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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Our British Fascists

I THINK we may fairly take Hitler as a type rather than as an individual, and judge him in terms of theory rather than by mere deeds. The deeds of German Fascism paralyse any effort at adequate description. When we have exhausted the vocabulary of vituperation and declamation we are still left with feelings of disgust that defy all vocalisation. So we will take all that can be said in that direction as having been said, and merely remind ourselves that there is a kind of social philosophy underlying Fascism whether it be expressed in a German, an Italian, a Spanish or even an English form. We may also remind ourselves that Fascism is not new in the world's history, nor is it confined to politics. There is, for instance, a very old form of Fascism exhibited by the Roman Catholic Church. There we have the Christian people—first but a section of the population, then we have established in power a ruling order—the Church and its priests, from the intellectually simple type up through numerous gradations to the Pope. This class still claims to be called to power by God, and the claims of the Papacy is well expressed in the New Testament command that obedience must be given to the powers that be, for the powers that be are ordained by God. There is with the Church all the Fascist intolerance of independent beliefs or opinions, and there is promised a spiritual interment camp for all who disobey orders. Persecution for those holding wrong opinions is as much part of the Roman Catholic régime as it is of Hitlerian Fascism, and there is little to choose in principle between the internment camps set for them. The fact of their being situated on different sides of the grave is a matter of detail. Finally, there is the same determination to kill “wrong beliefs” and so prevent heretical ideas gaining currency.

The Fascist idea is even older than Christianity. Those who are acquainted with the charming translations from the Chinese by Arthur Waley—they are said by experts to be very fine translations—may remember the chapter on “The Realists” in his “Three Ways of Thought in

Ancient China.” He gives translations of a number of systems, and among them a full-blooded social system with all the principles of current Fascism. But not with all its practices of brutality, for the Chinese had not the model of the historic Christian Church before them. The Christian experiments in forcing belief, in its control of education, and in its use of the torture chamber and public burnings may be taken as youthful exercises in Fascism. The Chinese had not behind them a thousand years of Christian tradition.

Fascism in Operation

Hitlerism pays special attention to the “right training of youth.” In this it follows the lines of Christian tradition. Like the Archbishops, Hitlerism says, if we cannot capture youth we are undone, and there is plenty of evidence in the present war of the fanatical fury with which the younger generation of Germans in the Army face death with “Heil Hitler” on their lips instead of “Jesus receive my soul.” To the scientific mind the psychological difference is negligible. Hitler saw, as did the Church, that the future would be fashioned by contemporary youth. Another lesson from the Roman Church, which has always insisted on the child being put under its direction—directly or indirectly. The ruling class or group, historically represented by the Church in education, morals, religion and the family, is represented in German Fascism by the Nazis. And pursuing our leisurely historical and sociological course, we find the British Fascist revealing himself as following the same ideals and favouring the same policy, with the modifications that the different situations demand. But we are not seeking differences so much as likenesses.

The Enemy Within the Gates

We have all been so shocked by the almost unbelievable brutalities of German Fascism that we have almost forgotten the way in which many of the leading figures in this country coquetted with Fascism. In this country we still have a ruling class, although it has not the rigid lines and they are not so firm as they might be. That the lines are not rigid does not prove their non-existence. The recurrence of the names of members of families in power generation after generation is alone evidence of this. For there is no proof whatever that, other things equal, native or potential ability is greater in Mayfair than it is in White-chapel. Not nature, but nurture appears to be the dominant fact here. Neither ability nor stupidity is the monopolistic character of a class.

Even now that Fascism has become with us a word that affronts the nostrils of decent men and women, under another guise it is still being cultivated. Neither the Church nor any form of privilege can perpetuate itself without cultivating Fascism in some form. The rule of

privilege, if it is to perpetuate itself, must aim at providing a people with whom passive obedience is second nature. An example of this since the war began is the attempt to place the schools under the direct influence of the Churches, and to see to it that without for the moment making an open profession of religious beliefs being made compulsory, to take decided steps in that direction. This began with an account—religiously alarmist accounts—of the state of utter barbarism of a large percentage of the children up to twelve years of age who were evacuated. No real evidence was ever supplied of this, and it was probably weakened by the praise that had to be given of the heroism, etc., etc., of the young men who were pressed into the Armed Services and their admirable behaviour in many directions. How far this plot ultimately succeeds will depend upon the life of the present Government. Recent events go to show that the conspiracy may not be completely successful.

This first step is now followed by a scheme put out by the Committee on Education set up by the Conservative Party—of which the Minister of Education is the Chairman, with our Prime Minister as leader of the party—an office it would have been best for him not to have held until the semi-coalition Government was at an end.

This new scheme is, in outline, placed before the public by the chairman of the Conservative Committee, and its affinities to a form of Fascism are unmistakable. For the scheme is not to be voluntary, to be adopted by those who believe in it. It is to be compulsory. Without it being so, Mr. Fabre says, quite plainly, the end aimed at cannot be reached. So Hitler argued for his National Socialism.

We may note in passing that Mr. Fabre builds his case on the alleged terrible state of the youth of the country. Mr. Churchill ought to keep an eye on his subordinates, for if the leader of the Conservative Party, as Prime Minister, goes about the country praising the behaviour of the youth of this generation for their services in the Armed Forces, in the auxiliaries to these forces, in the workshops and in all sorts of war services, while his own party is proclaiming or even suggesting the poor quality of the youth of to-day and putting forward compulsory regimentation of boys and girls between 14 and 18, it will look very peculiar. Mr. Fabre asks: "In the name of reason and humanity, what can be said for applying compulsion up to 14 and leaving it between 14 and 18 to the mercy of the streets and factories?" Let us shiver! We ought to say "Thank God for the Conservative Party which has always distinguished itself for its concern for the education—of the right sort—of the poor."

But before we shiver ourselves into a state of unreasoning Conservative fear, let us consider one or two things. Mr. Fabre, it is plain, bases a lot of his fears about youth on the reports of interested parties who, to get more power in the schools, have ever since the war started been carrying on this campaign. He says we must end this foolish division between individualism and patriotism. We agree. But would Mr. Fabre be in favour of giving to youth honestly worded lessons on, say, Communism, Socialism and Free-thinking? If they are not allowed a glimpse of such subjects at the age of 14 or upward—and they do not get it nowadays even in our secondary schools—of what avail are the extra years of schooling—save to develop a British Fascism in place of Italian and German forms? We

are indebted to the "News Chronicle" for a passage from the "Manchester Guardian" remarking that the proposed youth training of Mr. Fabre would end in producing "a post-war people of militant apes." And I have as much objection to a society of peaceful apes as I have to militant ones. Perhaps I ought to assure the apes that I mean nothing offensive—to them. One may picture the apes looking forward to something better. But if Mr. Fabre and others have their way, mankind will, if it wishes to see something worth looking at, have only the past generations to provide the scene.

Mr. Fabre asks "Is compulsory education Fascism?" The answer is "It entirely depends upon what you are teaching." In Germany the teaching is educational. How else would Nazism have grown? How would the Roman Church have held its own if it abolished education. Really, Mr. Fabre, education began with the higher animal world. It goes on through every generation. Why Mr. Fabre has been educating me in the article he has written. I now see the Church-cum-Conservative plot clearer than ever. As Shylock might have said, "I thank thee, O Fascist, for the lesson, and it shall go hard if I do not better the instruction." For I would have the education of the young people radically altered from the earliest possible years. They should be encouraged to question whatever they are told from the earliest years onward. The "You must listen to your teacher" should be accompanied by, and the teacher should listen to, the child. The New Testament Jesus says "Suffer little children to come unto me," and the priest and the misled and misleading layman comes along, and with different words but identical purpose, says "And we will tell you what you must think, and we will keep from you things that we know may be true, but which we will prevent your ever suspecting as such. We will tell you what is true."

I think the educational years should be lengthened to 18. If for no other reason, for getting rid of such incapables and objectionable types as the Duff-Coopers and the Halifaxes at the head of affairs. And if that lengthening of school time is pursued it should be the period in which the instruction in "dangerous" ideas, the real social equality of men and women, the discussion of religion—real religion, of Atheism, of Confucianism, Communism, Conservatism, and all other isms—including the universal topic of humbugism, should be taught and discussed in the continuation schools. Until that is done it may be less of a social danger to close compulsory school life at 14 than to continue to 18 or 20. Our danger of developing into a nation of that threatened community of militant apes would be less.

There is one sentence in Mr. Fabre's essay that is worth bearing in mind. He says that friendly intercourse has failed. Youth "must be treated as men are now treated. Youth now expects orders." Probably Mr. Fabre sees himself busily engaged in raising a generation of militant apes. He is doing his best. And, apparently, he has the Minister of Education behind him—and, of course, the Churches.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

As the mind must govern the hands, so in every society the man of intelligence must direct the man of labour.—DR. JOHNSON.

DR. TEMPLE PUTS ONE OVER

"THIS is the Gaumont-British News, presenting the truth to the Free Peoples of the World."

Thus opened the news-reel at our local cinema. Then, after the high-sounding proclamation of G.B. News, came the truth, in the form of Dr. Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, supported by his surpliced choir, to deliver to us a short homily (no doubt specially prepared for the news-reel) in connection with the National Day of Prayer.

The homily was followed by a request by the Archbishop to join him in repeating the Lord's Prayer—a performance which, in one cinema at any rate, was a complete flop, for the audience uttered not one word; not even a whispered "Amen" at the end. Clever, and very subtle, is this idea of bringing the church into the cinema. With the figure of the chief medicine man framed in the chancel, and with occasional glimpses of the choir, the scene was calculated to reproduce almost to reality the atmosphere of the church in the cinema building. But the will to worship was lacking, and the whole thing flopped with the audience. One thing that must be admitted, however, is that our Archbishop photographs very well indeed, and now that he has joined the ranks of our film stars we can no longer complain of his enormous salary. He has every precedent for it in his new vocation.

Briefly, however, one must confess that Dr. Temple, on behalf of the Anglicans, has "put one over" the Roman Catholics. I am now wondering what will be the attitude, and the position, of the Roman Catholics now that our news-reel can convert cinemas into Anglican churches. Will the R.C.s arrange for special dispensations to cover visits to cinemas on such occasions, or will the followers of the True Faith be forbidden to see such news-reels, or to listen to Protestant heresy? Anglican services are clearly "against the true faith" of the old original firm, and this development must raise some nice points for Romanist disciplinarians and strategists.

At the moment the matter will be difficult of solution; but, if I may make a suggestion, it is that Roman Catholics could, when the war is over and building is resumed, erect their own cinemas, in which films "of a Catholic nature" could be shown in a "distinctively Catholic atmosphere." Cardinal Hinsley (like Dr. Temple) could be trained to perform his ecclesiastical gyrations and holy genuflections before the camera, and so the centuries-old competition of outworn superstitions could have a new lease of life in the modern and highly scientific sphere of the cinema.

But if this were done a new problem would face the Romanists. It is their most untruthful boast that no Catholic is compelled to pay anything for his or her religion—although we do recall a Catholic boy once declaring that it cost him a penny to light a candle! Still, the Catholic "fact" remains. You don't pay for R.C. dope. It is entirely a matter of how much, under the influence of the dope, you can be induced to part with.

So I will make a further helpful suggestion. As no admission fee, as such, could be charged in these Catholic cinemas, the cost of building them could be met out of local rates, or the National Exchequer—say to the tune of 75 per cent.! More if you can get it. The cost of running them could then be met by adding, say, 50 per cent. to the admission charges of ordinary cinemas and remitting it to the Catholic cinemas, to be augmented by voluntary offerings by Catholics. This would be quite fair, of course, because a Catholic has as much right to go to a cinema to see the Pope as an Anglican has to see the Archbishop. You cannot deny that Catholics have a right to have their own cinemas, with a Catholic "atmosphere," and it is not fair in a democracy that one section of the community should be burdened with special costs just because it wants its own "atmosphere." So at least you would agree to a special

tax to help to build and maintain these cinemas. Or would you! Indignant at the idea, are you? Yet you do the very same thing for Roman Catholic schools, you darned fool!

But the Roman Catholics will have to be slick about the business, because the cinema, in its secular form, has done much to loosen the roots of denominational insularity, and to broaden the outlook of the people. Mixing together in an atmosphere of mixed ideas, they have almost learnt that religious tags like "R.C." and "C. of E." do not necessarily make people better or worse. Such an outlook is dangerous to religion, and most of all to Romanist "exclusiveness."

By the way, Mr. Editor, am I injuring the cause of Free-thought by handing out suggestions for the preservation of religion in a scientific fashion. Or do you think, as I think, that it cannot harm our cause, because the Churches are too far gone already?

F. J. CORINA.

THE MODERN MUSE

(Continued from page 407)

III.

THE majority of poets and verse-writers at the present time belong, fairly recognisably, to one of a number of easily defined "schools." There are the traditionalists, of whom Mr. John Galsworthy is perhaps the most typical representative; there are the "modernists," following Mr. T. S. Eliot, of whom Mr. W. H. Auden is most directly typical. But Mr. Dylan Thomas, who has made a great name for himself in a comparatively short period of time, belongs to no school of poetry, follows no one and apparently has no followers. Nevertheless, there is something about his writing which has attracted critical attention, not merely among those who seek for "something different," but among the established writers of the older generation. Miss Edith Sitwell, for instance, has lauded Mr. Dylan Thomas as probably the best poet of his age in the country.

The reader who wishes to discover just what is the aim and object behind the work of Mr. Dylan Thomas can do so at the expenditure of half-a-crown, for this is the price of Messrs. Dent's edition of his "Twenty-Five Poems," which made its first appearance in 1936, but much of which still remains fresh and lively. Of course, as was the case of Mr. W. H. Auden, discussed in a previous article in this series, Mr. Dylan Thomas occasionally writes very badly. It would appear that up to the present he lacks almost completely the faculty of self-criticism; but nevertheless, he has written several poems which are strikingly successful. Witness the stanza which follows:—

Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean
bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall
rise again;
Though lovers be lost lost shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

That shows at once Mr. Dylan Thomas's weakness and his strength. He has on occasion a magnificent declamatory style, but he sets down almost anything which comes into his head, with the result that occasionally he ventures perilously near nonsense. He can call himself (and I believe sometimes does call himself) a Surrealist in verse, and the Surrealist painters almost lose themselves by drawing upon their subconscious minds for their subjects.

It is in many ways unfortunate that Mr. Dylan Thomas has so concentrated on these semi-mystical themes, especially since his Welsh ancestry probably gives a tinge of emotional revivalism to his mind, which when verse is written in the undisciplined

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ACID DROPS

THE Roman Catholics of Crewe have sent a telegram on the recent vote of the Trades Union Congress against the plans outlined by the Churches to gain control of the schools. These mighty men of Crewe say it is against the Atlantic Charter. So far as the Prime Minister is concerned, we do not imagine that it will seriously disturb his sleep. He is probably as well aware as anybody that these generalisations may mean anything, everything—or nothing. Political and religious generalisations usually have this quality. Hence the quantity of them on which agreement is reached.

The Lord Bishop of Portsmouth says that it is the duty of the Church to try to solve economic problems. We do not see that it is any more the duty of the Church to do this than it is the duty of anybody or anything else. At any rate, there is no Church in this country that is able to do it or has any intention of doing it. The declaration is sheer verbiage.

Some few hundred years before the date given for the alleged miraculous birth of Jesus Christ the Chinese discovered how to make gunpowder. But the poor boobies, destitute of the sublime gospel that others were to receive, could find no better use for it than to make squibs and crackers to amuse the people. But about a thousand years later some Christian travellers came to China. They saw, they wondered, they understood. They saw in it one of God's gifts to man. It could do more than amuse; it could kill. They brought the discovery to Christian Europe and it was recognised as God's great gift to man. It promised to be more deadly than sword or spear or bow and arrow. But for those Christian travellers these Christless Chinese might have remained for ever ignorant of the power in their hands—how a new gospel might be carried throughout the world—and God's great gift would have been thrown away on childish amusements.

The Chinese also discovered the art of making paper some time before the beginning of the Christian era. It was known in parts of Asia soon after its discovery and the art of printing followed. When the Mohammedans captured the larger part of Spain they established the first paper mill in Europe. The first paper mill in England was built in the 13th century. So far as Christian influences were concerned, Europe remained where it was in A.D. 1. Still, let us be fair. Christians did show the world what might be done with gunpowder. They did what they could to prevent the multiplication of books, and in a later period those countries which wished to indulge in mechanical warfare were compelled to come to Christian countries for tuition.

Lord Halifax is one of this country's inherited responsibilities. When he dies there will be the usual humbugging talk about the great services he gave to the Empire, although we do not expect that his services in the Baldwin and Chamberlain Governments in helping Japan to take Manchukuo, to attack China, for the Germans to get bombing practice in Spain, for opposition to an alliance with Russia, and for handing Czechoslovakia to Germany will be stressed. But for the moment we have to be thankful that he is in America, although the Americans may not be over delighted about it.

But before all things Lord Halifax is a devout Christian—of the High Church-near-Roman Catholic brand. And he took an early opportunity of making a speech soon after he reached the United States as Britain's representative. On September 20, it being Sunday, the B.B.C. gave us part of the record of a speech that had been delivered by our representative. If we had known what was coming we would have been prepared. But we were not, at any rate, we had no idea that he would pack so much nonsense in so few words. But the B.B.C. broke its record in broadcasting religious nonsense.

Lord Halifax repeated, without the slightest reservation, that this world war was essentially a fight for Christianity. Proof,

hospitals owed their beginnings to Christianity, Democracy was built on Christianity, freedom of speech was built on Christianity, and so on through every one of the better phases of life. It will be quite encouraging to the four hundred millions of China and the two hundred millions of Russians, to the two hundred and fifty millions of Hindoos, to say nothing of the millions of anti-Christians who are fighting with us in this war, that we are waging for the preservation of Christianity. Only the other day we were being told by our leaders that Democracy began in ancient Greece. Lord Halifax knows better. Real freedom of speech has been won in the teeth of Christian opposition wherever it exists. A portable medical service followed the ancient Roman soldiers everywhere, but Halifax thinks our soldiers owe it to Christianity. Candidly, we have never heard such a tirade of ignorance since we first made acquaintance with the Christian Evidence Society of some 50 years ago. Lord Halifax remains a national responsibility.

The "Daily Telegraph" publishes a picture of a bridal couple with a letterpress description of the bridegroom as Prince Andrew of Russia. There is no such person. There was a Prince Andrew of Russia prior to the revolution. If we cannot send Russia in its struggles all the help the people would wish to send, we could at least cease insulting Russia with dummy figures of princes who no longer exist. He may be an ex-prince, but the original Prince died years ago.

The "News Chronicle" (September 24) reported Lady Astor as saying that she "would not mind sitting on the same platform as a Russian Communist." Of course, the Communist is expected to manifest full appreciation of the contact. On the other hand, however, Lady Astor says she "would not be found dead with a British Communist." We understand that with a large number of people, Communist and other, no insistence will be made as to the kind of company in which Lady Astor is found dead. The fact overshadows all minor details.

A series of conferences on Home Life has been held at Carr's Lane Chapel, Birmingham. Many very sensible things were said, but the element of foolishness was provided by the Rev. J. L. Tizard, who said that "home life must be founded on religion," and as he meant the Christian religion that is just downright nonsense. What of the multitudes of homes that are not founded on religion? Cannot parents deal properly with their children without talk of Christ and God, and stuffing their children's heads with matters that neither parents nor children understand? If such statements were not so common, and are just part of established cant, we should say that Mr. Tizard was offering a gratuitous insult to multitudes of parents. As it is we dismiss it as just so much regularised stupidity—or worse.

We congratulate the Harwich Education Committee. At a recent meeting, reported in the "East Anglian Times" for September 17, Councillor E. Auston moved the prepared Church propagandist motion that, "in view of the alarming deterioration of discipline among children," etc., etc., there should be compulsory religious instruction. Of course, there is no evidence from teachers as to the demoralising of children. That information does not come from teachers of ability; nor is it manifest among the children one knows. It is one of the Christian slanders inaugurated by those—belonging to both the Churches and the Government—who led the campaign for the reinstatement of the clergy in the schools. We are pleased to report that the motion had only one vote in its favour—that of Mr. Auston.

In the "Journal of Education" for September, Mr. J. C. Dent, Headmaster of Westminster City School, cites Archbishop Temple as saying—probably some time ago—that "a strong case should be made out for the argument that on the whole religion, up to date, had done more harm than good in the world." We assume that statement was made some time ago. But it is one that could be very easily justified. Truth will out; even an Archbishop cannot prevent it.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

Will C. E. Smith be good enough to write to his sister at 5, Edgcombe Road, Lostwithiel, Cornwall, or care of this office?

F. C. TWISING.—The Archbishop of Canterbury's reply to the arranged question put to him by that insult to the "common soldier," the "travelling padre," as to the ownership by the Church of slum property, was one of those half-truths that are meant to mislead. But it is not true that a small amount of slum property in Paddington was all the slum property in the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. There was property in the Bethnal Green area, in South London and elsewhere, both in London and in other parts of the country. And in any case, as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners sold the property at full market price, the Church still profits from the property sold. The Church is one of the largest, if not the largest, beneficiaries from land in the country. As a reformer, the Archbishop threatens to become another ecclesiastical joke.

J. H. CHARLES.—Pleased you find "The Atheist's Approach" "superb." It is selling well. We have done our best to present the situation as fairly as we could. We have other things in the press.

J. BROWN.—We have sent your letter on to the writer of the article. He will probably be best able to reply to your question.

E. J. HUGHES.—You have evidently taken the measure of the general intelligence. But we cannot conceive a time when there will not be a need for Freethought propaganda, no matter how the world develops. The contest will be on a higher level, but we think sheer conservatism will always cling to what was and is, rather than to what might be.

C. HOLLINGHAM.—Sorry we cannot get your letter in this week. We are working under rather difficult circumstances for a time.

R. HALLAM.—We have very pleasant recollection of your uncle. Pleased to learn of your continued interest in this journal.

F. M. FICKSBURG.—War Damage Fund, £5.

W. NELSON.—To circulate and distributing "The Freethinker," 15s.

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SUGAR PLUMS

IF the Educational plot—or, more correctly, the plot against education—matures, the Church of England will make a good bargain by handing many of its schools over to the Government. Of course, there will be financial "considerations" in the interests of the Church, and the children should benefit considerably. For it is a fact well known that one of the aims of the Church folk is to escape the provision of the money that the Government grant, keeps these schools in being.

The condition of many of these schools is well known to those interested, but there is one case described in the "Manchester Guardian" for September 18 that is worth noting. There is a Church of England school in Blackfriars Road, Salford, and in a discussion at a meeting of the Salford Education Committee the state of the school was described by Councillor Brental, who said that—

"when he and other members visited the school last week they came away with a feeling of disgust that it should have been allowed to reopen after the holidays in the 'filthy condition' they found it. The lavatories were in a shocking condition, flushing systems not working, and the roofs had been 'repaired' by wrenching off the doors and laying them on the top.

"The interior walls were pitted and scarred and showed marks of rain leakage in many places. Outside, the downspouts were broken or missing, gullies were full of dirt, window frames were damaged, coping-stones were overhanging dangerously, railings were rusted to a razor-edge state, and everywhere there was evidence of absolute neglect.

"There is evidence of absolute disregard for the children's self-respect and health," he said. "I want to record my disgust that anyone in whom charge of a school is vested should have allowed such a state of things to exist or continue." The matter should be reported to the Medical Officer of Health for instant action.

"Councillor Pugh said that he was distressed by what he had seen, and it was mild to say that the staff was disgruntled. He doubted whether a penny had been spent on the exterior since the schoolroom was built. He knew the financial difficulties of non-provided schools, but this was beyond reason."

It would be a capital bargain for the Church of England if it could hand over to the State the upkeep of these schools, and secure at the same time the teaching of its own doctrine in the national school. The Archbishops have a very keen eye where finance is concerned.

Braintree has decided to have cinemas open on Sunday. As usual against the wishes of most of the clergy.

We have seen of late two well-advertised films. We leave it an open question whether they are famous because they are advertised or advertised because they are famous. One is "Gone with the Wind"—which had far too much wind and was too long in going. One of the chief performers was Clark Gable—in a change of clothes. The first requisite in a good actor is to hide his own personality, and no one will accuse Gable of that. The scenery was quite good, but the play would have been better had it been cropped by quite a third. There was an incident that provided quite a good ending at that stage, but then the rest would not have been good enough for a play.

The other film was "The Young Mr. Pitt." Donat was excellent as Pitt, but the picture of Pitt was not very convincing. Nor was Fox the helpless gambler and opportunist that was depicted. The cardinal fault of the play was that it was obviously war propaganda. Even then it was late in the day to caricature the French Revolution as a threat to the freedom of Europe with Britain saving the world. The fact is that the Revolution itself was accomplished with little bloodshed, and it was largely due to the hostility of Britain that the war of propaganda, of which the authorities in England were in deadly fear, became a war of conquest.

To turn our war with France into a war for democracy is grossly absurd. For it was in the 30 years following that in this country there went on a series of savage persecutions against freedom of speech and publications and against the attempts of the working class to secure an improvement of status. It is time that the French Revolution was better understood by the English people.

MOLIERE AND RELIGION

THERE is, curiously enough, one great writer who does not figure in Wheeler's "Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers." Somehow this painstaking scholar contrived to miss Molière, the greatest comic writer for the stage, the tercentenary of whose birth (January 12, 1622) our friends on the other side of the Channel have just been celebrating with artistic enthusiasm and national pride. The oversight is, no doubt, to be explained by Wheeler's lack of interest in the lighter forms of literature, and his want of acquaintance with Molière either by the book or the stage. The literary criticism of the dramatist he would be likely to come across in the course of his reading would lay no stress on Molière's anti-religious bias, that being precisely the side of an artistic mind which our English writers find it convenient to ignore. Even the best of modern English studies of the dramatist, Mr. Arthur Tilley's "Molière" (Cambridge University Press, 1921), does not bring out at all clearly the philosophical value of the great comedies. But French critics are less squeamish. In the 17th century in France there was no hesitation in placing him—not on the side of the angels. His whole career was a progress in Freethought. The Jesuits who gave him his "humanities" laid the foundation of his large and tolerant philosophy of life, and probably dissipated what theistic belief he had commenced with; and when as a young man he studied philosophy with the man of science and materialist, Gassendi (1591-1656), a follower of Bacon and friend of Galileo, his natural anti-theistic bias must have been as confirmed as that of his fellow student, Cyrano de Bergerac. In choosing the calling of a play-actor he put himself outside the pale of what was then considered respectable society, although he had always the protection of Louis XIV. and the loyal friendship of a few libertines who were distinguished in philosophy and letters. His sworn enemies were not so much the Jesuits as the austere Jansenists. They had that irrational hatred of the stage which is always associated with the puritanical type of mind, and when Molière brought his company to Paris the theocratic government of the city excommunicated all play-actors, putting them on the same footing, as Remy de Gourmont remarks, with loose women, moneylenders, magicians and fortune-tellers. Every parish priest kept a list of the names of parishioners who frequented the playhouse, and could at any moment deprive them of civil rights. Great pulpit orators like Bourdaloue and Bossuet used their powers of persuasion, exhortation and abuse, and pamphleteers like Barbier d'Aucour represented Molière to his religious readers as a cynical preacher of all the vices whose aim was to destroy men by making them laugh, whose *cocu imaginaire* was an invention for the better making of real ones.

The religious bigots brought against Molière a formal charge of impiety and sacrilege, and they were justified from their standpoint, for he was the most formidable enemy the modern spirit had raised against them. They avenged themselves in the end by refusing to bury the dramatist in consecrated ground. But the better sort of clergy were more shocked by Molière's philosophy than by his comedies. What they detested and dreaded, as Remy de Gourmont has pointed out, was the vindicator of the natural man, the lover of liberty, the sworn enemy of religious prejudgments. In him they persecuted one of the liberators of human nature, one whose work of liberation was all the more effective because it was disguised as mere popular amusement. It was a struggle between the priests and the play-actors, and the comedians won. Paris just escaped being converted into a Geneva.

Molière's contemporaries had not the slightest doubt with regard to his contemptuous disregard of religion, and we who read his plays now can understand why they regarded him as a sort of devil incarnate, a corruptor of virtue a *mauvais maître*,

a professor of evil, as Louis Veuillot was pleased to call every great thinker who rejected the claims of the Church of Rome. The impiety and the epicurean scepticism of his plays are obvious. In "Don Juan" there are two scenes (Act III., scenes 1 and 2), which so scandalised the faithful that they were cancelled after the first performance. Don Juan and his servant are walking through a forest, both disguised, for the avenging brothers of the wronged Elvire are on Juan's scent. To while away the time they discuss the fundamentals of belief, Juan standing for materialism, Sganarelle for religion. The valet gets the worst of the argument and damages his nose into the bargain. This trusting of the defence of religion to an uneducated serving-man was understood as an insult to orthodox intelligence. It was certainly not very flattering. But worse was to come. In arguing, the two have lost their way and, meeting a beggar, they ask him to direct them. He begs for alms in the name of God and says that he will pray for their health and prosperity. Don Juan asks him how he spends his time. He replied that all his time is given to praying for those who help him. "Then you have everything you want," remarks Don Juan. "I have nothing," replies the beggar. "But surely a man who is always praying to God could not possibly be in a wretched condition. That is but a poor reward for all your trouble. Come, now, try what a little blasphemy will do. Curse God and I will give you a guinea. Well, if you can't be persuaded to blaspheme, if you would rather die of hunger than curse God, I will give you one not in the name of God, but in the name of suffering humanity."

It was with "Tartuffe" that Molière fully revenged himself upon his religious persecutors. It has often been said that this terrible satire is merely an attack of religious hypocrisy. Sainte-Beuve is under this impression when he tells us that it was directed against Jesuit casuistry. But Molière had no quarrel with the Jesuits, who preferred to remain neutral in the contention between religion and comedy. Their attitude toward Molière was fairly sympathetic. They probably enjoyed his ridicule of the casuists. He was not a theologian like Pascal, but a philosopher who took a wider view of the world. No, what Molière attacked was religion itself, and Brunetiere evidently had this in view when he called "Tartuffe" a Freethinking tract. Certainly it is that, and something much more precious. It is the most wonderful piece of comic stage craft the world has ever seen, and one of the truest and most moving pictures of life as shaped by religious ideals.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

(Reprinted)

"JESUS INSIDE A RUBBER FACTORY" (A True Story in All but Names)

THERE is a certain rubber factory where the "Christian" owner issues decrees to his workers concerning their allegiance to Jesus Christ!

This "Christian" employer has made it a condition of employment that workers must attend a prayer meeting in their own time inside the factory!

Employees are informed by the works manager, who is also a "Christian," that they should arrive a half-hour earlier in the morning and attend a prayer meeting!

The "Christian" proprietor parades up and down the outside gate playing hymns on a concertina, whilst his "stool-pigeon" (the works manager) takes up his stand at the canteen door, which is the improvised chapel, and welcomes the congregation. Of course, the real motive is not so much to "welcome," but to note those who are absent.

The nurse who is employed in the private ambulance room which is used for treating the victims of serious burnings and scaldings, which are a feature of the factory, stands inside the

door with a collecting-box cadging for contributions for some "Christian" charity!

When it is considered that the congregation is large enough, the man with the concertina comes up the wooden stairway with the last member and, still playing "Jesu Lover of my Soul," proceeds to the "pulpit" followed by the works manager, who acts as chairman. He opens a large Bible, reads a verse in orthodox fashion, then proceeds to prayer.

There is a murmur of voices throughout the hall, as Mrs. Dubb asks Mrs. Muggs how her "lassie is getting on since she got scalded last week." The chairman immediately blares out, "Silence!" in the same manner as the usher in a court of law.

The "buzz" subsides immediately and the chairman states that never was it more essential than to-day that prayer should be indulged in. He introduces the preacher, the owner-manager-director who is known by the workers as "Misery."

This worthy, in an obsequious manner, emphasises the need for supplication to enable us to maintain the war effort.

He then proceeds to pray for "Victory."

The "congregation" becomes restive; they have had a surfeit of this nonsense from the daily Press and the radio, and in any case, as they get paid piece-rate wages for their production of gas-masks, which the "Christian" factory owner has the contract for, their minds are more occupied with earnings than prayers!

The preacher continues in that sonorous voice beloved by "Christians" to inculcate the necessity for increased production; the works manager smiles blandly and nods over to the foreman of the delivery department. The latter, forgetting for the moment, winks back to the "stool-pigeon." Eventually the preacher stops and the "congregation" emits a sigh of relief.

Up springs the chairman and thanks the workers who attended, with a homily on their patriotism and Christian charity, and requests the preacher to close with the "usual benediction."

The "buzz" of voices is resumed, and Mrs. Dubb resumes her talk with Mrs. Muggs as the "congregation" files down to the factory to resume their production of gas-masks and contraceptives!

The male workers light their pipes and cigarettes with a feeling of nausea and disgust, despite the fact that large notices on the walls read, "Smoking Strictly Forbidden!"

Soon the factory machinery drowns the buzz of voices as the preacher retires to his well-appointed room, and the works manager slips from department to department to speed the production and to snoop on the workers who are on the "suspect list."

Jesus has been to the rubber factory, but the production of the factory is of more importance than the visit of that—myth!

A. S. KNOX.

THE MODERN MUSE—(Continued from page 411)

way which he writes may lead to dangerous extremes. Once again one can see the value of a sane, sensible philosophical background for an artist—a background which only some such movement as Freethought can give.

Only when a poet's feet are firmly rooted in reality, four-square upon the ground, can he hope to give his work that air of genuineness, complete lack of those slight suggestions of unreality, which only the greatest in our poetic heritage have known. Mr. Dylan Thomas, up to the present, has not quite reached that height. In the future, of course, there is no knowing where he may reach. He is still very young, and young men frequently write in difficult and deliberately abstruse ways. However, at present he has earned for himself a small niche in the gallery of modern poets, and there are very few people of his age who can claim to have done that.

S. II.

HEAVEN

Airs from heaven, blasts from hell.

—"HAMLET."

Is he in heaven or is he in hell,

That damned elusive Pimpernel?

—"THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL."

AH, heaven—the abode of God and the blessed—the place of supreme felicity. Also the seventh heaven, the very sanctum sanctorum of God and the divine presence surrounded with celestial atmosphere. How sweet! Tremble, you unbelievers! This "bright land far away, where it is never-ending day," is not for you. This "place where angels sing ceaseless praises to their King" is not for you. This "happy place where men always see his face" is locked, bolted and barred against you. Just picture it. Never-ending day! Angels singing ceaselessly! Perpetual visions of his face! Supernal visions! Oh grave, where is thy victory? Oh death, where is thy sting? Where indeed? This glorious vista of heavenly bliss and everlasting life does not mean that the religious mind does not do its utmost—aided by medical science—to preserve its religious body. Far from it. It is because of the fear of that "undiscovered bourn from whence no traveller returns" that gives them pause. For is it not better to bear the ills we have than to fly to the joys which may not be ours at all!

The beatific vision of a celestial abode is pictured by all believers and they, too, see themselves sitting on the *right hand* of God. (Most uncomfortable.)

The heavens are telling of the glory of the life everlasting which is yours—on conditions! As the quack medicine vendor will always receive the money of the credulous and unthinking in return for some worthless concoction, so will the Chief Medicine Man accept tribute, approbation and service as long as the gullible and self-seeking believe "the lie at the lips of the priest." The promise, "we shall all meet again," is potent. For then there will be no more pain! No more ills! No more partings! No more tears or sorrows! Happy band of pilgrims look upwards to the skies and see the prize waiting for you. Pledge your life to the celestial pawnbroker and what security have you? None. Even the most astute business man cannot get anything in writing. He must be content with a promise. "When you want to get your life out of pawn, just call in," says the celestial pawnbroker. "Until then, I'm all set?" "Oh yes, so long as you pay your dues, and when you fail to do that you're sunk," and adds in an undertone, "You're sunk in any case."

In heaven you will get no variety. What, no music-hall? There will be an all-singing, angelical, never-ending day. What, no dawn and no dusk? How simple you are. As there is no night there cannot be any dawn or dusk; and you will live for ever and ever. What, no deaths? Don't be so ridiculous. How can there be life without death? Then we shall see some funerals? If you don't keep quiet you'll be seeing your own. Shall we be clothed? Of course; you must remember to bring your ration books, for there is such a thing as a war in heaven. Good heavens, is it possible? Everything is possible with God. Good. Shall we take a return ticket, just in case we may not like to stay? There will be no returns, and should you take a return ticket, there will be no refund. Well, in that case we'll go C.O.D.; so we shan't lose anything, except perhaps our lives, and who cares if you won't have them?

Have we any means of knowing anything about heaven? We have as much right to an opinion as anyone else. We believe the song-writer who said it is Ireland. He definitely states that "a little bit of heaven fell from out the sky one day, and it nestled in the ocean in a spot not far away . . . and they called it Ireland." We have no objection at all in going to heaven if it resembles Ireland, for we have very happy memories of a

holiday spent there; and if the angels are as hospitable as the Irish people it will be heaven indeed!

Other folk say they are in heaven "when dancing cheek to cheek," whilst young couples say it is heaven just being together. Some people are heard to say, "What a heavenly view," and "What a heavenly child," or "it is heaven to see you smile." Perhaps they have been for a holiday across the water also. Spiritualists have been known to assert that there is a place en route to heaven where you can smoke cigars and wear—er—plus fours. What kind of "plane" is not known. Whether there is whisky to be had when the destination is reached cannot be stated with certainty. But it is known that if you are very good you may have an escort of angels who will "play you in." But should you resort to any pranks they will "play you up."

Now then, you ordinary passengers, all aboard for heaven, stopping at Purgatory and Paradise, and woe betide any of you travelling first-class with a third-class ticket. You will be given in charge of Lucifer. No luggage allowed except harps. Wishing you God speed and a safe return to—sanity.

Throughout the ages man has resorted to horrible devices so long as he thought he would gain heaven thereby. The motto has been every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost; and at long last when the church bell rings the pines will exclaim, "Hark! it is a knell that summons me to heaven: and thee to hell."

S. GORDON HOGG.

SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE

It is of the utmost consequence that strict accuracy should regulate our use of language and that everyone should acquire the power and the habit of expressing his thoughts with perspicuity and correctness. Few, indeed, can appreciate the real extent and importance of that influence which language has always exercised on human affairs, or can be aware how often these are determined by causes much slighter than are apparent to a superficial observer. False logic, disguised under specious phraseology, too often gains the assent of the unthinking multitude, disseminating far and wide the seeds of prejudice and error. Truisms pass current, and wear the semblance of profound wisdom, when dressed up in the garb of antithetical phrases or set off by an imposing pomp of paradox. By a confused jargon of involved and mystical sentences, the imagination is easily inveigled into a transcendental region of clouds and the understanding beguiled into the belief that it is acquiring knowledge and approaching truth. A misapplied or misapprehended term is sufficient to give rise to fierce and interminable disputes: a misnomer has turned the tide of popular opinion; a verbal sophism has decided a party question; an artful watchword, thrown among combustible materials, has kindled the flames of deadly warfare and changed the destiny of an empire.—From Roget's "Treasures of English Words and Phrases."

BURTON ON THE BIBLE

There is no more immoral work than the Old Testament. Its deity is an ancient Hebrew of the worst type, who condones, permits or commands every sin in the Decalogue. He ordered Abraham to murder his son and allowed Jacob to swindle his brother; Moses to slaughter an Egyptian and the Jews to plunder and spoil a whole people, after inflicting upon them a series of plagues which would be the height of atrocity if the tales were true. The nations of Canaan are then extirpated. For treacherously disembowelling a king Elud is made judge over Israel; Jael is blessed above women for vilely murdering a sleeping guest. The horrid deeds of Judith and Esther are made examples to mankind, and David, after an adultery and a homicide which deserved ignominious death, is suffered to massacre a host of his enemies, cutting some of them in two with swords and axes and putting others into brick-kilns. For obscenity and impurity we have the tales of Onan, Lot and his daughter, Amnon and his fair sister, Abraham and his father's concubines, and, capping all, the Song of Solomon.—From Sir Richard Burton's "Arabian Nights," Vol. X., p. 180.

CORRESPONDENCE

A PROTEST.

SIR,—I am sorry that your reviewer should have seen fit to mislead your readers regarding my book, "Christianity and Chaos" ("The Freethinker," September 13) and feel sure that, in the interests of fairness, you will extend to me the courtesy of printing this letter of protest and correction. Your reviewer quotes me as referring to Jesus as the Redeemer, Saviour, Teacher—all, he declares, with capital letters to make the words look more "sacred"—whereas, in point of fact, I do not use those words at all; and I should be interested to know on what page I use the words "the ennobling ideals of Jesus the Christ." Referring to my definition of "God" as the supreme Good, your reviewer says "whatever that means," which would appear to indicate that he has not read the book, since I devote a whole long chapter to defining what I mean. Nor do I plead for my own brand of religion, but simply for a return to the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. There is no need to believe in the divinity of Jesus in order to find in this Sermon a design for living the good life in the best sense. As to what I mean by materialism, I have devoted a space to this also. I mean by it the machine age, war, capitalism, imperial exploitation, the value of the stock exchange and the market-place. But all this is in the book.—Yours, etc.,

ETHEL MANNIS.

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.

LONDON

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D., "Some Makers of Modern England: I.—The Elizabethan Age."

COUNTRY Indoor

Bradford Branch N.S.S. — Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate, 7-0 p.m.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Cafe, Old Arcade), Sunday, 6-45 p.m., a Debate, "Is Freethought More Conducive to Progress than Present-Day Politics"; Affirmative, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON; Negative, Mr. D. SMITH (I.L.P.).

COUNTRY Outdoor

Brierfield, Sunday, 2-45 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.
Bunhopefield (Co-op. Corner), Sunday, 10-30 a.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.

Burnley (Market), Sunday, 6-45, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

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

Glasgow Branch N.S.S., 25, Hillfoot Street (off Duke Street), Mr. T. L. SMITH, "China," 3 p.m.

Worsthorne, Saturday, 6-15, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

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