

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXII.—No. 44.

Sunday, November 1, 1942

Price Threepence

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and Mr. Lewis

IN two previous articles I have dealt with Mr. C. S. Lewis, the much puffed-up advocate of Christianity, and also one of the B.B.C. lecturers on religion. We have tested his quality as a preacher and as a moral philosopher. My task now is to exhibit him as a believer in God, and then to hand him back to the B.B.C., where he can continue his work in full confidence that no one will be permitted to criticise him from that platform. We will commence by taking samples of him as a mere reasoner.

In the last essay of his "Broadcast Talks" Mr. Lewis leads off by saying people believe in God for "certain reasons." That is not true; or true in so few cases that they may be set on one side. In the overwhelming majority of cases the belief in God is planted in people when they are very young. They believe first and find reasons for believing afterwards. Leave the child alone, and in civilised society the belief in God would wither to disappearance.

Suppose, says Mr. Lewis, there was no intelligent being behind the Universe. "In that case nobody designed my brain." Well, that would certainly remove a great responsibility from someone. "But," continues our "brilliant" expositor, "in that case how can I trust my own thinking to be true?" Well, personally, I would advise him not to do so. But as the brain is the brain, and as it will behave in the same way whether or not God made it, reliance on its functioning is not affected. Of course, if God did not design the brain of Mr. Lewis, a responsibility is removed from God's shoulders, and Mr. Lewis would not be able to blame God for its quality. But Mr. Lewis goes further and says, "If I can't trust my own thinking . . . I can't believe in thought." But this won't do.

Mr. Lewis starts out with the *untrustworthiness* of *thinking*, and it will not do to switch off to *thought*. The *untrustworthiness* of a thing and the existence of that same thing are distinct questions. I can, of course, appreciate Mr. Lewis's anxiety to shift the responsibility for the quality of his thinking to God, but we must be fair to

God and just to Mr. Lewis. He sets out to deny the trustworthiness of thought if there is not a God, and concludes that he has no justification for believing in thought itself if there is no God *behind* it. There is no connection between his premises and his conclusion.

A Strange Atheist

Let us take a further sample of Mr. Lewis's thinking. He tells us he was an Atheist until he was 14. And, being an Atheist, "I had to persuade myself that the whole human race were pretty good fools until about 100 years ago." That is a frame of mind which only a fool could develop. Two people may reach opposite conclusions, one of which is obviously right, but it does not prove the other fellow to be a fool. The Atheist *knows* the origin of the God idea, but that is not evidence that one who is not so well informed is an idiot. An Atheist may say that a Godite is ignorant of the origin of his particular superstition, and that this prevents his arriving at a sensible opinion; on the other hand, one may champion a sensible conclusion without knowing why one does so. I happen to have Christian friends who retain the most childish ideas concerning religion, but I should certainly never dream of thinking of them as fools. To be a fool and to entertain foolish ideas are not identical statements. Mr. Lewis is not wise.

I am treating Mr. Lewis as a doctor would who examines a blood specimen in order to understand a patient's condition, and I will take a few more samples of Mr. Lewis's mentality. He tells us that while he was an Atheist (pro-fourteen Atheist) "My argument against God was that the Universe seemed to be cruel and unjust." This is very crude indeed, even Commander Campbell might have jibbed a little at it. The question of the goodness of God and the existence of God are quite separate and independent questions. The first thing is to settle whether God exists. His character can be discussed afterwards. All the gods we know of were first of all created, then their characters came under discussion; and the history of any God, particularly the Christian one, shows that a God improves in character as his followers develop. Gods must keep pace with the development of their followers as a political leader must keep in line with the development of his supporters. Most gods have been improved out of existence. But even Mr. Lewis ought to be able to recognise that the quality of a thing and the existence of a thing are separate and independent questions.

Here are a few more symptoms shown by Mr. Lewis that are very indicative of the quality of this B.B.C. genius. "In arithmetic," he says, "there is only one right answer, but some of the wrong answers are much nearer being right than others." Quite wrong. If I say that twice three are seven, and someone says twice three are eight, I am no nearer being correct than the other fellow. We are both equally wrong. There is no midway point in the

matter. Trying to prove something, Mr. Lewis says, "we learn from association"—he has drifted into an accuracy here. "We all learned the multiplication table at school. A child brought up on a desert island would not know it." Bless the man, he can't keep right anywhere. There is no human being so low as not to realise that two objects are more than one object. Humans who cannot count up to seven do count up to five. And that two is more than one is at the root of all arithmetic.

I could select many more of these "brilliant" outbursts by Mr. Lewis. Those given are enough for my purpose. They are samples from bulk. On the whole, I am rather pleased that Mr. Lewis gave up calling himself an Atheist—that is if he ever did so—but we are quite used to the man who tries thus to enhance his value to Christians of a particular type. We commend to Mr. Lewis the judgment of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, that hardly one man in a thousand has either goodness of heart or strength of intellect to be an Atheist. But there was no B.B.C. in the days of Coleridge. Really, if a man is not overburdened with intellect, is there another occupation in the world that holds out the promise of prizes that will equal that of being a preacher or writer on religion? And if he is a rogue, where else may he find his course so easy as under the shelter of the Cross? If Mr. Lewis merely wished to "get on," he has chosen well. There may be a subtle sarcasm in the claim of some preachers that they live on the cross.

God and the World

So Mr. Lewis, at 14 years of age, decided that God made the world. God must have done it, no one else could. Having made man, God might, of course, have so endowed him that he would have gone along the right path, and in that case the world would have been freed from trouble. But for his own reasons God endowed man with a "free will," and the chief function of this "free will" appears to have been that of enabling him to take the wrong road instead of the right one. For God also created an "evil spirit," who appears on the scene without rhyme or reason. This evil spirit made himself, says Mr. Lewis, the "Prince of the World." But why did not God, seeing and knowing the consequences to the whole human race, administer a "knock-out" blow to this "Prince of the World"? Mr. Lewis would do so if he could, and all who believe in this Prince of Evil would if they could. "Why," as Topsy very sensibly inquired, "Why don't God kill the devil?" No Christian we have heard of has given a satisfactory answer to Topsy's question.

Yet we all believe in Allies. There are large numbers in this country who do not believe in Russian economics or in the Soviet way of life. Yet they say, our Prime Minister says, "There has arisen a Prince of Evil in the world who threatens well-being, and we will join hands with Russia or with any other country to end this evil." And if anyone says that we should leave this Prince of Evil to God, and some do say that as Russia does not keep God's holy laws we must leave the whole matter with God, the reply is "Rubbish. The German menace threatens the peace of the world. It threatens not merely men and women, it threatens the child unborn. We must all in some way lend a hand, and citizens must be forced to take a hand, no matter what their private opinions or individual tastes may be."

Now, if that reasoning holds good with regard to the Nazi peril, why does it not hold good with regard to God's relations to man? The reply is that God has given us free will, and we must abide by our choice. Now, I am not going to deal with Mr. Lewis's nonsensical presentation of free will; it appears he has yet to learn even the meaning of the phrase. I simply point out that sufferers from the exercise of this God-given free will involved, according to the Christian theology, all people—the unnumbered billions of people who had to be born. What about them? Mr. Lewis believes God gave him his brains. Cannot Mr. Lewis rise to the level of saying that God should have stopped the war with all its attendant miseries and misfortunes?

Mr. Lewis supplies a justification that is worse than an indictment. He says "If God thought this state of ~~war~~ in the Universe a price-paying for free will, then we may take it it is worth paying." But how does the price become worth paying if at the end of the long-drawn-out process of misery we can but reach the position the whole ~~race~~ might have had from the start if God had endowed men with better sense and judgment?

Mr. Lewis's apology for God is that while he did not know how man would choose his path—how he would use his freedom—yet "He thought it worth the risk." "Worth the risk"! Just as though it were a matter of going to the Derby and putting five shillings on a "dead cert"! The combination of brutality and stupidity in this "divine plan" is enough to make one feel uneasy in the region of the stomach. God was just taking a risk when he made Adam. He certainly ran a risk when he made C. S. Lewis one of his defenders. "Oh, Allah," prayed a wise Mohammedan. "Save me from my friends. I can look after my enemies myself."

In the end Mr. Lewis comes back to the true Christian doctrine—ethically as damnably bad as it is possible for a teaching to be. God—with his curious ideas of justice—provided a way out in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He knew that his sporting chance would not come off. He could have forgiven his creatures for not being better than he made them, but that would not do. Someone had to be punished; and the price was paid by the sacrifice of an innocent man, which, after all, saved only a small minority.

Now, I think this is the very worst aspect of Christianity. If we may use the phrase, it pays a compliment to neither God nor man. I have heard it said that there is no worse sight than a man in tears. Yes there is. It is a man grovelling on his knees and groaning about his own shortcomings. For the most part, the whole performance is a lie, sanctified by custom and kept in being by sheer cant.

One final word concerning Mr. Lewis. It is noticeable that in the whole of his essay he exhibits not the slightest acquaintance with what we *know* as to the origin of the belief in Gods. From Tylor to Frazer—a period covering 70 years of scientific research—there is a stream of evidence demonstrating the origin of the gods in the ignorance and weakness of primitive humanity. Substantially this is now the scientific position. Representatives of religion do not discuss this aspect of the belief in gods, they just ignore it, obviously trusting to their listeners not being acquainted with the facts.

(Concluded on page 455.)

ABORTION—AND THE LAW

THERE used to be an old maxim of English justice that it were better that a number of guilty men should go free than that one innocent man should be wrongly convicted. Grave doubts arise in my mind whether this maxim has in some way changed, so that it now reads, "Better that a number of guilty people go free so that one person may be convicted."

My thoughts on the matter are aroused by a recent case in which a doctor was sent to prison for procuring abortion. For the moment, I am not concerned with the pros and cons of abortion itself, but rather with our ideas of justice. According to the present law, it is clear that artificial abortion is an offence, whether procured by instruments, drugs, or other means, whether it is self-procured or procured by an accessory or accessories. All concerned in the act of abortion are criminals according to law—upon conviction.

Yet we have the spectacle, in an English Court of Justice, of a clever doctor (there can be little doubt about his skill) being sent to prison for five years, while his confederates in the offences are neither convicted nor even charged! Because this doctor "sold" his skill for money to relieve anxious women of the embryos they did not wish to develop, he is being severely punished. According to law, that course is sound. But is it sound, according to law, that several confederates in the offences should not be charged? Is it sound that the law itself can "sell" immunity, the price being evidence? Which "racket" is the worse—abortion or protection from legal action?

The law says clearly that abortionists are criminals. The law also says that criminals must be brought to justice and punished. Equally clear, then, is the presumption that the law must be breaking the law (whether technically or morally is not really important) by "selling" immunity to people in return for their evidence. In this particular case it seems to me that the most useful person to the community—the doctor—was sent to prison, while others not so skilled as he were allowed to assume the saintly cloak of "witness for the Crown" to send him to prison while they remain free.

I am not prepared to accept the argument that this course assisted the best administration of justice. Such an example provides justice in a minus quantity, and bad law in a plus quantity. To justify such a course "in the interests of justice," surely the best method would have been to charge the various confederates and to use the single evidence of the doctor to convict. Confessions might have been forthcoming for corroboration. Thus, if the cases were proven, several law-breakers would have been convicted and immunity allowed to one only. Justice would have been the plus quantity, and bad law the minus quantity in such circumstances. But perhaps the doctor had a greater sense of "honour among thieves"—and wouldn't talk.

It might also be argued that the doctor was the real culprit because he took money for his services, but this would be a fallacious argument and an unjust one if offered to excuse his being singled out to suffer punishment alone. For it can be no greater offence to take money for an unlawful service than to offer it for such a service; and I can well imagine that most women, in the circumstances that lead to abortions, would be more anxious to persuade a doctor than a doctor would be to persuade them. So that culpability in this respect does not rest in the largest measure on him that suffers for it.

To get down to the roots of the matter, however, is not this anomalous position, in which we get faulty administration of the law, due to the very law itself, which is bad in conception in these days?

I am certain that the police recognise, and it is time that Parliament recognised, that abortion is widely practised, and that it is no longer regarded as a terrible crime by the majority of the people. When a crime ceases to be a crime in the public mind it is very difficult for the law to function properly, as sympathy

and secrecy come to the aid of breakers of obsolete laws, and evidence must be obtained by any means if prosecutions are to be sustained.

Abortion is widely practised for a simple reason—speaking in a superficial sense, of course. It is no longer the fashion to have large families to-day, general social factors being against such families. But the spread of preventive birth control knowledge has not yet been effective enough to control families "at the source," with the result that modern abortion may be described as the method by which the leaks have to be stopped if the fashion is to be maintained.

Personally, I dislike the method of abortion in controlling families, because there are safer and more scientific methods. But unless and until the authorities recognise the need, and the demand, for knowledge concerning those safer and better methods, and provide such knowledge in an efficient manner, abortions will continue, and the law will become more and more an object of contempt. A law that exists to be dodged, rather than respected, weakens the whole structure and value of laws in society.

A vast traffic in abortion products exists in this country. Remember, procuring by drugs is against the law, as well as instruments. Yet there must be few married women (and hardly any single ones in the appropriate situation) who have not at some time visited a chemist's shop, a drug store or a herb store to get "something strong," usually in a bottle. Every such woman has broken the law; every such storekeeper has broken the law—for they all know what "something strong" implies. Out of this vast social need of women for "something strong" in the drug line, out of the people's lack of effective knowledge of prevention, has arisen a great racket, in which easy-tongued vendors of next-to-useless "bottles" make an easy living from troubled women. Out of this need has grown a secret profession among women themselves, the disastrous results of which are seen in the frequency of injurious miscarriages. Hardly is there a working-class street in Britain where a week goes by without some poor, ignorant woman suffering "a bad miss," as it is often called.

Dear reader, the crime is not abortion. The crime is lack of knowledge to fulfil a need. With knowledge accessible, abortion would die a natural death, for no woman prefers an instrument if she can use information; no woman prefers a bottle to her brains. The women in that court I have referred to were not criminals, any more than the doctor who went to prison on their evidence. The real crime is Ignorance.

And to me it is tragic that, because of Ignorance, society for five years loses a skilled and useful citizen; a man who, in a sane community, would be used for nobler things because the baser things would melt away under the solvent power of Knowledge.

F. J. CORINA.

ACID DROPS

WE wonder whether Christian propagandists will manage to tell the truth where their religion is concerned, and also when newspapers will have the courage not to give them almost unlimited occasions to either tell or suggest falsehoods. The other day, for example, the papers gave the glaring headline, "War Brings Big Demand for the Bible," and the letterpress gave the information, handed to them by the British and Foreign Bible Society, that since the war began nearly 1,750,000 Scriptures had been "bought or issued" to the Forces. We should much like to know—taking the figures as genuine—how many copies were bought and how many given away? It will be remembered that when the war began a huge printing of the Bible, or parts of the Bible, with a personal message from the King was given to each member of the Forces. That, of course, comes in with the number distributed. So we expect that the demand for Bibles, or parts from the Bible, is just as genuine as was the "personal message of the King," which we suspect was suggested by the Church and written by some Churchman.

The Archbishop of York says that:—

"If we leave it to men of science to create the new order, if we leave the politicians alone to create the new order, if we leave it to ordinary men to create the new order, we shall have again despondency, disillusionment and catastrophe."

In other words, we must not on any account leave the clergy out, and we must let them rule the roost. Their impudence would stagger one, if one was not used to them. The great lesson we are to learn is that the clergy must rule—if they can. So much for the Christian idea of democracy.

What an easy thing it must be to write for a real Christian audience! This is how it is done by a writer in the "Catholic Herald" for October 16—all by one writer:—

"There are many signs of a religious revival. The opportunity for such a revival is unprecedented."

That sounds cheering, but only for a few lines. Then we alight on this by the same writer:—

"Worship of God is actually weakening as Christian reforms obtain unprecedented publicity. Worship of God, above all in worship, is disappearing. . . . War or no war, victory or no victory, prosperity or no prosperity, after the war it remains solemnly true that so long as we tolerate this deadly cancer, this defiance of God's basic natural law, our people will be destined for corruption and decline."

We don't often agree with Roman Catholic writers, but somehow—God or no God—there seems some truth in what this writer says. Only where does the revival come in?

Father Owen Dudley says that "We of the Allied nations can regard it as a God-given privilege that we are fighting in the cause of justice and freedom." That removes all cause for complaining about the war. The war is a God-given privilege. Now we ought to have a day of prayer to thank God publicly for it. Without the war God might not have been able to show how much he thought of us. So we thank God for the war, and the war has given God a chance of advertising how great and considerate He is. It looks quite a rosy situation from that point of view.

It is not easy to follow the reasoning of some Christians. For instance, the "Catholic Herald" says that the Pope intends asking Bishops to offer "special prayers" that the days of the war may be shortened. That strikes us as rather artful. Whenever the war stops, the Catholics can claim that it would have lasted longer but for the prayers. Why cannot they put a date, and so make it a fair test? And why does the Pope now need praying to, to stop the war? Perhaps he has only just heard about it. At any rate, the Christian, as his American followers would say, is "sitting pretty." If the war ends soon they will count it as an answer to prayer, and if it keeps on and on and on, it will be our fault. God will be right either way.

The "News Chronicle" announced in its issue of October 21 that Princess Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the King, killed three deer in one day's stalking. Tastes differ, of course, but we should feel anything but pleased if a daughter of ours could find no better or kindlier way of spending her time.

The Rev. Maurice Relton, Vicar of All Saints, Knightsbridge, laments that "The disease of Secularism has spread to an alarming extent." Of course, it is the vicar who does the lamenting. But many trades and occupations have suffered during this war, and many were decaying before the war broke out. Nor is there justification for assuming that the firms which deal with the next world should be free from the ups-and-downs of life.

The "Catholic Times" announces that a "Joint Christian Council has been formed in Nottingham." The main object appears to be "to put God back into the world." It looks like an admission of a truth we have often impressed on our readers. Gods exist only so long as people believe in them. Cease to believe and they soon are as dead as mutton. Perhaps we ought here to apologise to the sheep, for a dead sheep is good for food, but to what good purpose can one put a dead god?

In discussing the coming religious education struggle, we note that the "Schoolmaster" says:—

"The real bone of contention in the coming struggle is not primarily the needs and interests of the children. Rather it is the possession of the children, the domination of the method of training so that membership of this or that sect or party can be assured. State schools are not recruiting stations for any sect or party, and any attempt to use them as such cannot but be disastrous."

This reads so much like an extract from the "Freethinker" that a Catholic paper like the "Universe," unable to give a straight answer to the plain statement of the "Schoolmaster," angrily rebukes it and asks, "By what right does the 'Schoolmaster' assume that only those who are urging the destruction of the voluntary schools are protecting the children? The A.E.C. makes the same presumptuous claim."

Well, the schoolteacher has at least one "right" which the Catholic Church has not—in fact a right that no Church has. For the aim of the teacher, and the task of every decent teacher, is to develop in the minds of his pupils an independence of thought which all the Churches oppose—either openly or otherwise. The "Schoolmaster" is absolutely right when it says that the important fact at issue is that all the Churches are aiming at is the capture of the child in the interests of a teaching that is discredited by all civilised and informed thinking.

We learn from one of the religious papers that "the contemporary Englishman may not be a regular church-goer, but he shows no lack of keenness in discussing religious problems." But the more important religious questions are not discussed until people have ceased to believe. Do two men ever discuss whether God exists or not until one of them is at least rather doubtful? That is why we have so many religious talks from the B.B.C., which gives us an artful, but not too intelligent, believer with a pretended unbeliever who always succumbs to the nonsense of God's champion. The Religious Committee must contain some of the finest humbugs that even British religion can produce.

Mr. W. V. Eustace, chairman of the Bingley (Yorks) Council is attempting to have the Council proceedings started with prayer. In trying to justify this hair-brained and antiquated idea, Mr. Eustace says: "Anything which will add tone and dignity to our proceedings will be welcome. I think we would set a fine example." May we suggest that tone and dignity are completely inconsistent with the humiliating and self-debasing attitude of prayer, whether in public or private? May we also suggest that Bingley Council members might set a really "fine example" by walking into the Council Chamber with their heads erect and shoulders back, looking and feeling like men, conscious that the tasks they have to perform first, finally, and all the time, depend upon the amount of common-sense they speak in the Council Chamber, and not upon the mouthing of useless and infantile mumbo-jumbo?

If this straightforward hint does not impress the members of the Council when they are considering the chairman's idea, may we remind them that, as representatives of an electorate that has no fixed religion, and contains (to our knowledge) a number without religion, their duty is to administer the affairs of the town in a secular fashion only. It is no part of the business for which they were elected to give free boosts to religion or religious ideas, of any kind. And if this doesn't impress them—well, we can only point out that the general public's idea of such proposals is one that would reflect no credit on the members of the Council.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has been discussing the pros and cons of the treatment to be meted out to the German peoples when this war is over. We must, he said, be stern but not vindictive. But for the bishop the matter was settled centuries ago. Jesus ordered us to turn one cheek when the other was smitten. The Archbishop's course is plain. The Germans have smitten; he has no other course but to turn the other cheek.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- R. ROSE.—Thanks for list of books. However, we have copies of them. The books lost in the destruction were very scarce and valuable, and were intended for the N.S.S. to form the nucleus of a genuine Freethought library, not a mere collection of books of liberal opinions which so often leave the real fighting Freethought but poorly represented. Our books at home were safe.
- H. L. WRIGHT.—We are flattered at the compliments you pay "The Atheists' Approach to Christianity." Let us hope it deserves at least some of the praise you give it. Will bear your suggestion in mind concerning another pamphlet.
- G. WHITE.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.
- C. M. HOLLINGHAM.—For distributing "The Freethinker," £1.
- T. L. WILLIAMS.—The only condition we can think of as crushing Freethought completely out of existence is of the human race becoming completely automatic in thoughts and actions. In some shape or form the persistence of the past will force the present into revolt in the interests of the future.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—S. J. Barker (S. Africa), £2; C. Draper, 7s. 6d.
- 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

WE congratulate Mr. Sorensen on his courage in asking the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether, in view of the pronouncement of our representatives in America defining the war issues as the establishment of Christian civilisation and Christian brotherhood, and in view of the fact that millions of Jews, Hindoos, Mohammedans, Atheists and Rationalists were engaged in prosecuting the war, he would re-state our aims in the accepted terms of the Atlantic Charter and not in the exclusive terms of any particular religious faith? That was a good question, but it led only to a further exhibition of cant and dishonesty of the Under-Secretary of State. He replied with a curt "No," and said he did not think that "the majority of those who are fighting on the side of the Allies would dissent from the proposition that they are fighting for Christian civilisation."

Mr. Law was backing-up that political incubus of ours, Lord Halifax. But no more deliberate lie has been told since the war started. There are all the Hindoos engaged in the war who would not agree with the statement that we were fighting to uphold Christianity. There are at least half the population of Russia, about four hundred millions in China, a good many millions of Mohammedans, and more millions of non-Christians and anti-Christians all over the world, who are in this war, who would repudiate the statement that we are fighting for the restoration and strengthening of Christianity. Mr. Law simply cannot be so stupid as not to know this. It would serve him right if he were forced to leave the House of Commons and compelled to become a bishop.

Once more we congratulate Mr. Sorensen on having the courage to raise the question. But he must be careful, for he is running the risk of either being given a post to shut his mouth, or losing his seat by party opposition when a re-election occurs. The last alternative is the more honourable, but not many survive the test. Completely honest men are likely to have short lives in the political world—that is, unless they are content to do their work outside Parliament, or be counted a nuisance while they are inside.

Since writing the above, a debate on the subject was initiated by Lord Winterton, and if ever a member of a Government received a dignified and deserved reprimand, it was Mr. Law. We cannot say with any confidence that the debate will be enough to kill this lie, and it is not likely to make Lord Halifax and Sir Samuel Hoare regret fathering it. But it will make the shrewder ones more careful. We will deal at length with the whole matter next week. It should be placed on record.

We were very pleased to see the following letter from Mr. Leslie S. Robertson in the "Spectator" for October 16:—

Sir,—I write in protest against the unwarranted assumption that the present war is being fought so that "Christian principles must be made to permeate public opinion." That is unfair on all the thousands, nay millions, of Freethinkers, Jews, Mohammedans and others who are fighting tooth-and-nail for the United Nations so that they may have freedom of conscience, not so that they may live in a democracy dominated by Christian theology. "Christian Principles" is a term seldom particularly defined—but if it means self-sacrifice and the general exercise of good conduct, to use the term "Christian" is misleading. Such qualities are not specifically Christian at all, they are possessed by Atheist and Theist alike.

It is only of recent years that so much emphasis has been placed on the ethical side of Christianity—that is probably because more and more men and women have ceased to believe in its dogma. But without the dogma their Christianity is nothing and, of course, the "advanced" social policy now advocated by some members of the Church is simply an ingenious way by which it is hoped men and women will accept the Church with its endowments and privileges. Social progress will come if we work for it, but it will be only genuine if brought about by secular agency—that is, by the State.

If the writer is the person we suspect, we have a special interest in reading it. Mr. Robertson comes from a good stock, and is running in the line of his ancestors for several generations. We hope he will use his pen and brains in the cause of Freethinking whenever opportunity offers.

We have to make a correction with regard to our recent notes on the Atheist brother of Cardinal Newman. We said that he was not mentioned by George Jacob Holyoake in his reminiscences. One of our readers calls our attention to a reference which appears in Holyoake's "Bygones Worth Remembering." We acknowledge the correction and thank our friend for sending it along. There is a slight reference to him, although the larger part of the chapter is taken up with the other two brothers. It is a pity that more was not said concerning Charles Newman. Holyoake remarks that he was "a propagandist of insurgent opinions," "Charles believed in nature and nothing more," and "would now be classed as an Agnostic." We doubt it. What we know of him shows him to have been too thorough for that. He was evidently an Atheist.

Glasgow and Paisley have decided on Sunday cinemas, and all the "Elders" are moaning and groaning at this attack on Scottish religious traditions. Of course, there is no intention to compel the Elders to attend the cinema. If they were compelled to laugh—in orthodox Scotland laughing on Sunday is a rather serious affair.

We listened with considerable interest to the speech of General Smuts before the Members of both Houses of Parliament. Nothing new was said, and nothing new could be expected. War secrets, if they exist, must not be disclosed, neither could plans for the future. There were also the references to Christianity that one had to expect, although Smuts's own religious opinions cannot be more than a form of Deism. We do not expect that he has any belief in specific Christian doctrines. His notable book on "Holism," which we noted on its first production in 1926, and which was harshly spoken of because some were led astray by the use of certain terms and a lack of appreciation of the trend of scientific philosophy, showed itself as the work of a man of high mental ability. We do not think he would have been a statesman of so high ability had he not been a philosopher by nature. Our trouble is that we have plenty of political lights who are nothing else. We pay pretty heavily for their one-sided development.

The speech of General Smuts contained no startling news. But it was a good speech, well delivered and with nothing "cheap" about it. Although an outline of events, well known to most, the summary was a good one, free from vituperation and catchy denunciations, and with just that suggestion of a determination not to be shaken and a hatred of oppression that would act as an inspiration to others. His forecast of a better future based on an internationalism that should be real also struck a useful note, although when the time of realisation comes we are quite certain that many of us who were listening would be dead against it being made successful. Those who did so much to help Hitler, in the hope of crushing Russia, are not dead. They are merely silent. We had, here and there, indications rather than statements that he was alive to the fact. We feel that Smuts's visit will do good.

SOME NOTES ON THE APOCRYPHA

I

THE word Apocrypha means *hidden*, and it is used to designate a number of Jewish books written shortly before or after the Christian era, mostly in Greek, which were not admitted into the Jewish canon; that is, they were not considered "sacred" or "inspired." Many of these works have, however, been admitted by the Roman and Greek Churches into their Bibles and are considered by them to be quite as sacred as the Protestant Old and New Testaments. By the English Church they are "read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet it doth not apply them to establish any doctrine, and does not receive them among the Canonical Scriptures."

Some of the early Church writers like St. Jerome, Origen and St. Epiphanius agreed with the Jews of their day as to their non-canoncity; but it must be quite bluntly stated that actually no really valid reason can be given as to why the Apocrypha should be considered less inspired than the rest of the Bible. Protestants point out that, as Jesus never quoted from it, and agreed that Malachi was the Seal (or the last) of the Prophets, nothing written after for the Old Testament has the right to be called "inspired."

Roman Catholics do not like the word Apocrypha, and the "Catholic Encyclopædia" prefers to call the books "deuterocanonical." They were solemnly included in the canon of the Bible by the Council of Trent, which agreed on the subject with most of the Councils, like that of Florence (1441), Carthage (397) and others. It is certain that quotations from the Apocrypha were constantly made by early Christian writers, and it is certain also, as the Rev. H. T. Andrews points out (in his "Apocryphal Books"), that "up to the time of the Reformation the Apocrypha formed an *integral part* of the Christian Bible."

The Bible in use in Europe for about 1,000 years was the Latin Vulgate and when, at the time of the Reformation, the Protestant scholars went to the Greek and Hebrew "originals" of the Bible

rather than to a Latin version like that of Jerome, they discovered that, as far as the Hebrew was concerned, there was no Apocrypha, and that there was no Greek for the second (sometimes called the fourth) book of Esdras. It was also learned that Jerome very reluctantly admitted the extra books into his Latin version, and as the schism in the Church at the time of the Reformation became extremely embittered, other arguments were discovered, and the Protestant Bibles soon appeared without the Apocrypha, thus habituating anti-Catholics to a Bible containing only the present Old and New Testaments.

But it is quite unfair to such works as the Book of Wisdom or Ecclesiasticus to imagine that they are one whit behind the canonical works in beauty of writing or anything else. They belong to precisely the same class of literature as the accepted Bible; they are "full of rich treasures of ethical wisdom, and contain some noble passages of holy eloquence and sublime poetry." In other words, they should be in the Bible, and it is sheer nonsense to maintain that they have no right therein. And now to particulars.

The first book of Esdras gives a history (of sorts) of the period embraced by the canonical Ezra, and it is followed in many details by Josephus; because of this his accuracy and sagacity "as a historian is considerably lowered," and particularly because he seems to have also believed some Apocryphal legends. Of course, the whole history of the Jews returning to Palestine after the second Captivity is confused and uncertain. Josephus was, however, more likely to know the truth than we in this age, though no one knows actually what happened in detail.

The second book of Esdras seems to have been very popular, for it was extensively translated. It is a confused medley of absurd visions, but it is considered by Professor Andrews, in his little work on the "Apocryphal Books," as "undoubtedly the finest discussion of the problem of evil in the whole range of Jewish literature." It was certainly written after the Christian era—parts as late as 268 A.D. The difficulty about Tobit is that there are five versions of the book, and no one knows which is the true one, as they all differ. Like Judith, it is quite certainly not history but fiction with a didactic purpose. The Story of Susanna is an addition to Daniel, and it just pure fiction like Tobit and Judith—and, for that matter, like Daniel as well. Another addition to the same book is Bel and the Dragon, written perhaps in the first century, which is merely "folklore adapted as a vehicle of religious instruction." Finally, another addition to Daniel is the Song of the Three Children, which was, we are told by the Rev. J. M. Fuller, "intended to fill up imaginary blanks or amplify details."

The very interesting little romance in the Bible called Esther also had some additions made which were not accepted by the Jews in their Old Testament canon. They were for centuries by no means disposed to accept Esther in any case, as it happens to contain no mention whatever of God. This, the writer of the "Rest of Esther" undertook to correct, but his book was rejected all the same.

The Prayer of Manasses (or Mannaseh) is also an attempt to add to a Biblical narrative, this time "his prayer unto his God," (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18, 19). It is, of course, pure imagination.

Apart from the second Book of Esdras, the other prophetic writings are Baruch and Epistle of Jeremy. Baruch appears to have been written after the fall of Jerusalem, at least in its present form; but critics widely differ as to the date of its composition—or its worth. The Epistle forms the sixth chapter of Baruch in the Vulgate. Professor Andrews thinks "its style and general thought quite unworthy of Jeremiah." The Wisdom of Solomon is "partly polemical and partly apologetic." It is an attempt to win man back from "Epicureanism," and while Jewish in tone, the book is also quite Grecian in outlook. The

author was probably an Alexandrian Jew, but the Bible he knew was not the Hebrew but the Septuagint. Professor Andrews says:—

"The conception of the Logos and the Holy Spirit are also a prominent feature of the book, though the exact relation between these ideas and Wisdom is not defined. In one passage the three great conceptions—God, Wisdom and the Holy Spirit—are joined together in a manner which adumbrates the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (chap. ix. 17). There can be little doubt that the speculations of the writer of the Book of Wisdom helped to provide the categories for the Christian interpretation of Christ. In fact, some of the language in which he describes Wisdom is boldly borrowed by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and applied to Christ (compare chap. viii. 26 and Heb. i. 1, 2)."

Professor Andrews, in fact, contends that Paul drew most of his "wisdom" from the book, as there are many points of similarity between its teaching and his theology. "It was," he adds, "one of the most important sources from which Paul drew the materials out of which he constructed his philosophy of the Christian religion." This is a point not stressed by Christian apologists; they prefer to state—no matter what they think—that it was the theological Jesus or Christ Jesus who gave Paul his philosophy. Wisdom was probably written just before or just after the beginning of the Christian era.

H. CUTNER.

JESUS CHRIST AND DR. TEMPLE

I.

Love all your enemies, he straitly said,
But Jesus Christ and his strange words are dead.

Resist not evil. Pray for them, he cried,
But Jesus, masochist and failure, died.

And when they smite you, turn the other cheek:
For modern war this Jesus was too meek.

II.

Hear our Archbishop Temple. His solution
Is: "We must give those Germans retribution."

"As Christians let us pray to Christ," says he—
—For enemies? Oh no! For Victory.

Lest men should hear Christ's words and (worse!)
should act them

He talks faint socialism to distract them.

III.

* Well, he is dead, that One who bade men flee
From that worst vice—the priest's hypocrisy.

And half-believers in half-Christian creeds
Approve of half Bellona's bloody deeds.

Since what are Christ and his mild doctrine for
Unless they can, and do, advance the war?

IV.

Jesus said "Love," but Temple "Justice" cries
Are these two, one? Are they? . . . Who says so, lies.

With what contempt, each man of sense agrees:
Jesus is dead—but not his Pharisees!

And Britain needs the ancient Jesus-blitz
Of white-hot words on holy hypocrites.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

JUST ISSUED

WHAT IS RELIGION? by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll.
Price 2d.; postage 1d.

RICHARD JEFFRIES AND "THE STORY OF MY HEART"

(Continued from page 445)

IT was at the age of 18, Jeffries tells us, that "an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe, and indefinable aspirations filled me"; and one may fairly place his rejection of religious beliefs at about this period. At any rate, the rejection was complete. The volume was published in 1883, and is, in his own words, "A real record—unsparing to myself as to all things—absolutely and unflinchingly true" of his most earnest thinking from early youth onwards; and, in the light of after events, his further confession that the book "was not written for the sake of argument, still less for any thought of profit—rather, indeed, the reverse"; it has "been forced from me by earnestness of heart, and they express my most serious convictions"—is important.

The work opens with the note that is sustained to the end—the hunger of the man for a fuller "soul life"; a closer, deeper communion with nature; a better understanding and appreciation of it. "Soul" and "prayer" are terms he constantly uses; but he is careful to explain that he repudiates the customary implications of the former, and means by the latter "intense aspiration." There, on the lonely Wiltshire hill, the young student of nature dreamed and pondered on the life around him; on its character, its significance and its relation to man. Never did religious mystic write of the object of his visions with greater intensity and passion than he writes of his lonely communion with nature; and never did mystic see a vision more real than he. Past, present and future are swallowed up in the eternal "now." The man buried centuries ago in the tumulus on which he rests seems to him as real as the larks soaring into the air or the sheep grazing in the field. Everything conspires to impress him with the power, the beauty and immensity of Nature; and his conclusions are, in the main, two-fold. First, the evanescence of human effort wrongly directed; second, its power for good when properly organised and rightly applied. Finally, his vague yearnings take the form of a definite aspiration.

"First, I desired that I might do or find something to exalt the soul, something to enable it to live its own life—a more powerful existence now. Secondly, I desired to be able to do something for the flesh—to make a discovery or perfect a method by which the fleshly body might enjoy more pleasure, longer life and suffer less pain. Thirdly, to construct a more flexible engine with which to carry into execution the design of the will."

This was, so to speak, his philosophical agenda; and his conclusions, although denounced soon after their publication as "pernicious," may safely be commended to at least the sympathetic attention of earnest thinkers.

(Continued overleaf.)

(Concluded from page 450.)

Mr. Lewis follows this plan. It is simple, it requires no serious thinking, it is a cheap way to good pay and a disgraceful popularity in certain quarters. In its most honest phrase the belief in gods is, again to quote Spinoza, the asylum of ignorance. But we are approaching a stage—if it is not already reached—when to the word "ignorance" we might properly add another and stronger word. In the last days of ancient Rome it was said that two priests could not meet without a smile. Our modern priests have better control over their facial muscles. They reserve their grins for the study—and, perhaps, the B.B.C. reserve their grins for the study—and, perhaps, for the B.B.C. pulpit.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Twelve thousand years ago, he says, the Cavemen discovered three things: "The existence of the soul, immortality, the deity." But these do not suffice. He wishes to advance further, and to know more of the "soul life," more of that thought and civilisation which is yet to be. "Twelve thousand years ago," he says in a picturesque but scientifically inexact passage, "the Caveman stood at the door of his cavern and gazed out at the sun and stars. . . . There was nothing between; no wall of written tradition, no built-up system of culture—his naked mind was confronted by naked earth. . . . Now, to-day, as I write, I stand in exactly the same position as the Cavemen. Written tradition, systems of culture, modes of thought, have for me no existence. If ever they took hold of my mind it must have been very slight; they have long been erased."

The Cavemen's three ideas Jeffries appears to have valued chiefly as mere outlets for thought, and from the outside his qualified praise of them may be put down as the expression of the acute sense of restriction that always affected him. "Thought is life; to have thought them is to have lived them"; and it was part of his philosophy that man only lives as he thinks. He knew that nothing was known of the soul; that immortality was in all probability a delusion—knew this, and said this. Nor is his recommendation that we are to return to nature for the healthiest instruction based upon any misconception of nature's relation to man. There is nothing human in nature, he points out; the earth, though loved so deeply, would let him perish on the ground. There is no effort on any part of nature to help or preserve man. He can drink water, but it is not produced for him; eat fruits, but they do not grow for him; utilise wheat, but it grows for itself. "All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us and, except to us, human life is of no more value than the grass." Man utilises natural products, but this is only by wresting them to his own purpose.

"All things being without design, shape or purpose, I conclude that no Deity has anything to do with nature. There is no God in nature, nor in any matter anywhere, either in the clouds, on the earth, or in the composition of the stars. For what we understand by the Deity is the purest form of Idea, of Mind; and no mind is exhibited in these. That which controls them is distinct altogether from Deity. . . . I cease, therefore, to look for Deity in nature or the cosmos at large, or to trace any marks of divine handiwork."

"QUONDAM."

(To be continued)

CORRESPONDENCE

THE GOSPELS.

SIR,—Reading the article in "The Freethinker" by Mr. H. Cutner on the Greek and Hebrew Originals of the Scriptures, I think it would be of much interest to many to be made aware of the passing over from the Aramaic dialectic of Hebrew of the New Testament to the Greek in Alexandria.

Everyone must be aware that ignorant fishermen like Peter and the others could not write Greek or speak it.

A Jesuit Father tells me and insists that there was an Aramaic document originally, and a translation from this was made into Greek, but he gave me no directions where to obtain the facts regarding same.—Yours, etc.,

(Rev.) W. G. MARSDEN.

ABUSED GENEROSITY.

SIR,—Propagandists are usually prone to overstatement, but you are guilty of understatement; your editorial suggests that being an R.C. does not tend to make one better or worse, but the facts are *against* this contention. Roman Catholicism has dragged down Spain and Ireland and others; the country with the highest crime rate (i.e., per unit of population) is Italy, the

centre and pivot of the R.C.s; on top of this the two towns in Great Britain with the highest crime rate are those with the highest percentage of R.C.s—to wit, Liverpool and Glasgow. These are facts. By the wildest stretch of Atheist charity, could you say the combination of these facts were pure coincidence? Did you hear Canon Cockin's answer to: If A. is prayed for and B. is not, is A. less likely to be killed than B.? Here it is: "Well, I should say that if 'God' had got hold of A. he would not let him go." These are the actual words. Can you explain? It completely beats one who, like J. Huxley, avers that he was much happier and healthier in mind when he discarded the clotted nonsense to be found in "God's Word."

ROLAND J. PRANKERD.

THE FALSIFIED PROPHECY.

SIR,—To save your space I will reply to Mr. Hollingham's points briefly in order.

1. "The Bible offers ample evidence that the Jews believed that Yahveh had walked the earth." Anthropomorphists like "J." in Genesis did; but I was writing of Ezekiel. The nearest he gets to anthropomorphism is in i., 26 ff.; and that is palpably a poetic artifice.

2. "Mark says nothing about 'seen' Jesus." Well! The prophecy in ix., 1, is said to be made by Jesus to "the multitude with his disciples." That implies that they saw him, unless my opponent thinks there was a blackout at the time!

3. "It is assumed that the writer's meaning is known." Matthew, who gives the same prophecy in xvi., 28, is explicit enough: he words it, "till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." We know what he meant by that from xxv., 31-46. The prophecy, as even my critic must admit, has failed.

4. "Anyone who deems Mark x., 13-16, to be a literal account should live in a pulpit." Here we have typical mythicist inability to distinguish between an opinion, tenable by any Atheist, and orthodox Christianity.

5. The parallel between the saying under discussion and the miracle of Lazarus fails; for John nowhere says that anyone still alive saw Lazarus (xxi., 24, is by a later hand), whereas the Synoptic saying *does* imply that some still alive have heard Jesus.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

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. Wood and supporting speakers.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.), 11-0: Professor G. CATLIN, M.A.—"The Duty to Differ."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Café, Kirkgate, 7-0.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Glasgow), Sunday, 3-0: Mr. A. B. MACKAY, a Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate), Sunday, 3-0: Mr. E. HARRY HASSBELL (president of Leicester Secular Society)—"Is There Life After Death?"

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Café), Sunday, 7-0: Mr. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

South Moor, Sunday, 10-30 a.m.: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON—a Lecture.