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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God Makes Another Capture

FOR some time I have had on my table a couple of books by a Mr. C. S. Lewis. I first made his acquaintance on the wireless—preaching religion. This is a terrible introduction for a man, and all I need now say is that he is quite on a level with other B.B.C. preachers. That, too, is a hard thing to say of any man, but Mr. Lewis holds truth in such confessed adoration that he would not wish me to speak falsely. After all, if Mr. Lewis is correct in his view, God made him, and the final responsibility for his existence rests in heaven. So I bought a couple of his books, and felt that perhaps he was just "kiddin'." Next I found him being boomed in religious journals and by reviewers. The "Church Times" called him "brilliant." The "British Weekly" classed him with Dorothy Sayers as two "competent and effective writers in theology." "The Times" Literary Supplement, notable for the space it gives to religious propaganda, joined in his praise. It said that he was most effective because "for many years he was not a Christian believer." Other journals pointed out the same thing, but they usually made it stronger by saying that he was for many years an Atheist. An able, brilliant, convinced and convincing preacher of Christianity—and above all, one who was an Atheist for many years! Joad announces to God, through the columns of the "Standard," that he is coming on his side. Then another announces that he *was* an Atheist but is now on the side of God. There must be joy among the denizens of heaven that these two will one day join them. Of course, the better type are in the lower regions. Heaven for climate, hell for company.

But it turns out that Mr. Lewis was an Atheist only until he was 14. At that age he gave it up. With "The Times" Literary Supplement speaking of him as being an unbeliever "for many years," one would have in mind a man struggling year after year with scientific teaching, with studies of abstruse philosophy, and then exclaiming: "I have delved deep and soared high. I have grappled with problem after problem, have weighed all the pros and cons, and at the end of my weary toil I am convinced there is

a God." So I felt that I must, in the interests of those who read this paper, devote some time to Mr. Lewis. After all, the Spartans are said to have made some of their slaves drunk so that their youth might see the evils of drunkenness.

On Miracles

It will help to the understanding of the terrific mental struggle of Mr. Lewis if I take first a summarised report of a sermon by him on "Do Miracles Happen?" The "Church Times" is impressed by it as a "brilliant explanation of the whys and wherefores of the Gospel miracles." And so we commence with a passage which may be "brilliant" but which is certainly muddled. Mr. Lewis says that "miracles may be hallucinations." This is simply not true. An hallucination is something that has no objective existence, a fancied perception of something. The essence of a miracle is that it shall have a real objective existence, but which is not explainable by any known natural means. The two words are often misused, but a "brilliant" expositor of the Christian miracles should not confuse them. Then, unconsciously, Mr. Lewis stumbles on a truth—but without understanding its significance. He says that "a person holding a philosophy which excludes the supernatural would not experience a miracle, however many occurred."

That is anything but "brilliant." For it implies that miracles do not occur to anyone who does not already believe in them. That, I think, is true enough, but that does away with the need for miracles. At most, in such circumstances, miracles can only strengthen a belief that already exists. And when one comes to look at the matter, there is an awful waste exhibited in this miracle business. Obviously, to get a hundred per cent. result, miracles should occur to some hard-shelled Freethinker. Miracles are performed at Lourdes. But the people who receive them already believe. A Lourdes miracle may confirm a faith, but it cannot create it. It will be remembered that even Jesus could not perform a miracle where the people had no belief. Modern workers of the confidence trick make precisely the same complaint. Business is bad where the public is shy. Folly and "faith" run together in harness.

Giving miracles to those who already believe in them cuts no ice; why cannot we have one or two in conditions that would create a world notice and gain converts? Why not a miracle—a real miracle—in, say, "The Freethinker" office? It is related in what is called the Apocryphal Gospels (they have as good internal claims to be considered "inspired" as those of the official New Testament) Jesus is represented as working with his mother's husband in a carpenter's shop. A piece of wood was too short. So Jesus took one end of the wood and Joseph the other end and stretched it to the required size. Now, if by the same method a ream of paper could be stretched to two reams,

we should regard that as a very convincing example of a miracle. Or if a consignment of munitions was transported to Russia by spiritual delivery, that event would do more to convince the world of the truth of Christianity than all Dr. Temple's meaningless generalities or Mr. Lewis's "brilliant" rationalising of the ridiculous. It might even bring all the Russians back to Jesus. But none of these common-sense things happen. We thank God for our security, but have neither the wit nor the courage to remind him that it has been partly secured by the slaughter of several millions of Russians. We appear to have a rationing system with miracles. Where people are ignorant and very pious they may occur daily. As they become less ignorant, miracles become rarities. It is as though the Christian Deity said, "Damn these people! Why should I perform miracles for them when they pay so little attention to me?" Looking back, it seems that miracles are rationed with increasing rigidity. But the rationing is without reason. Even Lord Woolton would get into trouble if he sent more food where food was already plentiful and reduced rations where everyone was hungry.

In a roundabout way Mr. Lewis seems to be aware of this. He says we must not assume that our ancestors "believed in miracles because they did not know the laws of nature . . . When the disciples saw our Lord walking on the water they were frightened and astonished because they knew enough of physics to know that that sort of thing does not ordinarily happen . . . A complete ignorance of the laws of nature would exclude a consciousness of nature." Agreed. Of course, there must be a background of "natural law" to make miracles useful. But the distinction grows slowly. Natural law is not first on the Christian scene. Miracle, the supernatural—if we may be permitted to use the term—holds the field. It is only gradually that the concept of natural "law" makes its appearance. But in proportion as our understanding of the natural grows the concept of the supernatural declines. In other words, religion, which is a codified form of the supernatural, is only another term for ignorance. Religion declines as knowledge and science grows.

Of course, the people pictured in the New Testament were surprised when they saw Jesus walking on the water. So should we have been—it we had seen it. But the people who advertise this did *not* see it. So far as we know, no one saw it. So far as the New Testament goes, we are merely *told* that someone saw it. Someone writes in the New Testament that someone else saw Jesus walking on the water, and someone else tells the congregation of St. Jude's-on-the-Hill, Hampstead, that they ought to believe it because he is telling them of something that someone said someone else had seen. We are reminded of Thomas Paine's saying that a revelation is only such to the one who receives it. It is hearsay to everyone else. We do not think that many wives, if a husband came home late and explained that he had been delayed by watching a man walking on the park lake, getting half-sovereigns out of the mouths of fishes, would accept the story. There really does appear to be limits to the brilliancy of Mr. Lewis. But perhaps it is with Mr. Lewis as it was with Jesus. Where the people do not already believe, it is not possible for him to convince them.

Mr. Lewis explains that a great many people do not believe in miracles because they do not think "God would violate the laws he had himself imposed on matter." But

a scientific law does not "impose" anything. It is just a description of the way in which things behave. Mr. Lewis seems to think that matter existed at one time without "laws," just as a dozen shipwrecked sailors might exist on an island without any civil or criminal code. Mr. Lewis's idea, apparently, is that matter existed without "law," that is, without any settled form of motion, and God then passed or created certain "laws," much as the House of Commons might act and post up notices of what had been done. It looks as though Mr. Lewis's abandonment of Atheism at the mature age of 14 was not brought about by an acquaintance with elementary science.

Finally, for this week, Mr. Lewis explains the performance of occasional miracles by saying that God is behind all natural law, and that the Bible miracles illustrate God reducing the text (of nature) to small letters so that men could see them. And he illustrates God's method—as sanctioned by Mr. Lewis—by saying that every year "God turns water into wine, by enabling the wine to draw up water." That illustration is worthy of Joad. But the *wine* does not draw up water. There are many factors that go to make wine, and water is only one of them. And even then it is not the wine that draws up the water. Perhaps Mr. Lewis will look up the matter.

So much for this much-puffed defender of God. This week I have dealt with him as the preacher. Next week I will take him as a B.B.C. exponent of the existence of God and the dependence of morality on the belief in God. The reader will then be able to study the philosopher side by side with the preacher. But I cannot promise a very marked change for the better.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

PSYCHOLOGY WITHOUT TEARS

HAPPENING to glance through a recent number of a journal styled "The Psychologist" (July, 1942), which I often buy and sometimes read, I was struck by the appearance of an article presented under the alluring title, "The Romance of the Unconscious." It is a romance indeed, but in a different sense to the one intended.

Referring to what he describes as "unconscious mentality," the writer, Mr. R. W. Wilde, M.A., B.Sc., states that it is not very difficult to test out. If, for example, he were to ask someone to think of a number, the person interrogated might innocently think that he had the whole gamut, from nought to infinity, to choose from. "But," states Mr. Wilde, "he has not, for nothing is more certain than that the number chosen will be one having a special, and most probably unconscious, significance." Without in the least doubting this statement, we shall require more evidence than we so far possess that the psycho-analyst is enabled by his art to reveal that significance.

Mr. Wilde mentions that one of his former students was rather sceptical on this subject, and had protested that the whole idea was nonsense, a conclusion with which I heartily agree. "Very well," says Mr. Wilde to her, "think of a number." Having been a student of Mr. Wilde, the lady apparently was not so sceptical as he would have us believe, and immediately complied. The number thought of was 73. Mr. Wilde now gets to work. He says: "That number *means* something for you. Let us see if we can discover just why it was 73 and not some other number that came up," leaving it to be implied that there was not the slightest doubt that the discovery would be made. Now we come to the scientific technique. "Did you ever live in a house numbered 73?" asks Mr. Wilde. No, she had not. If

she had the inquiry would have been at an end and Mr. Wilde would have been credited with the possession of some mysterious psychic power. Now we come to question No. 2: "Are your parents or your grandparents aged 73?" Note that the questions must have some degree of probability. Nor would it, for instance, have been deemed to be polite to ask a lady whether her children or her grandchildren were aged 73. Neither parents nor grandparents were aged 73, and we are still as far off the solution as ever. But as Mr. Wilde's reputation is at stake, some meaning has to be found and so the procedure is continued. "Did you ever matriculate?" asks Mr. Wilde. Yes, she had done so some 20 years before. The next obvious question is: "What was your pass standard?" The lady halts, evidently struck with amazement and exclaims: "I guess you've bowled me out; I got 73 per cent." And there you are.

Had the matriculation question failed this guessing game might have continued indefinitely, and had interrogator and interrogated not collapsed in the process we may be certain that that stubborn number 73 would eventually have been made to fit in with some event or circumstance in the lady's life. For instance, had all her relatives been counted: aunts, uncles, nephews, etc., it may have been found that they amounted to exactly 73. There is no end to the possibilities; and if there is more than one circumstance that fits in with the number, which is almost a certainty, which one is to be taken? Mr. Wilde is silent on this point; he sticks to his first lucky shot and there, so far as he is concerned, the matter is at an end.

But the matter cannot be allowed to rest there so far as the inquiring layman is concerned. When, for example, Mr. Wilde asked the question: "Did you ever live in a house numbered 73?" it would, on Mr. Wilde's own principles, have been quite pertinent to remark: "Now that question means something for you. Let us see if we can discover just why you asked that particular question and not some other." Such reciprocity would not carry the inquiry very far, but it would at least serve to emphasise the absurdity of the whole procedure. If the ordinary conscious processes are to be ignored, and full reliance placed on the unconscious, on the one hand, they ought to be so on the other. Some unkind critic might say they are.

But we must not be too hard on Mr. Wilde. He is but following out what is a recognised part of psycho-analytic procedure, examples of which may be found in galore in the literature dealing with the subject. I have not space to refer to more than one, which may be found in "Papers on Psycho-analysis," by Ernest Jones.

Like Mr. Wilde, Ernest Jones encountered a sceptical acquaintance who, on being requested to think of a number, gave the number 986, and defied him to connect it with anything of special interest in his mind. By means of the free-association method he recalled to memory that six years before, on the hottest day he could remember, he had seen a joke in an evening newspaper which stated that the thermometer had stood at 986 deg. F., evidently an exaggeration of 98.6 deg. F. They were at the time seated in front of a very hot fire, and the acquaintance stated that the heat had aroused this dormant memory. Here Mr. Wilde would probably have been satisfied. Not so Ernest Jones, who was curious to know why this particular memory had persisted with such vividness. The free-association method was therefore continued, and it transpired that the conception of heat had always greatly impressed his acquaintance, who considered that heat was the most important thing in the Universe—the source of all life, and so on. The free-association continued. The next thought was of a factory-stack which he could see from his bedroom window. He used to watch the flame and smoke issuing out of it and reflected on the deplorable waste of energy. Thought Ernest Jones: Heat, flame, the source of life, the waste of vital energy issuing from an upright, hollow tube—it was not hard to divine from such associations that the ideas of heat and fire were unconsciously linked with the idea of

love, and that there was a strong masturbation complex present, which the acquaintance subsequently confirmed.

The above example carries the matter a stage further than the first. Whether it may be considered as more enlightening is a matter of opinion. If any other number had been thought of, it could have been manipulated to the same result. A good example of this is given in the chapter on "Dream Manipulation of Numbers," in the work of Ernest Jones referred to above. This requires to be read in detail to get the full relish. In this case the number occurred in a dream. The dreamer was endeavouring to find the number of his old home. Prior to waking he joyfully exclaimed: "Yes, that's it, No. 72." As a matter of fact the house in question was numbered 243. These two numbers had naturally to be reconciled; so the last two numerals, 4 and 3, were added together, the whole then making 27, which, when reversed, made 72. Many deductions were made from those two numbers, and from their division, multiplication, addition, subtraction and transposition, all leading to a result which, from the preceding example, may be inferred.

There have been many suggestions made as to the best and quickest means to put an end to present hostilities, but I have still to hear that anyone has suggested that Hitler should be asked to think of a number and that matters might then be safely left in the hands of the psycho-analysts.

FRANK KENYON.

ACID DROPS

HAS anyone noted that since the Albert Hall meeting Sir Stafford Cripps has become over-fond of religious phraseology? He has had much to say about Jesus and God, etc., etc. We do not know what his opinions were or are, but there has certainly been a shrinking in his popularity of late, and it would be a poor thing if he commenced to solidify his political position by way of catering for Christian audiences. We have need of honest and able political leaders, whatever side they are on, but flirting with religious sections is certainly not the class we need.

The narrowness of the Roman Catholic Church, even in the very act of proclaiming its universality, is seen in its indulgence in the cheapest and most stupid of advertising puffs. Week by week it advertises that Mr. Blank, a Catholic, has been elected on a local council. Mr. Dash, Catholic and a fireman, was complimented on his courage in saving a woman from a burning building. Mr. Smith has received a medal or promotion for courage before the enemy, and so on, and so on. It is the poorest kind of advertising one could have—unless such papers as the "Universe" are astonished to find so many decent people members of the Roman Church and wonder where the devil they came from.

Suppose we were as paltry as the "Universe." We might then publish weekly something like this: Mr. "A," Roman Catholic, was locked up for burglary; Mr. "B" was charged at Bow Street for being drunk and disorderly; Mr. "C," Roman Catholic, received three months for robbery; Mr. "D," Roman Catholic, was found guilty of beating his wife, etc., etc., through a couple of columns weekly. There is plenty of material, if one cared to use it. We have never stooped to this kind of thing, and unless special circumstances arise, never shall. We will agree with the "Universe" that all Catholics are not criminals and that some non-Catholics—Freethinkers—are. But we have never argued that Freethought should not have its share of bad characters, although, as a matter of fact, it does not occupy anything like its quota of prison accommodation. So we leave it to the "Universe" to advertise the fact that some Roman Catholics are as brave, as cleanly, as decent, as people who are not Catholics.

Finally, here is a problem for the puzzle editor of the "Universe." If J. B. is as good without the Roman Church as C. D. is with it, what part does the Roman Church play in

the life of C. D.? We will send a copy of "The Freethinker" free for one year to any member of the Forces the "Universe" cares to nominate if it publishes any answer to our harmless query.

Mrs. Lewis Richards, elderly daughter of the late Justice Grantham, told a meeting of the Workers' Conference of the Primrose League, at Caxton Hall, that she believed "mean, despicable boys" should be birched. Then, "if they could be given Christianity as well we would have a fine race." Mrs. Richards also said that her father "was a great Churchman and he believed in the birch." We are not surprised. Self-birching was one of the favourite methods of monks for inducing spiritual growth, and the Church never showed any marked dislike to its use on others. Brutal punishments flourished well when the Church was all-powerful, and it was only with the rise of unbelief in this and other countries that the practice became unfashionable. And the Christians gloated very much over Hell, which would be a torment for ever for not worshipping the Christian God.

The "Daily Telegraph" gives a display heading—"Halifax puts his faith in Bombs." That is a libel on Halifax, for we have it in his own words that he puts his faith in God. But perhaps Halifax meant only that he puts his faith in God if he has enough bombs. Or he perhaps hopes that the bombs will get God out of the predicament in which he is placed by people doing, minus God, just as well as they have done with him. It is difficult to say, for putting faith in God may be no more than an exhibition of Halifax's muddle-headedness.

A religious journal says that the people of Russia worship Stalin as though he were God. That is not an extravagant compliment to Stalin, but we understand what the writer means. But we should like someone to tell us whether the people of Russia have or have not done better without God than ever they have done with him, or whether they would have done more during this war if they had all believed they had God behind them?

When the victory of the Allies over Germany is announced we are certain to have an elaborate thanksgiving-to-God orgy of foolishness. The King will, on the orders of his Ministers, announce a special thanksgiving to God, and our medicine men will turn out in full force to advertise the power of their magic. Pulpits will resound with praises for what God has done for the people, and by way of showing our appreciation of the victory God has given, the Conservative Party will push on its plan to poison the mind of the new generation by seeing that they get a strong dose of religion in the schools. After all, offering sacrifices to gods is a very ancient practice, and if we cannot now offer up burnt sacrifices to God it will be something if we can offer him the brains of the younger generation. If a great many believers did they would be giving that part of their structure they use least.

But there is one point that we never find noted. We shall win the war by the decree of God—plus, of course, the trifling aid given by the Armed Forces, the industry of the ordinary people and so forth. But if it is by God's will and act that we win the war at the end, why in the name of all that is sensible did he not interfere at the beginning? If God moves our hearts—as the B.B.C. Brains Trust has it—why can he not use them before the mischief is done instead of waiting till afterwards? If only there were in heaven an associated committee of democratic humans things might be better managed.

The dare-devil character of the clergy in times of war is worth recording. The other day the Dean of Bristol Cathedral lifted the ban on hatless women entering the Church. It is said the Bishop is now considering the matter. Those who have doubts as to whether the Archbishop of Canterbury will lead his clergy on a socialistic campaign will note that the revolutionary spirit has reached the Bristol Cathedral.

One who signs himself "Absit Omen" makes a good point in a letter to the "Daily Telegraph" in connection with the current talk about social reform by leading clerics. He says

"The Crucial point is that when the Church expresses a political opinion or advises a certain line of action it does not say, as all other political bodies do, 'this is our opinion.' What it says is 'This is God's will.'"

That is a distinct hit, and it should go some way to kill the bunkum that is now being let loose by leading ecclesiastics. The Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, is plainly playing this double game. For if his advice—God only knows what it means in detail, and we rather doubt whether he knows himself—is accepted as good, it will be put down to the credit of the God-business in the market value of which he has such an intimate interest. If it is not, when explained, accepted, then the Archbishop was speaking as a mere man, and his business interests remain unaffected. Associations with God are of a very "sticky" character. It will be remembered that when Moses came down from the mountain and left God in the high altitudes, his face shone and something of God stuck to him ever after. When men have to do with gods they are more or less unfit for normal social intercourse. One can never be certain whether they mean what they say or say what they mean. When the Archbishop throws up his overpaid job and his altogether inflated position and comes down to the level of everyday life, sensible people may take him more seriously.

The Countess of Oxford and Asquith writes to the "Sunday Times," quoting the New Testament, that "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him." Quite good in its way, but the important thing to most people is not what the state of affairs is in heaven, but what it is like on earth. These texts have always been there, but they have never prevented the poor being sweated or decent men and women being trodden on.

From "The Times" of September 28:—

"Mr. J. T. Christie, headmaster of Westminster School, speaking at Durham Diocesan Conference yesterday on Church and the younger generation, said that 75 per cent. of the younger generation at the very least seemed to care nothing at all about religion. In spite of all the devotion and skill expended on training him to understand worship and religion, the upper middle-class boy was scarcely a whit less pagan than the others."

This helps us to understand the anxiety of the clergy for more religious instruction to youth.

In the "Observer" Mr. Priestley recently asked why people listen to a poor type of person instead of to a representative of a better type. He replies that it is because they want to read or hear them. We disagree very strongly, while agreeing that the majority do love to hear the old things said in the old way. The majority, we say, but there is a very large number of people who will also relish sensible ideas and theories sensibly stated, and that number grows. But when we have a Press such as we have, and a monopolistic broadcasting system which serves out stuff that is meant to prevent people thinking in the right direction, then we are dealing with a public only a section of which fails to accept as nourishing food the poison that is given them. But the people have no interest in being fooled. We think Mr. Priestley is aware of that from his own success as a broadcaster when he was allowed to have something of his own way with the B.B.C. The pity is that he did not use his popularity among the people to run a crusade to purify what might be one of our most useful institutions, but which often plays the part of one of our most poisonous ones.

The following comes to us from one of our readers:—

The following happened to me when I enlisted in the last war. The officer is taking down particulars at the Recruiting Office:—

Officer: "Religion?"

I: "None."

(The officer writes "Church of England.")

I: "I say 'No religion,' and you write 'Church of England.'"

Officer: "Same thing." Then, after a pause: "Young man, if you want to kill someone, you must have a religion."

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- I. HAWKES.—Thanks. Always useful.
- W. FINLEY.—Thanks for what you say. We must confess to giving the Lowlands a much wider area than you do. Shall be obliged for the title and publishers of Dr. Agnes Muir's history of Scotland.
- C. THOMPSON.—The Church's and Conservative Geoffrey Faber's slander of youth in the interests of religion was well exposed by Mrs. Thelma Cazalet Keir in a letter to the "Daily Telegraph" for September 23. Mrs. Keir says that Mr. Faber's figures left out 34,500 who already belonged to some organisation, and that in the London area more than half the youth over sixteen belonged to an organisation. That makes Mr. Faber's figures look rather sick. Churches lie and political parties lie, but when the two join hands—?
- FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—"In memory of the late Mr. George Billing," £1.
- DAN GRIFFITHS.—Next week.
- FOR DISTRIBUTING THE FREETHINKER.—C. W. Hollingham, £1; E. Watson, 5s.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—W. Adams (Canada), 10s.

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

TO-DAY (18th October) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. The subject will be "The War That Never Ends." Chair will be taken at 3 o'clock.

We hope to have the Bible Handbook for sale in the course of two or three weeks. This is the ninth edition, which is evidence of its quality and its utility. In spite of war-time costs, the book will be published at the old price of 2s. 6d. Our business manager has already orders booked. They will be sent as soon as possible.

The attitude of the Catholic Church towards civil liberty is well shown in forbidding its members to read certain scientific and historical and literary works with which the Church does not agree, the interference of the priest in almost every department of life, its sanction of blasphemy laws and its determination to keep unbelievers out of public offices wherever possible. There are, in fact, few departments of life that can act freely where the Roman Church has power. There is not, in fact, a country in which the Roman Church has achieved great power that in the interests of the people that power has not had to be curtailed.

We must remind readers that a few years ago Cardinal Hinsley led the way in doing what he could by both open and underhand methods to prevent the International Freethought Federation—which had held its meetings in most European capitals, including

this country—from being held here; and that good Christian Captain Ramsay, even went so far as to warn the Home Secretary in a kind of "Don't put him under the pump" suggestion that if it were permitted there would likely be public disturbances. Sir Samuel Hoare "regretted" that he had no power of interference. That certainly promises a curious liberty under Church rule.

Mr. R. Rosetti will visit Glasgow to-day (October 18) and will lecture in Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow. His subject is "Shall We Live When We Die?" Life is, of course, always with us, as is death, but death is with us in these days to an unusual extent. The Glasgow meetings have been going well, and we hope to be able to record a "full house." There will be the usual opportunity for discussion at the end of the lecture. Donation tickets may be obtained from the local Secretary, Mrs. Macdonald, 65, George Street, Glasgow. Freethinkers should take this opportunity of bringing a Christian friend with them.

Blackburn Freethinkers are asked to book Sunday, October 25, when Mr. J. V. Shortt will lecture in the Public Halls, Northgate, on "God Help Us!—By an Atheist." The meeting commences at 6-45. The local branch has been very busy during the summer and deserves all the help local Freethinkers can give them.

It would not be a bad thing if some of those who are so fond of talking of the character of this or that race, and its influence on world affairs, would study a list of the names of those American airmen and soldiers who are at present in this country. The origin of these names, in Holland, Ireland, Germany, Norway, Russia—in fact, in every country in the world, should give them material for thinking. Even Nazism did not begin in Germany. And the German nonsense—criminal nonsense in their case—had some very substantial help from English writers. But to many, the repetition of a slogan counts as evidence of its trustworthiness.

Mr. Tom Harrison, the Radio commentator for the "Observer," citing Mr. Eden as saying that "the old order has gone," adds:

It would be possible for a person whose whole picture of contemporary Britain came from the B.B.C. to be unaware of this simple but terrifying fact.

We agree, but what can one expect from a monopoly that is controlled by the Government and the Churches, lectures on history given by Churchmen, the absurdities of a Campbell, and the sugary inconsequentialisms of men of the type of Lord Elton. There is scarce a worth-while broadcast on politics, history or religion that is not honeycombed by falsity—if not deliberate lying.

"A Million Years of Human Progress," by Ira D. Cardiff (New York, 2 dollars), gives in about 150 pages a sketch of human progress in the shape of discoveries in science, mechanics, and other instruments by which man has lifted himself from the animal stage to the present state of civilisation. Unlike most books of this class, the pages are well-besprinkled with the names of well-known Freethinkers of all ages. Our complaint against the author—the only one we have—is that it should have been at least four times the size. We hope that other books will come from the same pen.

Some Roman Catholic organisation has had the impudence to write to the Prime Minister complaining that the recent Trade Union vote against the Christianising of the schools is against the Atlantic Charter. If this is a true interpretation of the Charter—and we admit that it is in some parts general enough to mean anything—the sooner it is cancelled the better. Anyway, the message is worthy of Lord Halifax. We feel sure he would sympathise with the authors of the document.

IN REPLY TO MISS ETHEL MANNIN

LET me assure Miss Mannin that I would be very sorry indeed to misrepresent her book "Christianity and Chaos"—or any other book I was dealing with, no matter how much I disagreed with it. But I think that she herself should be very sure of her facts before charging a critic with misrepresentation.

She says in her letter ("The Freethinker," October 4): "I should be interested to know on what page I use the words 'the ennobling ideals of Jesus the Christ.'" She will find them on page 233, seventh line, counting from the bottom of the page, exactly as I quoted them. But the thing that surprises me in this connection is that she seems quite angry to have them attributed to her, when the whole of her book is a glorification of the ideals of "Jesus the Christ." The title of her book is "Christianity or Chaos," and its theme is "A Restatement of Religion." If the Religion here meant is not the Christianity of the title, and if this Christianity is not "the ennobling ideals of Jesus the Christ," what in the world is she writing about?

The word Christianity—in spite of the 200 odd sects of Christians—has an historical significance; and though Miss Mannin has the right to repudiate everything which Christianity as a religion—apart from ethics—stands for, she has no right to expect, when she does so, immunity from criticism. The backbone of Christianity is belief in God, His Son and the Holy Ghost, and in miracles, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. When Miss Mannin departs from this, and claims that by Christianity and Religion all she means is "a return to the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount," I claim first, she has no right to use the word Christianity at all, and second, that all she is advocating is a special brand of religion exactly as I maintained in my article.

Miss Mannin claims I have not read her book. I might as easily claim that she has not read the Sermon on the Mount. At all events, I do not remember coming across any quotation from it in her book. The nearest is from Luke—which is generally known as the Sermon on the Plain; and here are two extracts from this not quoted by Miss Mannin, and I ask her if she is in full agreement with such delightful sentiments as "a design for living the good life in the best sense"? "Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." The Codex Sinaiticus says that Jesus said "Woe unto you that are full now!" and I must, therefore, expect some dire retribution very soon. The feeling that I have when I read the numerous "Woes" of Jesus is much what I feel when I hear "Lord Haw-Haw" or his god Hitler telling us what we must expect if we do not instantly submit to National Socialism.

I deliberately wrote "Redeemer, Saviour and Teacher" to call attention to the way in which Miss Mannin almost always uses capital letters when she deals with deity, and uses small letters when dealing with poor man. For example, she refers to the "Founder" of Christianity with a capital F, but to the "founder" of the Franciscans with a small f. Jesus is the "Christ." Now the word Christ simply means "anointed," but to write "Jesus the anointed" would not look quite so impressive as Jesus the Christ. Or would it?

She writes "God, the Supreme Good." This is a far, far more reverent way of writing the phrase than to put it "god, the supreme good." In fact, any restatement of religion in terms of small letters would rob it of its power, so Miss Mannin uses capital letters whenever she can—and the question of validity never bothers her.

She tells us that she has devoted a "long chapter" to defining what she means by "the Supreme Good," but I hope I am not offending her feelings when I say that 20 chapters could not make sense out of non-sense. Good and evil are words used in human society with definite meanings, but they are relative words. Religious people like to use them and similar words in

the absolute—thus preserving that air of mystery so dear to religion. How often we are told that Jesus is "sinless"—sin, being something objectionable, given a small s; and, of course, Jesus is "Pure Love," the capital letters emphasising its beauty and desirability. All I need say here is that "Supreme Love" is just as much nonsense as "Supreme Evil" and it astonishes me that a woman of Miss Mannin's intelligence does not see this. She tacks on a varying quality in human beings, "goodness" or "the good," to a non-existent, impersonal deity, "god," gives the words their capital letters, and behold, we have "God the Supreme Good," the deity at the head of "the Restatement of Religion" whom we ought to adore, worship and love, I suppose. I am afraid I must laugh here in spite of the awful warning of Jesus.

May I add, however, that I agree with many of Miss Mannin's views of life, but it appears that, among other things, if you believe in "the machine age" and "war," you are a "materialist." Incidentally, when she refers to a Christian, she uses a capital letter; but the unlucky materialist is a "sophisticated materialist"—with small letters; though I willingly admit here a change from the usual "blatant materialist," which has done duty in Christian mouths for so long.

As for war, of course what is meant here is the terrible slaughter of men, women and children, the destruction of cities and the almost unbelievable record of human suffering it has caused. Miss Mannin puts the whole lot on the shoulders of the "materialist," who obviously is never so happy as when indulging in bestial cruelty. There is only one answer to this charge, and it could be made with an ugly little word of three letters. I shall be more polite if I say it is not true, and Miss Mannin knows it is not true. There is not a scrap of evidence in her book that any "materialist," as such, is a beast. A man who wants war is a "war-monger" just as a man who commits murder is a "murderer"; and the fact that almost every crime under the sun has been attributed by Christians to "atheism" or "materialism" (with small letters) does not excuse Miss Mannin—who ought, by this time, to know better.

H. CUTNER.

HELL

Facilis descensus Averno.—VIRGIL.

All hell broke loose.—MILTON.

IN the epic poem narrating the adventures of the mythical hero, Æneas, Virgil said, "the descent to hell is easy." But Æneas did not find it so. The oracle Deiphobe set him a pretty stiff task in finding a "golden bough," and when an entrance into hell had been effected he was obliged to overcome the opposition of the surly Charon and the bellicose Cerberus before he could proceed safely. These two worthies did not welcome those who had no intention of taking up permanent residence in the nether regions. Æneas and those who accompanied him were, after all, "just having a look round," as the burglar said when he was caught on the spot. During his visit Æneas meets some of his former comrades in arms. He is embarrassed when he meets an old sweetheart. Poor Dido! When Æneas left her at Carthage and sailed away she committed suicide. Her pathetic story has inspired other poets to write, and musicians to sing, her praises. Who can listen to "Dido's Lament" without shedding a tear? Æneas also meets with his father, Anchises, and has a chat, after which he returns—

"Upward to retrace the way
And pass into the light of day."

A very refreshing excursion! But do not think that this extraordinary tour is for those who have not heeded the word of God. No, there will be no round trip for them.

Virgil's description of hell is indicative of a wonderful imagination. In turn it is gloomy, picturesque, terrible and pleasant, according to the district in which you will "live." Ultimately Virgil tells us that his hero Æneas may have dreamt it! At least that appears to be the implication of the concluding lines in the sixth book of the poem. Alas, it will be no dream for the wicked, and when they are in torment there will be no respite to their sufferings.

It is of little interest to speculate as to the whereabouts of hell, but the temperature must concern all of us—that is to say, those who are destined there. For further particulars see Dante's "Inferno."

For centuries it has been customary to believe that hell has an exceedingly high temperature—hence the phrase "as hot as hell!" What authority exists for this belief? The Scriptures, of course. Of course. You must read the stories about the sufferings of the damned. You said you'll be damned if you do? Come, you'll be damned if you don't! But for all practical purposes this belief is absurd. Fire consumes, and nothing remains but ashes. How, then, is it possible to burn for ever? You see, the notion is ridiculous. Now our version of hell is quite different. It is cold. Icy cold. The theory is, we believe, a new one, but worth consideration. Hell is nothing but snow and ice in which one resides in a state of suspended animation in perpetual refrigeration, or preservation as it were. When the day of resurrection comes the problem of thawing out should not be difficult. These Arctic conditions vary according to the degree of your sins, and so the degrees (below zero) will be adjusted to make the punishment fit the crime. There are favourable conditions for others for winter sports such as skating and tobogganing. Ice hockey is very popular. Those responsible for these amenities are to be congratulated, as also the sports outfitters, for the use, free of charge, of various equipment. The catering, too, is worthy of invention. A buffet service supplying a continuous round of hot drinks is much appreciated. The scale of charges is fascinating to read. For ice hockey the charges are on a sliding scale, whilst for ski-ing the prices are on a descending scale. For sledging the prices fall to a minimum, and for skating your charges are constantly falling and rising. In hell is much more attractive than the warm variety. In future it will be a commonplace to hear the expression, "As cold as hell!"

Assuming there may be two kinds of hell, then, it is suggested that people should have choice of temperature. To burn or to freeze, that is the question! In the event of one place becoming overcrowded the authorities could devise facilities for the rapid transfer of surplus folk. This would be an excellent arrangement in the busy season, don't you think?

George Herbert, who wrote the "Country Parson," said, "Hell is full of good meanings and wishes." Maybe he had in mind such a hell as has been described.

S. GORDON HOGG.

"HEAVENLY BLISS"

"The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven."—SHAKESPEARE ("Twelfth Night.")

THE Christian heaven is generally described as a place where everything is perfect and where the occupants enjoy eternal bliss. Its situation is extremely vague, the route to it being invariably upwards, irrespective of our planet's position in space at the time. Its appearance and climate, too, are equally uncertain, though we have all heard references to pearly gates and golden thrones, harps and choirs, and we suspect that the weather will not be too hot—the heat being found elsewhere.

All this is mere fiction, of course, but it is still taught as fact in the schools and churches, and most children must have imagined the land above the bright blue sky, presided over by

a white-haired old gentleman. To them and to many grown-up children, heaven, though shadowy, is a real place. Each one may have a different conception of God's abode, and the majority may treat such Biblical references as "the windows of heaven" as metaphorical, but all take for granted the "bliss."

In the evolution of religion the idea of reward after this life is a much later development than the belief in survival. In fact, the future life is first considered merely as a continuation of this one. Hence the common practice of providing the dead with food, fighting equipment, etc., in earlier stages of religious development. Now, so long as a tribe or people live a comparatively settled and happy life with few enemies, so is their future existence likely to be little more than a replica of their earthly one, though it may be intensified. The life of a nomadic Hebrew tribe was very different, being continually restless and hard, a constant and difficult struggle for existence against foes and climatic conditions. Their longing was therefore for peace and quietness, and if that could not be obtained here, then it would be hoped for—later. Given, then, the basic belief in a future life, it is easy to see that it would soon take the form of the mutual desire and the foundation stone of the Christian heaven would be laid.

To the early Christians there was little of heaven that was shadowy. It was a definite place above the earth (then thought to be flat), and it was run like an earthly kingdom. No doubt it resembled a gigantic palace and perhaps it had a foundation stone. It was certainly a substantial and material place, and it was quite near to the earth, because at one time men built a tower in an attempt to get there, while on another occasion a ladder connected the two places. This was consistent with the passage in Job xxxvii. 18 that the sky "is strong and as a molten looking glass," and was generally believed until the revival of scientific investigation in Europe.

The Copernican system left no place for heaven in the Solar System. The earth was proved to be a small spherical planet revolving round the sun. In other words, the idea of a fixed and solid heaven was shattered once and for all time and eventually Christianity had to adapt itself in order to survive. It did this by altering heaven from a definite material place into an indefinite, uncertain and shadowy spiritual existence. But the idea of "bliss" still remains the basis of the heavenly life, wherever and however it may be fulfilled.

This single unchangeable attribute of heaven deserves some attention. "Bliss" is ultimate. It means perfect joy, and perfection cannot be improved upon. To some unambitious creatures such a condition may seem ideal, but to "the thinking few" it would be intolerable. The aim of human life should be happiness, but not the inactivity and finality of bliss. It is the fact that bliss is unattainable that makes life really worth living, and this is one of the strongest arguments against the Christian idea of heaven.

Bliss is, indeed, a very undesirable state, and it would inevitably result in sluggishness and decadence. At the close of his famous Belfast address to the British Association in 1874, Professor John Tyndall said:—

"... it is perfectly possible for you and me to purchase intellectual peace at the price of intellectual death. The world is not without refuges of this description; nor is it wanting in persons who seek their shelter and try to persuade others to do the same. The unstable and the weak will yield to this persuasion, and they to whom persuasion is sweeter than truth. But I would exhort you to refuse the offered shelter and to scorn the base repose—to accept, if the choice be forced upon you, commotion before stagnation, the leap of the torrent before the stillness of the swamp."

That is a truly scientific and Freethought attitude, and it is applicable only to earthly life, but after all, it is this life that matters!

C. McCALL.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BIBLE.

SIR,—In this paper—September 20, page 394—Mr. Archibald Robertson, adjudicating on his own case, declares that my argument against the Three Witnesses, Mt. xvi. 28, Mk. ix. 1 and Lk. iv. 27 “falls to the ground,” because the comparison with Ez. xxvi. 1-14 is a parody, not a parallel. Now Ez. does not profess to write a biography of his hero, but Mk. does, and the Bible offers ample evidence that the Jews believed that Yahveh had “walked the earth,” and surely the prophets were better disciples of Yahveh than the Gospel ones were of Jesus. Mr. R. objects that Ez. does not say that “Tyre will fall before the last of those who have seen Yahveh have passed away.” True enough, but Mk. says nothing about “seen”? Jesus. Both Ez. and Mk. say that the event will happen in the lifetime of hearers. Not wishing to usurp the right of readers, I leave the verdict in their hands, merely pointing out more fully than I did in “A Bible Problem”—this paper, 6th September, page 368—what I deem to be a fallacy. It is vital to the proof of an historical Jesus that the prophecy should fail, so we are told that the Kingdom “hasn’t come yet,” thus, despite the Gospel’s hopeless confusion as to the “Kingdom,” it is assumed that the writer’s meaning is known. Jesus must be found, so he is quietly inserted, as it were, in the hat, then pulled out with a “Therefore there was an historical Jesus.” Mr. R. first cited Mk. ix. 1, where the prophecy is made publicly, now he side-tracks Mk. in favour of Mt. x. 23, xvi. 28 and xxiv. 29-34, where it is made privately to the disciples. This certainly would narrow down any search for a possible informant of the first writer. Mr. R. says that the first canon of literary criticism is that a writer must be assumed to mean what he says unless we have proof positive to the contrary. True generally, but not for the Bible. What a charming, natural seeming picture is drawn in Mk. x. 13-16, but I think that anyone who deems it to be a literal account should live in a pulpit. He continues: “I have nowhere assumed that the saying is an authentic prophecy of Jesus. My point is that the inventor of the saying . . . would have failed to be even plausible . . . if there had been no Jesus within living memory on whom he could father it.” So, too, the writer of Jh. xi. 1-45 would have failed likewise if there had been no Lazarus, known to many, but not to Mt., Mk. or Lk., on whom he could father the miracle, which the many knew never happened. I suggest that Mr. R. is looking at “A.D. 75-80” with A.D. 1942 eyes.—Yours, etc.,

CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

FREETHOUGHT IN BRADFORD

After a highly successful summer campaign on the Broadway Car Park, the Bradford Branch of the N.S.S. will continue its meetings indoors for the winter session, Laycock’s Café having been secured for Sunday night meetings. The outstanding lesson of the open-air meetings has been that, although religion has lost its grip on the bulk of the people, there is still a tremendous amount of ignorance concerning the real part played by religious interests in social and political life. To remove that ignorance is the task of Secular Society and Freethought workers. The question is not “Are we flogging a dead horse or a live horse?” but, rather, “Are we flogging some sense into the indifferent masses?” This is a big job, far from complete, and there is nothing better than some open-air meetings to demonstrate the great need for continued Freethought propaganda.

Laycock’s Café should prove useful to the Bradford Branch as a meeting-place, for it is, famous throughout the North as a rendezvous of thinking people and as an intellectual battleground that has survived (despite temporary setbacks) for nearly eighty years. In the past it has given hospitality to and provided a platform for some of the pioneers of progressive movements, G. B. Shaw, H. M. Hyndman and Keir Hardie, among others, having spoken there.

In such an atmosphere our Bradford friends may find an even greater inspiration in their work of ploughing up the largely virgin soil of the human intellect. More power to their elbows!

OBITUARY

THE LATE MR. GEORGE BILLING (BIRKENHEAD)

Another veteran of the Freethought movement has passed in the death, on October 2, of Mr. George Billing, of 46, Halcyon Road, Birkenhead, aged 76. The sympathy of his fellow Freethinkers will be extended to his widow, who shares his views, and had been his constant confidante and help-mate, and to the other members of the family in their loss. Mr. Billing, who had been in failing health since severe shock and damage to his home in a raid two years ago, had been a keen but quiet supporter of the movement since his early days. He was widely read, and could recall many personal associations with G. W. Foote, Lawrence Small, and others, having a great admiration for both Foote and his successor, Chapman Cohen. In accordance with his wishes, a secular service was conducted at his graveside in Flaybrick Hill Cemetery, Birkenhead, on October 6, by Mr. R. H. S. Standfast, in the presence of his family and friends.

ELIJAH IMMANUEL HIRST

The remains of Elijah Immanuel Hirst were interred in Hither Green Cemetery on Friday, 9th October. A lovable character with humanitarian thoughts, feelings and actions he won respect for his freethought opinions. He was a reader of “The Freethinker” for many years and took a general interest in the freethought movement giving his help in any way possible. Death took place on 3rd October in his 68th year. Before an assembly of relatives and friends a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary N.S.S.

R. H. R.

RUFUS KING NOYES

It was with feelings of the deepest regret that we received the news of the death of Dr. Rufus King Noyes, of Chamber Street, Boston, U.S.A., at the age of 89. Dr. Noyes was well known in the United States, and was an enthusiastic supporter of this journal. Many of our readers in the United States came through his introduction. We also had to thank him for many useful items of information, religious and other matters of interest to Freethinkers. With absolute certainty we can say the world was the better for his having lived in it. We offer our sincere sympathy to his widow.

C. C.

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 Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park), Sunday, 3-0; Mr. G. E. WOOD and supporting speakers.

LONDON

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1), 11-0, C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.: “The Educational Ferment (II).”

COUNTRY

INDOOR

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

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow), 3-0; Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: “Shall we Live When we Die?”

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Cafe), 7-0; Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.

COUNTRY

OUTDOOR

Craghead (Road Ends), 10-30 a.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.