtue, but it is obvious that the only meaning intended is that of an "attribute of God." So remember, when you are being charitable you are exercising an attribute of God.

Of the many names given to children the name of Charity is one. Charles Dickens, in his "Martin Chuzzlewit," bestows upon Pecksniff's elder daughter the name of Charity. It is probable that he realised that to keep to this name throughout the novel would be an ordeal—perhaps to himself or perhaps to readers—so she was known as Cherry. Was she called Cherry out of Charity? Dickens certainly made her "as cold as charity." But whence this expression? The term may well have originated during those days of Bumbledom when Oliver Twist was so unhappy. Could charity have been colder anywhere else than in the institution which housed young Oliver? And the stigma which attached to such institutions must have caused acute

mental anguish to the youthful mind when some unfeeling wretch taunted the former inmate with having received such charity!

When Portia asked Shylock, in the play "The Merchant of Venice," whether he had a surgeon lest Antonio "do bleed to death," Shylock counter-questioned, "Is it so nominated in the bond?" Portia replied, "It is not so expressed, but what of that? 'Twere good you do so much for charity." So much for charity! And Shylock was lucky to escape with his life, thanks to this same "Christian charity"! For this same charity which Portia had attempted to invoke on behalf of Antonio was almost forgotten when sentence was passed on Shylock. For was the loss of most of his wealth so hard as the order that "he presently do become a Christian"! Shylock consented, for he must have realised that, as an old man, he had not much longer to live, anyway.

Charity does not always follow in the steps of pity. She often walks alone. But then one must not seek for a motive in every act. We are concerned only with the charity that "springs from love of one's fellow," and not with the other kind of charity that has the hope of publicity or the hope of preferment. Neither is charity measured by the depth of the pocket or the depth of the mind of the donor, as witness the case of Mozart, among others. "Sell all you have and give to the poor," the Bible says. How does one interpret "you" in this quotation? If this is charity it is also economics run mad. Bentham sums up the position thus: "Let no man apprehend for himself or others, that he can produce too much good, or remove too much evil. It is not on the side of expansive benevolence that his mistakes are likely to be made. Let him do all the good he can, and wherever he can, he will never do too much for his own happiness or the happiness of others." This seems to us to equal all the Biblical platitudes put together.

And what says the inimitable George Eliot? "There is a power in the direct glance of a sincere and loving human soul, which will do more to dissipate prejudice and kindle charity than the most elaborate arguments." To kindle charity! This is a happy expression and reminds one of the warm glow of a fire on a cold winter's night. The warm glow of your charity on a cold winter's night is life to the beggar who cries, "Spare a copper!"

S. GORDON HOGG.

A THUNDERING GOOD PLAY

IN these turbulent days of oppressive symbols, Ministry of Information films, Regulations 2D and 18B, ostentatious patriots and depressingly cheap war songs, it is gratifying to encounter a piece of theatrical propaganda which doesn't attempt to thrust either the Union Jack, the Monarchy or the Heavenly Father down our throats. Having just witnessed a performance of a war-time propaganda play which succeeds in entertaining for the best part of three hours without making any concessions to what is so flippantly termed "popular taste," I am moved to write about the experience. This phenomenon is called "Lifeline," and at the moment of writing it is being acted by a well-known cast at the Duchess Theatre, off Drury Lane. "Norman Armstrong" (a pseudonym assumed by two ingenious writers, Miss Barbara Toy and Mr. Norman Lee) is credited with writing this play, and if this *nom-de-plume*—or Miss Toy or Mr. Lee—doesn't write a great play one of these fine days, I shall be more than somewhat surprised, to quote that well-known American humorist, Mr. Damon Runyon. Meanwhile, this "team" have done the next best thing to writing a great play. They've written an extraordinarily fine one—one which will be discussed for many months to come wherever thinking theatregoers meet.

"Lifeline" is an honest attempt to depict the war-time crossing, in and out of convoy, of a 5,000 ton tramp ship, "The Clydesdale," running between Canada and England, and the

reactions of a group of men—the ship's crew—assembled in the saloon, where the entire action of the piece takes place. The crew are varied, but not a very odd assortment of humanity. None of them are anything approaching perfect as individuals, but most of them are fairly decent, and all of them typify that courageous spirit which is the hope and inspiration of freedom-loving people's the world over. We are introduced to the ship's master, a Scot, dour, loyal but quarrelsome; his brother-in-law, an engineer, who apart from being his relative's good-natured "butt," has, in the words of one of the crew, "the soul of a woman." There's "Casey," a steward with an Irish wit and a knowledge of philosophy; a stoker, an apprentice and third mate, as well as the first officer and second mate, who are described as "a pair of heathens" by their shipmates; perhaps because the words "heathen" and "atheist" are synonymous to most people—perhaps, though, because "heathen" is not considered such a serious term of abuse as the other, and both these "heathens" are decent fellows, and consequently immensely popular with their shipmates.

Do I credit my authors with too much skill, powers of acute observation and subtlety as painters of character? I don't think so. These two, who obviously know a good deal about seafaring, as well as being writers of integrity, haven't "pulled any punches" in getting a message home to "comfortable" West End theatre audiences: a message which deals with the constant peril merchant seamen are called upon to face, as well as the countless lives sacrificed in bringing petrol—and certain luxuries for the privileged few—home to these shores. There is an instance of this in one of the play's most moving moments, one entirely devoid of theatricality. As the captain lies dying through enemy action, he begs with his last gasps that his crew

"Get the petrol home. Don't let the people down—for Derby Day."

And so we have one of those unforgettable moments in the theatre when the proverbial "pin" can be heard to drop. But the authors never preach from the heavens. Not only a thoughtless public who use petrol for shopping and race-meetings, and luxury restaurateurs who charge exorbitant prices for "austerity" delicacies brought through the blood and sweat of their fellows, are attacked. No, the shipowners, vested interests and the Church are all smitten in turn. An officer is talking to a raw third mate:—

"And they (the Merchant Navy) won't expect anything when it's all over. You'll probably find them in the bread line like they were after the last war."

"Who's side are you on?"

"The men's."

And a little later:—

"While the rest of the world benefits from progress, let the sailor live in the Nelson age. If he asks for a penn'orth of comfort, the Old Country's cracking up."

"Why don't the men complain, if it's as bad as you say?"

"Once a sailor gets foot on land he doesn't want to waste time complaining. He's got a short memory and is incurable bloody optimist. The next ship'll be a good one, maybe."

"Sailors always seem pretty happy to me."

"You'll find optimism in the slums."

And later the same fierce resentment against bad conditions:—

COMBER: "What's wrong with the Service?"

LAUNDER: "In wartime nothing, in peacetime everything."

COMBER: "What do you mean?"

LAUNDER: "It's all right while the limelight's on us. Then it's 'Good old lifeline' and 'God Bless the Merchant Navy' . . . but in peacetime we're just a lot of sea tramps with our arses out of our pants."

COMBER: "We'll put it right after the war . . . that's what we're fighting for—a peace we'll all have a hand in."

LAUNDER: "I can see you ending up in Parliament."

But the authors of "Lifeline" are not only excellent propagandists for that Better Order, about which some of us dream and the Editor of "The Freethinker" writes so convincingly; they are inspired to passages of infinite tenderness, as when the "heathen" discusses the sea:—

"It's exciting—really romantic. You get to know the sea that Masefield, Conrad and the sea poets wrote about. They painted it full of colour . . . and it is . . . you get to know the sunsets . . . the mists . . . and the sharpness of sun on water, until they are part of you. . . ."

I revere my Jefferies, Hudson and Llewellyn Powys sufficiently well to appreciate Miss Toy—or Mr. Lee—for giving us that. There's another passage, too, which would have appealed to that splendid trio of freethinking naturalists. The captain is dogmatizing at table:—

McGRATH: "God's given us the brains to decide for ourselves whether we'd like to be heathens or Christians. If we choose God we've got to trust him."

SECOND MATE: I know a lot of heathen people—"

McGRATH: "Second mates, I've no doubt."

SECOND MATE: "—they're very decent people."

THIRD MATE: "If it comes to that, there are a lot of God-worshipping people who stink!"

SECOND MATE: "Owners, no doubt."

Here then is "Lifeline." Not "high" theatre, and perhaps not a great play, but a play to be seen and discussed if only because it is a thundering good one. It's tremendously honest, passionately angry, poetically inclined, and earthily good-tempered in spots. In addition, it's well acted by an all male cast which includes: Messrs. Arthur Sinclair, Bredon O'Rourke, Frank Pettingell, Lloyd Pearson and Terence de Marney, and it has been intelligently produced by Mr. Redgrave.

If a production of this calibre isn't eventful enough an occurrence in wartime, when theatrical standards are at their lowest, it has the additional merit of being the best propaganda for our cause presented on the West End stage since the outbreak of war. But although the Second World War is its background, "Lifeline" is actually an escape from the war; rather is it an escape to Humanity. And it is Humanity that we are so badly in need of just now.

PETER NORTHCOTE.

GOD DID NOT INSPIRE THIS, BUT IT IS JUST AS FUNNY

I was bathing in that pleasant sea near Marseilles one summer's afternoon, when I discovered a very large fish, with his jaws quite extended, approaching me with the greatest velocity. There was no time to be lost, nor could I possibly avoid him. I immediately reduced myself to as small a size as possible, by closing my feet and placing my hands also near my sides, in which position I passed directly between his jaws, and into his stomach, where I remained some time in total darkness, and comfortably warm. The fish was discovered by the people on board an Italian trader, then sailing by, who harpooned him in a few minutes. As soon as he was brought on board I heard the crew consulting how they should cut him up, so as to preserve the greatest quantity of oil. As I understood Italian, I was in most dreadful apprehensions lest their weapons employed in this business should kill me also; therefore I stood as near the centre as possible. They began by opening the belly. As soon as I perceived a glimmering of light, I called out lustily to be released from a situation in which I was now almost suffocated. It is impossible for me to do justice to the degree and kind of astonishment which sat upon every countenance at hearing a human voice issue from a fish, but more so at seeing a naked man walk upright out of his body.—"The Adventures of Baron Munchausen."

HOLY HITLER'S PRAYER!

When Thou who rules the Universe
Was pleased to call me to Thy aid,
To punish peoples grown perverse
And sort the world that Thou had made,
Proud of the power thus placed in me,
I act and speak in name of Thee.

Out from the rulers of the earth,
Thou've chosen me to wield Thy rod,
Felt intuition from my birth
That next to Thee I stand, O God;
Empower and sanctify my state,
So by Thy word I dominate.

The genius and inventive skill
Thou hast provided to my hand,
The hosts of men to do my will
Proves Thy consent to my command;
Scribe, scientist, the sage and seer
Shall serve for favour, gold or fear.

Lord, guide my angel Zeppelin,
Who rains destruction from the sky,
Our aide-de-camp who soars between
My earthly throne, and Thine on high,
Direct his bombs to deadly aim
On those who hate my power and fame.

Great Krupp, my right-hand potentate,
Whose iron lips and lyddite breath
Can devastate as I dictate
And visit continents with death,
Provide him powder, shot and shell,
And I'll declare a war on Hell.

Control my cunning submarines
While under wave or murky mists,
They blow whole fleets to smithereens
Like upstrokes from my "iron fist";
Lord, o'er the greedy sea I'll gloat,
Until no foe is left afloat.

The scourge of Europe let me be,
Tho' in the holocaust I fall—
Yet phoenix-like, upraised by Thee
With sword and sceptre over all,
Thy anger featured in my frown,
Thy favour shown in my renown.

Those puny powers who woke my wrath
And caused me to this task prepare,
Lord, halt I'll not, until I hath
The Eagle and the Lion's share;
Indemnities will I demand,
Annex and subject every land.

When all the Earth is awed complete
I'll twinkle eyes 'twixt Mars and Jove,
Crushed Allies, crouching at my feet,
Shall own my power and Thine above;
Good Lord, I'll never rest till then,
When Thou and I shall join—Amen.
—JAMES NEIL; from the "Cummock Chronicle."

CORRESPONDENCE**CATHOLIC ACTION**

SIR.—Once again the "Catholic Herald" has upheld the traditions of the Catholic press for its policy of intolerance, nastiness and general—Catholicism! A few weeks ago Dr. Halliday Sutherland, a Catholic, recommended Sir Richard Acland's "Forward March" Socialist Movement to the "Catholic Herald," and a few nice comments were made upon it. Since then, however, there has been a change of heart. Dr. Sutherland suddenly discovered that, though Acland's movement was fundamentally a Christian one, it was also a humanitarian one which intended to give equality and freedom to all men and women regardless of sect, colour or creed. Dr. Sutherland stated himself that humanitarianism was not synonymous with Christianity (what an admission to make!), and that he could not continue to be allied with the Forward March movement. In other words, when he discovered that his particular brand of mumbo-jumbo would not be able to dictate the policy of this Socialist movement he turned completely against the movement and, with the willing aid of the "Catholic Herald," denounced it libellously. Thus, what had appeared quite respectably Christian to the "Catholic Herald" suddenly turned out to be too democratic and tolerant, so the Catholic press proceeded to be very nasty and, with its usual dirty zest for libel and slander, denounced the movement as being an easy way to getting money quickly.

Further comment is not necessary. Let me add that the Catholic press has nothing to learn from the Nazis or the Japanese.—Yours, etc.,

W. TOLSON.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.**LONDON****Outdoor**

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

West London N.S.S. Branch (Hyde Park), Thursday, 7-0, Mr. E. C. SAPHIN; Sunday, 3-0, various speakers.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), 11-0, Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D., "The Beginning of the Fourth Year."

COUNTRY**Outdoor**

Blyth (The Fountain), Monday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
Bradford N.S.S. Branch. Members and friends meet on Broadway Car Park on Sunday evenings at 7-30.
Burnley (Market), Sunday, 7-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON.
Chester-le-Street (Bridge End), Saturday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
Edinburgh N.S.S. Branch (The Mount), 7-0, Mrs. M. I. WHITEFIELD (Glasgow), a Lecture.
Enfield, Lanes. (nr. Library), Friday, 7-15, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.
Kingston-on-Thames N.S.S. Branch (Castle Street), Sunday, 7-0, Mr. J. W. BARKER.
Nelson (Chapel Street), Wednesday, 7-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.
Newcastle (Bigg Market), Sunday, 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
Padiham (nr. Recreation Ground), Sunday, 2-45, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

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