

THE FREETHINKER

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CONTENTS

Views and Opinions—The Editor	389
The "Daily Herald" tells the Truth—F. J. Corina	391
Acid Drops	392
To Correspondents	393
Sugar Plums	393
A Problem in Christian Ethics—Archibald Robertson	394
Desultory Thoughts upon the Myth Theory by an Admirer of its Ingenuity—C. Clayton Dove	394
Make Believe—Geo. B. Lissenden	395
Correspondence	396
Sunday Lecture Notices	396

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

History True and False

MOST people are familiar with Voltaire's description of history as tricks the living play with the dead. Actually it might also be described as tricks we play on the living, using the dead as material; and the tricks are so cunningly performed that few are sufficiently on their guard against the printed lie or the romantic caricature of reality. Less known than the comment of Voltaire is the story of Henry Fielding and the historian. Said the latter when Fielding was introduced to him—the introduction should have been the other way about—"I understand you write fiction." "Not so," replied the writer of "Tom Jones," the first great English novel. "It is you historians who write fiction. With us the fiction consists in the name and the dates. With you historians they are the only things that are accurate." We are citing from memory, and mere verbal accuracy is not of importance.

It would take a series of volumes fully to describe the important tricks that have been played on the world by historians. The presentation of Magna Charta, the important feature of which was that it transformed the privileges of the Norman Lords into legal rights, and so helped to maintain certain rights that should never have existed, is one example. The wizardry of Walter Scott offers another. Those who are acquainted with the real history of Scotland know that the greatness of the Scots—material, moral and intellectual—lay in the lowlands. The highlands, with a few exceptions, consisted of marauding tribes, primitive in their culture, crude and rude in their superstitions and behaviour. Then along came Walter Scott. He invented the gallant heroic Highlander, and in a few years the Lowlanders had actually accepted the romances of the "Northern Wizard's" pictures as being solid history, and the semi-civilised Highlanders as representing the real Scotland. We have our own parallel to this in the pictures presented of the England of the gallant knights of old, the shimmering silks of the fine ladies, etc., etc. Fact would have presented the population of the earlier centuries as wanting in cleanliness, the people living in hovels that would be condemned

nowadays if inhabited by animals, without even a thought of political rights, and gallant knights of "derry do," thinking little of raping the women folk, of the peasantry, or by force compelling a rich "ladye" to marriage in order to annex her wealth.

The picture drawn by Dr. H. Zimser in his fascinating "Rats, Lice and History," of the visit paid by a well-known Frenchman to a statesman of the time of Louis the Fourteenth of France, and of his watching lice crawling over the statesman's wig (France was then in advance of England in fashion and general culture) is a sample of realistic history. Consideration of history as it was, not as it is usually presented, would find less wonderful the process of creating a system of religion filled with accounts of things that never happened, and which so many who read the "history," of Christianity accept as a record of fact.

Education and History

Let us take an example of the way in which things are done. Dr. A. L. Fisher was for some time our Minister of Education. In 1936 he wrote a "History of Europe," which was well received by the press. A cheaper edition was soon issued at 10s. 6d. The work extends to 1,300 pages of close print. On page 897 there occurs the following, the period is 1812:—

"By slow degrees a notion began to spread abroad that the education of the masses was a national responsibility and not a matter which could be wholly left to the competing appetites of rival sects . . . (1) The Church and the sects were first in the field. When no secular agency is available and at a time when (2) it is doubtful whether any motive less powerful than religious zeal could have enlisted the necessary social effort to bring education to the poor, the unsectarian British and Foreign Society and its rival, the Anglican National Society, occupied the ground. Their methods were bad, their resources slender, their teachers were for the most part children in their teens. . . (3) They were pioneers in the greatest of the social services. (4) The State has never wished to discard their work.

It has never dared to build up in England a complete plan of systematic national education. Rather it has taken the existing elementary schools, Anglican, Free Church, Jewish, Catholic, as it has found them, and gradually, by assisting them with public funds . . . brought them to a relative degree of efficiency. The progress began in 1833 with a grant of £20,000 to the two societies . . . Not till 1846 was there any State provision for the training of teachers."

The italics and numbers are mine.

But there is the picture as presented by Dr. Fisher. It is well sketched—for a purpose—and that is a bad one. It is calculated to create an entirely erroneous conviction. No one can say that, given certain considerations, this or

that statement is wrong, but the cumulative effect is wrong. Begin with number one. It is true that the Christian sects were, officially, the first in the field. But the Roman Church has always claimed, and still claims, supreme control in matters of education. And when the Roman Church was displaced by the Church of England, the established clergy claimed and exercised the same power. The opposition of the English clergy to educational reform went on well into the nineteenth century, and it was openly based on the fact that proposals would take the control of education out of the hands of the clergy. One great impetus to the claim for better education of the people came from the influence of the French Revolution, another from the growth of Freethinking from about 1780. Another influence was the growth of Christian nonconformity. Here the motives were mixed. The Nonconformists would not permit their children to be "contaminated" by the teaching of the established Church, and there was a kind of combination between them and the followers of Paine and Robert Owen, later, to secure schools of a more liberal character. Education was one of the most clamorous of the claims among those who were fighting for a better life for the *people*. Unfortunately, histories written in the vein of Dr. Fisher's book ignore the tremendous upheaval of those days, which, so far as established forms of religion are concerned, were markedly anti-Christian.

Of course, no one would deny that in all the revolutionary movements of the early nineteenth century there were many Christians who did good work. But to put this to the credit of the Churches as such is simply ridiculous. As Christian bodies, the aim of both the establishment and the non-conformists were identical. It was to see that their children were brought up in the "true religion." The "Collar the kids" campaign which is now going on is a continuation of the earlier struggle, with the difference that to-day the Christian Churches are joining forces to prevent their being annihilated in detail. And to say that the Churches were first in the field is a dishonest way of hiding the fact that non-Christian schools were not permitted, and *therefore* the schools were nominally Christian. A Government that imprisoned men for selling "The Age of Reason" and took its possession as evidence that the owner was a "rebel" and agitator, would give scant mercy to a school that openly aimed at bringing up children without religion. More than once in the first half of the nineteenth century measures in favour of a wider and better education for the people were rejected in the Houses of Parliament on the ground that they would take the control of education out of the hands of the clergy.

And the value of the education given may be gauged by the fact when the Government had been brought to give an annual sum to help the schools, and after some years a Commission was appointed to report on the state of education, it was stated that the Government was not getting value for its money. That this was not an understatement may be seen from the fact that in places like Oldham and Ashton, with a population of over 100,000, there was not a single day-school for children. In other well-populated parts more than half the people married could not sign their names. The schools were dirty, controlled by the people that generally themselves were without adequate education, and were run largely on the monitor plan—that is by teachers selected from the pupils

themselves. Those who wish for full details may consult the "Town Labourer" and "The Age of the Charter," by J. L. and Barbara Hammond. Their summary of the facts will save much time and research.

Fact and Fiction

When one becomes familiar with the facts, Dr. Fisher's insinuating picture of the Christian sects being first in the educational field, and the Government, by insinuation, rightly acknowledging the value of the schools run by the religious bodies, looks very peculiar. A barefaced lie would have been much less misleading, and none knows better than Dr. Fisher that ever since the Act of 1870 the churches have fought to keep education down because every improvement in the schools involved greater expenditure by the sects. It is also worth noting that Dr. Fisher refers to the Church schools as the "National Society." The full title is the "National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church." The omission of the full title may have been accidental, but it certainly puts the efforts of the Church in a much truer light to present-day readers who are unacquainted with the facts. On the other hand, the suppressed part of the title makes quite plain the truth of what we have said, namely, that the aim of these efforts was not education so much as an effort to keep the children within the ranks of the established Church. In any case, it takes a great deal away from the picture of the Churches as deeply concerned with education as such.

In sober truth, the whole effort of the maintenance of schools from the Roman Church to the mildest of the dissenting bodies is part of the general policy of Church defence. Church leaders know that the modern trend is away from religion. They are also aware that, left alone, the vast majority would grow up without religion. Everywhere the influence of a modern environment is against religious belief. The Roman Church admits this without qualification when it claims for children that the whole of the school time shall be saturated with a specific religious atmosphere; and more and more the other Churches are driven to the same conclusion. Other subjects may wait until the child is old enough to understand them. Religion must be forced on the child before it is old enough to understand the treatment it is undergoing. If the general public were alive to the game that is being played there would be a sharp and drastic close to this manufacturing of clients for an institution that can exist only so long as an artificial environment is created for the developing boy or girl. The shame is that those in power are to be found doing what they can to manufacture clients for the Church, and one must suppose, hope to reap some benefit by their policy.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

NATURE OR GOD?

To what we call good and evil, nature as such is indifferent, and nature submits to man's control, not as he is just or unjust, believing or sceptical, but as he understands the law by which the operations of nature are directed. The piety of the captain does not save his ship from the reefs; he depends on his knowledge of navigation. Prayer does not avert the pestilence, but an understanding of the conditions of health. The lightning strikes the Church, but spares the gambling house provided with a conducting rod. Disease and misfortune make no distinction between the deserving and the base.—J. A. FROUDE.

THE "DAILY HERALD" TELLS THE TRUTH

IN my late teens there used to be a slogan, printed in red, on contents bill and displayed at most Left Wing political meetings. It said, in bold letters:—

"THE 'DAILY HERALD' TELLS THE TRUTH."

Now this was in the days when the "Daily Herald" was a struggling journal, representing a body of people who had some fairly concrete ideas about social and political reform. It was in the days before the poison of Roman Catholicism had taken a serious grip on the body concerned; before the movement's blood-stream and voice-box had been devitalised by injections of holy water and humbug. It was in the days when there was a reasonable chance that the "Daily Herald" told more of the truth than any other newspaper.

But as the "Herald" leaped upward in circulation with the passing of the years (remember the stirring "two million" days?) it accumulated a certain proportion of Roman Catholic readers. Now we all know that the Roman Catholic Church has a very comprehensive "Index Expurgatorus"—otherwise, list of banned books, etc.; and we all know that the Mother Church does not hesitate to use the banning method by every means in its power where it is considered necessary; and we have it on the sound authority of Mr. Joseph McCabe that all publications "against faith or morals" are involved in the ban, even though they may not be expressly named in the "Index."

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that as the "Herald" shot upward in circulation it would be viewed with serious concern by the Catholic authorities as a potential source of heresy on the one hand, and of anti-Romanist political expression on the other hand. Of course, the "Herald," as a national newspaper, could not very well be "put on the list," as Gilbert would say, nor could it openly be proscribed in the more general sense. But again, it is reasonable to assume that the process commonly known as "putting the screw on" was adopted, and the ventilating holes of truth stopped up by threat, promise and—most dread weapon of all—the vote.

Most likely the God of Socialism was deposed one evil night in the "Herald" office, and the God of Circulation enthroned. But whether or not the gods were changed, certain it is that evil spirits entered the portals of the newspaper that claimed to tell the truth. One of these was the Spirit of Sensationalism, and I well remember the influence of this particular spirit when, one day, there appeared a headline:—

"ATHEIST SENT TO PRISON."

I wrote to the editor, rather tartly suggesting that perhaps the reason for singling out the Atheist for such an honour was that the word would appear only on rare occasions, thus having a novel flavour, where as if the word Christian had to be used on all such occasions it would pall as a result of everyday use. There was no reply from the Temple of Truth, nor was my letter published. Like other things, it was lost in the rush for the "two millions."

Now whether the "Herald" still claims to be the paper that "tells the truth," I do not know. I have not seen those red posters, however, for many a year. Perhaps old man Truth has been locked in the cellar and the red ink has run out! But one thing appears fairly certain.

The "Daily Herald" has discovered a new brand of truth since those days. Freethinkers have been familiar with it for a long, long time as a comparative form of truth. When recognised as such it has a stimulating effect; but when accepted as final or ultimate truth it has a serious drugging effect. I refer to "Christian Truth." All newspapers suffer from its drugging effect in greater or lesser degree, but the "Herald" had a very bad attack recently in connection with the National Day of Prayer.

We have been told for quite a long time now that the war is a war for Christianity. I, personally, had thought such statements were from interested and inspired sources with a special axe to grind. I had regarded them as an attempt by the Churches to cash in on the present situation to their own advantage, and I had felt that, outside of purely clerical circles, nobody would seriously argue that the war was for Christianity. I knew our newspaper would play up to the idea to some extent, of course, but I never would have believed, until I saw it in the "Herald," that a long leading article could be devoted to telling the workers of this largely non-religious nation that they were helping in a war for Christianity. Listen to this:—

". . . that we have a common cause, and that it is a holy one. Holy it is: of that let no man be unaware. This is not at bottom a war between democracy and dictatorship. It is a war between Christianity and a new religion which seeks to undo all that Christianity has done. . . . Between these two doctrines there can be neither peace nor compromise; and, since this is a war which embraces the whole earth, one of these doctrines must for ever perish from the earth."

The colossal nerve and impudence of these statements will find few parallels in the whole dirty record of Christian Truth! How do the numerous Freethinkers in the fighting Forces feel about this piece of humbugging Christian truth? More important still, how do the millions of "nothingarian" soldiers, sailors, airmen and workers feel about it? Holy war, indeed! Does the "Daily Herald" really think that all the millions in this country who are engaged in the war effort would go on doing what they are doing if it were a religious or a holy war?

This is not, at bottom, a war between "democracy and dictatorship." Then Churchill, Bevin, Morrison and the rest of the war leaders are liars and deceivers; and the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians and all the others who do not subscribe or submit themselves to the Christian religion are just so many millions of mugs, fighting to achieve victory for Anglo-American Christianity! No wonder the Indians are resisting, when British newspapers insult them by writing such canting humbug as this.

"It is a war between Christianity and a new religion which seeks to undo all that Christianity has done." Is it? Then perhaps the "Daily Herald" can explain why the headquarters of the biggest branch of the Christian Church are still located in the heart of the second enemy nation, at Rome? Perhaps the "Daily Herald" (and any others who make such statements) can prove that the people of Italy, forming part of the enemy armies, have ceased to be Christian. The Italians (against us) are more Christian than the people of this country by every standard of Christian measurement; the Germans (against us) are about as Christian in most respects as the British; the Irish (neutral) are more Christian than we are, and yet are not in the fight for Christianity; the Russians (with us) are officially non-Christian and non-religious; the Chinese (with us) are, in Christian eyes, a nation of heathens; the Japanese (against us) are also "heathen"; the Americans (with us) are probably even less Christian than the British, taken as a mass; the Spanish (neutral) are more Christian-priest-ridden than any other nation. But that's enough. Let us sum up.

In this analysis there are two indifferent Christian nations, Britain and America, and two non-Christian nations, Russia and China, fighting against one indifferent nation, Germany, one non-Christian nation, Japan, and one very Christian nation, Italy, so that in the main channels, as it were, there is more Christian weight against us than for us. The two most Christian nations, Spain and Ireland, are not even in it; and which side would they be on if they were in it? It is an interesting point.

I can agree with the suggestion in the "Herald" leader, that Nazism is a new religion, in a sense. There are no really new

(Concluded on page 396)

ACID DROPS

WE congratulate Mr. Morrison on the support he has given the "Daily Worker." And we think he was misjudged when he was charged with a desire to end the existence of that paper. He gave it the biggest advertisement it ever had, and just when the interest was at its greatest he graciously authorised it to be reissued. And the rush for it was such that large numbers of people could not obtain a copy, and the wholesalers who had the impudence to refuse to sell it now deal with it in the normal way. The "Daily Worker" ought to make a presentation to the Home Secretary.

A paragraph in a Sunday newspaper informed us recently that where soldiers and A.T.S. girls are on combined duty the padres find that the girls are the best attenders at religious services, and that their example influences many young soldiers to develop a church-going habit for the first time. Why this information should be honoured by a special panel and heavy type is something of a puzzle to us, because the only facts that it serves to demonstrate are already well known to intelligent people. These facts are, simply, that the fair sex provides, as it seems always to have provided, the greater number of victims for religious movements; and that young men, when attracted by the secular attributes of young women, will do all kinds of silly things to remain "persona grata" with the ladies—including even the boredom of having to attend church.

In the same paragraph we are told that "many of the A.T.S. will not go out with a soldier in the same station unless he goes to church with them." This suggests to us that the said young ladies are members of the Roman Catholic Church, for in that church, more than any other, this narrow-minded, low-cultured attitude is developed and encouraged. If we are wrong in this surmise, then it would appear that padres of other denominations have been working on the girls with all the technique of Romanistic priests. There is little occasion to worry, however, for, judging by civilian church attendance figures, there are far too few real churchgoers these days, even among women, to corrupt the British Army by these holy partnerships. And loving a girl doesn't necessarily mean loving her Jesus.

In his contribution to the grotesque Day of Prayer the Archbishop of Canterbury said that "if a man hardly ever turned to God for help, that man was not trusting God for much." But a god who demands that people shall grovel before him in prayer before he will help is a god not worth anyone bothering about. A good man helps without petition. The need for help is an adequate spur.

There is a movement—suspect by quite a number of people—that calls itself "Jehovah's Witnesses," but whether these people are a witness for Jehovah or Jehovah is a witness for them is not quite clear. They claim that as they are witnesses for Jehovah here, Jehovah will be a witness for them in the next world. We are unable to solve the problem, but as Jehovah has had a rare following of all kinds of blackguards witnessing for him right through the ages, the organisation may be what they claim to be. Birds of a feather flock together. At any rate, quite a number of the Witnesses have managed to dodge military service.

One of the leaders of this sect, the Rev. Schroeder, has just been deported from this country and returned to the United States. That seems to us very unkind. We are hand and glove with the U.S.A., and as America has sent us some of its best fighting men, and with Russia given us very material help in this war, it does not seem fair to unload on the American people one of the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses. America already has a very fine collection of these semi-insane religious movements. But perhaps the professional jealousy of our own preachers lies at the bottom of this transportation.

There is no pleasing these Christians of ours, do what you will. Because the hymn "Abide with Me" followed the playing of "Kiss me good-night, sergeant-major," during a community sing-song at Blackburn Garrison Theatre, certain restrictions have been placed on the theatre in connection with its entertainment programmes for the Forces. The matter was raised by a protest from the St. Barnabas Church Council, whose vicar (Rev. A. J. Brown) declared that Sunday variety shows "are not suitable places for the singing of hymns." With the Christian church going through the leanest period of its history, we should not have thought that one of its officials would have been squeamish about the singing of a hymn in a theatre, but rather that such an opportunity would have been welcomed, and an effort made to repeat the dose. But there is no limit to the insolence of some clerics. Not content with forcing the Garrison Theatre to commence its Sunday programmes at 8 p.m., after the evening services, this impudent minority has now secured a ban on comedians, tap dancers, sketches, fancy costumes and make-up. Just because a hymn was sung! How the devil a variety theatre can produce anything without these accessories is a puzzle—but, of course, that was clearly the object of the protest. Was it that the hymn conveniently offered the means to a prospective end of Blackburn's Sunday shows for the Forces?

The war does not prevent those who are determined to cease attending to the real things of life. Thus, the Roman Catholic ritual decrees that the ceremony of the Mass cannot be performed without an altar stone. But in the desert a stone cannot always be obtained. If it could the magical phrases would be uttered that converts an ordinary stone into a sacred one. But the Church is not to be overcome so easily, and permission has been given by the Vatican to perform the Mass without a stone. The Church is not yet stone broke—at least, so far as manoeuvres are concerned.

There are some Roman Catholic preachers with which we often find ourselves in agreement. For example, we agree with Fra. F. J. Ripley, who is strongly opposed to "individualism in religion." It is individualism, he argues, that denies the "mystical body of Christ." This we take to mean that if a man is guided by his own commonsense the "mystical body of Christ" becomes just verbal foolishness. But if you are led by the Church it becomes unquestionable wisdom. We agree, once more. If you follow the Church, everything is as plain as a brick wall on a coal-black night. The proper and the safe way is to adopt the method of Hilaire Belloc and say: "I accept what she (the Church) teaches and trust her more than I do the evidence of my senses." Trust to the evidence of your senses and heresy is the result. A good Catholic—where his religion is concerned—must be as blind as a bat, and as unreasoning as a gramophone record. That way lies religious surety.

In one of our towns the other Sunday combined military and civil defence services did an exercise march. But the Vicar, the Rev. A. G. Brown, asked the Regional Commissioner to arrange for a religious service before the march began. This was, of course, granted, and the vicar was made master of the performances, with a choir, crucifixes, acolytes, etc., much as a musical conjuror arranges his table and accessories before starting his tricks. The performance went off successfully. But one wonders what would have happened if the N.S.S. had asked for permission for one of its speakers to deliver an address before the march began. This is a war for freedom of thought. Certainly some thought is being brought to bear on it, for there seems a hell of a lot of thought being taken to preserve all our superstitions and vested interests after the war.

The Roman Catholic "Universe" announces that a new committee—a Roman Catholic one—is to study the birth-rate. We suggest that one good step by the Roman Church would be the abolition of a celibate clergy. But it is not quality that the Roman Church is mainly concerned with, but quantity. An increase in non-Catholics would be counted as a disaster. The policy of the Church—in fact, if not in theory—is quantity. This is one more direction in which the Roman Church approximates to the Hitlerian ideal.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. JOHNSTON.—Pleased to hear from you and to know how much this journal has helped. We have very kindly memories of the Ruddy family. They were very staunch Freethinkers.

W. A. HOVE.—We will pay attention later to the broadcasting C. S. Lewis. The B.B.C. seems to specialise in these half-mentally (?) developed people. His statement that he ceased to be an Atheist when he was 14 is characteristic of the type.

F. MORE.—Wales has its own forms of local government, but is subject to the English Parliament. Our own experience of Wales is that while Christianity retains its hold on the older people, the young generation makes steadily for a more pronounced Freethinking. There should be more Freethought activity in Wales. In any move the N.S.S. will do what it can to help.

H. THOMSON writes from Bristol.—Thanks for the "Atheist's Approach to Christianity." It is an approach, an attack, and a decisive victory. We wish we had the power to bring it to the notice of every thoughtful Christian, and to those whose minds are still clogged with their early religious training. [We feel flattered, and will add only the information that it is selling well.]

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.—Next week. Too late for this issue.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

ANOTHER pamphlet by the Editor is now on sale. This is an essay on "God and Evolution." The pamphlet is one that should prove of great service, particularly to those who are interested in fundamental issues. The price is sixpence, postage one penny.

The season is waning, and it looks as though the war will be with us for some time yet. The boasted Day of Prayer—whether by the request of the King or, what is more likely, by the order of his advisers—has produced nothing except volumes of cant and an exhibition of foolishness on the part of a section of the community. Historians of the future will find in the days of national prayer evidence that the differences between a section of the British people and the natives of Australia are of a very limited character.

In these circumstances we again suggest a plan by which good in more ways than one might be done. Part of our population is now of a nomadic character. It moves from district to district as the war exigencies demand. Numbers of Freethinkers find themselves stranded in a new area, and they would welcome friendly association with other Freethinkers. We should be pleased to receive the names and addresses of those who would be inclined to make these men—and women—welcome.

There is another direction in which much good might be done. In many places halls for meetings are impossible owing to their being taken over for war purposes. In addition, many active workers are moved from their own area to some other part of the country, and to that extent our propaganda suffers. We have before suggested that to some extent this difficulty might be overcome by fortnightly, or even monthly conferences in the houses of members of the N.S.S. That will keep local organisations in a state of readiness for the fight of ideas when the war of force ceases and that of ideas takes the chief place.

How much can be done is well shown by those who have taken existing circumstances, not as an occasion for suspending propaganda, but for increasing it. In Glasgow, Mr. Humphrey has been working like a Trojan and has greatly increased the number of subscribers for this journal, and in Edinburgh the N.S.S. branch is bringing to a close an open-air series of meetings that have led to increased demands for both "The Freethinker" and other literature. An effort of open-air lectures in Leicester made by a few volunteers has also done much good. Other places send us many cheering reports, the sum of which is the conclusion that there is at present opportunities for propaganda such as there has not been for some time. Let us make the most of it.

Not enough was in the papers of the behaviour of the members of the House of Commons on the delivery of Mr. Churchill's summary of the war position. The House of Commons was crowded, even its approaches. Directly it was over the House emptied, at one time there were only about a dozen left, and a hurried search had to be made to secure thirty or forty members to prevent the proceedings being adjourned. The boys had had their outing, and were anxious to be away. The performance had ended.

But every one of these members receives £600 a year to carry on his duties as an elected. If a workman leaves his job he is fined, sacked, or at present may be imprisoned. Why is there not some method of preventing this bolting from duty displayed by M.P.s? It is not when the Prime Minister is making an interesting speech (it was not an important one, because nothing of vital importance was, or could be, said, because the whole truth could not be said). The importance of members should be shown when these staged orations are not being made, but when the business of the House—which is importantly that of seeing that Ministers act as they should—touches immediately the welfare of the whole of the people. The prime business of the Opposition, at least, is to watch the Government—and a government—no matter what its political colour is—will never act consistent justice until it is threatened with exposure when it does not.

The Rev. E. Unwin (Methodist) said, in the course of the "Beekly Lecture," that he thinks the world after the war will be "planned," but asks is it possible to plan for freedom. Well, no one can decree freedom, and you cannot take a man by the throat and choke him into either desiring or achieving or maintaining freedom. The most we can do is to make it possible for he who will to achieve freedom. Mr. Unwin says that every State is "infected by sin." Which is just nonsense. Sin is a theological offence, and unless the new world is to be planned for the weakening of the social and political power of theology the chances for freedom are small. With the Conservatives tied to the Church, and the Church tied to the Conservatives, with the Labour Party afraid to confess any sympathy with Freethought, and the Liberals ready to join hands with the Church party to maintain a political position, the chances for freedom in the "brave new world" do not look as bright as they might.

Sir Archibald Southby, M.P., told a Bournemouth audience that our men needed "faith in God which enabled the individual to surmount any disaster which alone would bring ultimate victory." Now does he mean that in our armed forces it is only those who have faith in God who can surmount disaster and gain victory? We feel sure he will not reply to this question. Men who make that kind of foolish statement never do answer a plain question. And, to be generous, we will assume that the poor man lacks the intelligence to understand the significance of what he said.

A PROBLEM IN CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

IN "The Freethinker" of September 6 Mr. C. M. Hollingham tries to rebut an argument used by Mr. Howell Smith and myself in favour of the existence of an historical Jesus. That argument is based on the internal evidence of certain passages in the Gospels (Matt. x. 23; xvi. 28; xxiv. 29-34; and the equivalents of the two last in Mark and Luke), in which Jesus is depicted as prophesying his own return before the generation which had seen him should have passed away. I first drew attention to these passages in "The Rationalist Annual" of 1928, and I refer to the matter briefly in "The Bible and its Background," vol. II., pp. 5-6 and 37. I do not, however, claim to have been the first to use the argument. It will be found in its essence in Shaw's preface to "Androcles and the Lion," written in 1915, where it is used to date the first Gospel. The only difference between Shaw's presentation of the case and mine is that I allow for the fact that the Gospels are composite documents, and therefore limit the argument to the particular source or sources from which these passages are taken. Briefly, my contention is that the prophecy in question, by its very nature, must have originated before the generation which knew Jesus had passed away, and that the ascription to Jesus of such a prophecy at so early a date is evidence, so far as it goes, of his actual existence.

Mr. Hollingham counters this argument by a "parallel" drawn from the Old Testament. In Ezek. xxvi., the prophet, speaking in the name of Yahveh, predicts the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon. That prophecy was not fulfilled. Nebuchadrezzar besieged Tyre for 13 years, but did not destroy it; it seems to have avoided that fate by capitulating on favourable terms. "But," says Mr. Hollingham, "'Ezekiel' must have expected [the prophecy] to come true. Therefore, he must have written when there were still people alive who knew that Yahveh spoke to him. . . . Therefore, there was an historical Yahveh." Which is absurd! And so say all of us.

This is not a parallel, but a parody. The argument holds good to the extent that Ezek. xxvi. 1-14 must have been penned at a time when the fulfilment of the prophecy was expected, but no further than that. All ancient prophets claimed to be inspired by some god. Accordingly, "thus saith Yahveh" is the common formula of all Old Testament prophecy; and Ezekiel's is no exception. But Ezekiel does not represent Yahveh as a man who walked the earth between certain specified dates, making disciples; and he does not predict that Tyre will fall before the last of those who have seen Yahveh have passed away. Mr. Hollingham's argument, therefore, falls to the ground.

Mr. Hollingham makes much of the contrast between the "known writer," Ezekiel, and the "nameless, homeless, dateless" author of the Gospel prediction. True, we do not know for certain who he was, though some would say that the Marcan authorship of the second Gospel is at least as well attested as that of the Book of Ezekiel. We do not know for certain where Mark wrote, though there is strong internal evidence in favour of Rome. But we can date the source from which this prediction is taken pretty closely. The mere fact that it predicts the return of Jesus in the lifetime of men who had heard him precludes a date much later than A.D. 75-80.

Mr. Hollingham challenges the "assumption" that the meaning of the writer is known and that he wrote literally. But it is surely one of the first canons of literary criticism that a writer must be assumed to mean what he says unless we have proof positive to the contrary. Otherwise we are landed in the bog of Bacon-Shakespeare insanity at once. The other "assumptions" listed by Mr. Hollingham simply show that he has misunderstood the argument. I have nowhere assumed that the saying is an authentic prophecy of Jesus. I am willing to suppose for the sake of argument that it was invented by some-

body who wished to propagate the idea of an early advent of the Son of Man. My point is that the inventor of the saying, "There be some of them that stand here," etc., would have failed to be even plausible if, in fact, there had been no Jesus within living memory on whom he could father it. Whether the saying emanated from Q. or from some other source, whether Marcion recognised it or not, whether it originally stood in our Gospels or arose independently, are questions beside the point.

Finally, I wish to make it clear that I have no intention of disparaging the important contribution of the mythicists to our knowledge of Christian origins. It is no part of my case to suggest that "a man Jesus initiated the Christian movement cir. A.D. 26." The Christian movement had more than one origin. It is my conviction that we need a myth theory to explain some, perhaps most of its features, but that we need an historical Jesus to explain others. I have dealt with this at greater length elsewhere. I think I may plead the authority of no less a mythicist than the late J. M. Robertson as at least partly in my favour. In "The Historical Jesus," pp. 56-57, he pronounces the hypothesis of an historical Jesus who met his death as a political agitator, and the nature of whose preaching was deliberately falsified by later writers concerned to conciliate Rome, to be not impossible, but declares it to be "merely a restatement" of the myth theory. Since then such a hypothesis has actually been elaborated by Eisler, whose work, though I do not endorse it in every detail, I regard as containing a kernel of truth. In a synthesis of this hypothesis with the myth theory I believe the solution of the historical conundrum to lie.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

DESULTORY THOUGHTS UPON THE MYTH THEORY BY AN ADMIRER OF ITS INGENUITY

[This article got lost in the confusion following immediately upon the destruction of the Freethinker Office last year; and the proof did not reach me till August 8, 1942. It is here reproduced without alteration.—C. C. D.]

PART FIRST.

THE Myth Theory teaches that Joshua, who is said to have slaughtered the Canaanites and to have installed his people Israel in the land of Canaan, got in course of time to be regarded by some of the Israelites as a god; and that when the whole race had come to be called Jews, and many of them had adopted the custom of turning their names into Greek, this god, hitherto known as "Joshua," was thenceforth known as "Jesus." Now, although great stress is often laid upon the Monotheism of the Israelites, they are frequently reproached in the Old Testament for abandoning Yahveh *alias* Jehovah, their national deity, in order to go a "whoring after other gods." Considering that the Israelites were a small people surrounded by great nations practising attractive forms of worship, we need not marvel at their religious infidelity. Moreover, it would be even more natural to find these earnest seekers after God selecting one of their own bygone heroes as an object of devotion. Here it is well to recall that, according to Numbers (xiii. 16), "Moses called Hoshea, the son of Nun, Joshua"; and that the word "Joshua" means "Jehovah-Saviour."¹ This fact is interesting but not as important as it might appear at first sight. For the Israelites used to call themselves by signficatory names, and many of these, because they involve a divine name, or a divine predicate, or both, are termed theophorous appellations, "Elijah," which signifies "Yahveh is God," being a familiar example. Besides noting the marked propensity of the Israelites to idolatry, and drawing inferences from Joshua's name, and that of his father Nun, the mythicists adduce other collateral evidence of a suggestive nature.

¹ See note by the Lord Bishop of St. Andrew's to Ecclesiasticus xvi. in "The Apocrypha With Commentary"; London, 1880.

which, though it scarcely seems sufficient to prove their point, may very probably indicate the way to further discoveries, and certainly deserves serious attention. But I prefer not to go further into this part of the theory, because the other part is so much the more important. Indeed, unless the second part of the theory can be proved, the first part, even if it were proved, would be of no service to the purpose for which the theory itself is propounded.

PART SECOND.

The Myth Theory teaches that the worship of the Hebrew god named Joshua *alias* Jesus, which began at an early but unknown point of time, persisted into the first century of our era; and that this deity Joshua *alias* Jesus then became falsely identified with Jesus Christ, the God-man of Christianity, an imaginary person said to have been crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judæa and Samaria, whose term of office began in A.D. 26 and lasted ten years, the Passover of A.D. 30 being the date most plausibly assigned to this crucifixion. Here it should be noted that in the New Testament Joshua receives very little attention compared with that given to Abraham, Moses and David. The fact that Joshua brought the Tabernacle into Canaan is mentioned in Stephen's dying speech. (Acts vii. 44-45.) The author of Hebrews says that David foretold a rest for the people of God which his predecessor Joshua had never provided (iv. 7-8). The Greek text and the Vulgate have "Jesus" in both the above cases. Finally, "Judas, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James," says in a brief Epistle, which is probably the latest work in the above collection, "that the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not" (v. 5). Such is the rendering of the R.V., which here differs from the A.V. only in putting "a people" for "the people." But in its marginal notes, the R.V. says that "Many ancient authorities read Jesus" instead of "the Lord," and that the Greek adverb rendered by "afterward" means literally "the second time." Let me add that in the above cases the Vulgate has *Jesus* and *secundo* respectively. The passage is certainly corrupt. The Israelites were saved but once out of the land of Egypt. The Lord God was the one who saved them on that memorable occasion, and his instrument was Moses, not Joshua. Moreover, the Lord God afterwards destroyed a number of the delivered Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness, because they had shown him want of faith. As, however, "Jesus" used in the rejected text equals "Joshua," which equals "Jehovah-Saviour," it also equals "the Lord" used in the accepted text. A confusion thus arising is the natural explanation of the mysterious point now in question.

With regard to the reticence of the New Testament about Joshua, it should also be mentioned that the eleventh chapter of Hebrews omits him from its list of worthies, and that although it records the fall of Jericho, one of his alleged triumphs, it celebrates only the harlot Rahab in connection with this affair. Moreover, the name "Jesus" was very common among the Jews, and the historian Josephus mentions at least a dozen persons who held it. Hence, a god named Joshua *alias* Jesus might be worshipped at the time when a man named Jesus Christ was crucified.

Thus, the Mythicists would have to disprove the crucifixion of Jesus Christ before they could claim him to be a fictitious embodiment of the equally felicitous god Joshua *alias* Jesus, whom some of the Jews still worshipped at the period in question. The name "Jesus" means "Saviour," but, in the case of the person whom Pilate is said to have crucified, the title "Christ" is added to it. This title is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word "Messiah," which means "the anointed one," and was the technical term for the promised member of David's stock who should restore the lost glory of Israel. How could Joshua be thought of in this connection?

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be Continued)

MAKE BELIEVE

WE all have to make believe at some time or the other, and in one way or another. Life would be quite intolerable if we didn't, and if we all said and did just what we felt disposed to say or do on the spur of the moment.

For instance: Someone may pay us a friendly call when we are frightfully busy, and although we may tell ourselves that we have some justification for inwardly resenting the intrusion at such a time, good manners demand that we pretend to be pleased to see the caller. No one with a spark of decency in him would, figuratively speaking, slam the door in the other man's face, no matter how inconvenient it might be at the moment to break off what one is doing.

Or again: We may be asked to attend some social gathering, and although we know from experience that we are most likely to be bored stiff with the whole proceedings, and would therefore far rather spend our time in more congenial company, we go to the function nevertheless and for the same reason—because we know that, in the circumstances, it is the proper thing to do. These are little obligations which social life forces upon us.

We learn to play this game of make believe when we are children, and then—when we have our toys and other kiddies to amuse us and to be amused—it is all good, innocent fun and we enjoy it. But when we grow up and deception—or the attempt at deception—becomes so much a part of our everyday lives, the game is, often enough, difficult to play with any degree of satisfaction. Indeed, it is very seldom that either party is deceived, because both sides realise what is happening and accept the position with as good grace as possible because neither of them can do anything about it.

Politicians are adepts at the game. Before a man is elected to Parliament he will make believe—and try to make you, as an elector, believe—that all you have to do is to cast your vote in his favour and all will be well. He may have developed the art of deceiving others to such a pitch of perfection that in due course he is made a Minister of the Crown, and then his ability will have full play. If he is called upon to answer an awkward question in the House he will, as likely as not, give a reply that is obviously not in accordance with the facts of the case, but his questioner dare not call him a liar. That sort of thing isn't "done"—not in polite, Parliamentary society! Or if he himself remains a mere back-bencher and puts a question, he will know, being what he is, that what he is told isn't true. He will know, too, that he can do nothing whatever about it. It is just a part of the great game of make-believe which is so popular these days. So he decides and, for the moment, is content. But only for the moment.

The preaching class are, of course, notorious at the game. They make believe that they firmly believe in the literal truth of the Bible, that God is in heaven and all is right with the world, that it is quite right and proper to turn the other cheek to the smiter, that you should most certainly forgive them that trespass against you, and so on and so forth. But if this preaching is put to the test and any one of them is asked—as the Bishop of Liverpool was asked quite recently—"Am I to forgive the Nazi gang?" they take a right-about turn and reply—in the words of Dr. David, the aforesaid Bishop: "No, I don't think you are"! "Don't think," mark you!

Of course, no one but a blithering idiot would think of allowing an aggressor to attack him a second time, or of forgiving the human vermin who are responsible for the present world-wide crime and resultant misery. Indeed, any and every individual worthy of the name of man feels an overwhelming desire to rid the world once and for all of this scum of the earth. To preach "Forgive them their trespasses" on Sunday, and on Monday to tell the same people that they must not interpret that injunc-

tion literally is to write oneself down as a humbug. But the make-believe still goes on in spite of its transparent insincerity!

Some people seem to like this sort of thing—judging by their readiness to listen to it and be guided by it. Others don't. There are those who loathe and detest these insincerities—these attempts to hoodwink the public and these barefaced lyings—but they feel, or many of them feel, that they are in a hopeless position, because to expose the liar is no easy task, and there are far too many quite ready and willing to take his part if any attempt is made to expose him as a humbug or hypocrite or both. Besides, both time and money—in addition to concrete evidence upon which to convict—are required to take successful action. That is one reason why so many get away with it. As a rule, vested interests are on their side. . . .

Judging by their advertisements, some firms are past-masters at the game. "Have you a cow? If so, rub it with some of our Blitzkrieg ointment and it will disappear overnight!" says one. Says another: "Why be troubled with a wooden leg when a bottle of our special 'Hokum Fakeum' will make a new one grow while you sleep!" Lies, of course, but the liars sell their pills and potions all the same. Occasionally these people get caught out, but as a rule they have a long run for their money.

For the reasons already given we are all bound to be deceivers to a greater or lesser degree, but the extent of the degree depends largely upon ourselves and the sincerity—or lack of it!—which animates us. To lie, even like the proverbial gas-meter, to save a loved one from suffering—as Madame Dreyfus deliberately lied to her children, when her husband was wrongly accused of treason, to save them from a sense of shame and mental distress—is surely highly commendable, but deliberately to deceive someone merely for self-aggrandisement or personal profit is equally surely just as condemnable.

In short, we can make-believe for good or ill. It is an art by which we can accomplish much—one way or the other—and as our fancy dictates.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

CORRESPONDENCE

DR. JOAD AND GOD

SIR.—Your crushing indictment of Dr. Joad's "conversion" in the "Evening Standard" having reduced the "Professor's" entertainment value to the level of the B.B.C. Music Hall, there is no need to sprinkle salt in the gaping wounds. However, perhaps the gentleman in question himself could serve as a fitting appendix to your article, "C. E. M. Joad and God." Speaking at a Freethought Dinner at the Trocadero Restaurant on September 12, 1938, Dr. Joad asserted that there was "nothing that so much promotes belief in the goodness of God as a first-class disaster, an earthquake let us say, or war or pestilence or famine." The italics are mine. He went on to say that it was likely we were on the brink of a first-class disaster, and that if it took place, he would "expect to see the Almighty again becoming popular." He added: "God in fact may well be the coming man, and from that point of view it may be the case that there is danger to be feared." Dr. Joad's discovery of God during the war he feared for the consequences it would bring about, has thus coincided with the B.B.C.'s discovery of Dr. Joad as a philosopher.—Yours, etc.,

PETER NORTHCOTE.

WAR AND THE PEOPLE

SIR.—I have carefully read the letter from Mr. R. B. Kerr in your issue dated September 13, and nothing therein prompts me to alter my opinion or even tone down the two statements he questions in my recent article. That Neville Chamberlain tried to avoid a war which Germany was preparing, and that Australia and New Zealand—for their advantage—avoided a threatened conflict with Japan in no way invalidates my statements that, "The people do not make wars," and "The affairs of nations, including foreign relations, are handled by Governments."—Yours, etc.,

R. H. ROSETTI.

HOW GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

The night was dark on the ocean's breast,
And the waves rolled high in wild unrest,
Where a stately barque was dashing on
Toward a breaker's crest, with the rudder gone.
Around the capstan, in wild despair,
The crew had gathered, and joined in prayer
To Him who only had power to save,
To deliver them from a watery grave.
A crash and a gulping wave alone
Were the answers of the Omnipotent One.

A beautiful maiden knelt to pray
For the life of a loved one far away,
Away in the fields where life and death,
Hang poised in the scales that tip with a breath.
"O Father of Mercies, protect the heart
Of him I love from the foeman's dart;
When the death-bolts rain on the charging field,
Be Thou his strength and guide and shield."
A mangled corpse and a soldier's grave
Was the answer the Father of Mercies gave.

CHARLES STEPHENSON.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES. Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12-0 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.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), 11-0, Prof. G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D. "Friendship."

COUNTRY

Outdoor

Bradford N.S.S. Branch. Members and friends meet on Broadway Car Park on Sunday evenings at 7-30.

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

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

Enfield, Lancs. (near 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.

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

Scoutbottom, Wednesday, 7-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

(Concluded from page 391)

religions, of course, but there are new forms of expression of the religious idea. Nazism is one of these. It has built, however, on a foundation that was well prepared for it by Christianity. If the principle of blind, unthinking acceptance had not been planted in the minds of Europeans by 2,000 years of Christian teaching and practice, Nazism could never have achieved its hold on the German people.

Consequently, the "Daily Herald" is completely wrong. It is not "one or the other" of these creeds that must go. It is both. It is more than both—it is all of them. From Berlin to Tokio and Rome; from London, New York and Delhi; all forms of religion must be banished by Reason if Mankind is to evolve better things, for religion means death to progress.

F. J. CORINA.