

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The B.B.C. and Freedom of Opinion

ONE of our readers in South Africa recently wrote the B.B.C. concerning its policy with regard to talks on religion. A reply duly reached the questioner, and the reader will gather the nature of the question by the answer. Here it is, from the London headquarters, dated 20th July, and signed by the Director of Empire Programmes:—

"Thank you for letter dated 5th May. The work of the department of Religious Broadcasting is guided by a central Religious Advisory Committee, on which sit representatives of *all the more important denominations*.

The recommendations of this committee is that the B.B.C.'s religious broadcasts should be confined to the main stream of the Christian tradition, and the B.B.C. has accepted this recommendation.

The attitude of the Freethinker and the Agnostics is dealt with in the "Brains Trust" and similar programmes, *where free discussion is encouraged.*"

The italics are ours.

We would ask all to bear in mind that this letter was not written as an essay in humour. It was written in all seriousness, and the only explanation we can give of it is that it was going to South Africa, and it was not expected to reach this journal. But, as we have often said, "The Freethinker" does really put a girdle round the earth, and if that girdle is not thick it is strong, inasmuch as it represents a bond between Freethinkers all over the globe. We are greatly indebted to our reader for sending the letter.

Now consider, first, the formation of the Committee. Anyone really intending to act fairly would have invited representatives of *all religions*—freedom of speech is not a question of numbers—together with representatives of non-religious groups. In addition, representatives of Buddhists, Mohammedans, Agnostics, Atheists and others. People belonging to each of these groups are citizens and should have all the rights of citizens—unless our current praise of democracy is one of the greatest exhibitions of humbug that has ever existed. A body of men anxious to act fairly would have considered—on the purely scientific

side—and invited a few representative anthropologists, with an historian or two, so that their opinion on the value and veracity of religion might be heard. Historians could have given valuable counsel as to the causes of the rise of religions and their influence on the development of peoples.

But, of course, nothing of this kind was done, and under the rule of that prime bigot—the present Lord Reith—it was announced in one of the year books issued that the aim of the B.B.C. was to prevent the disintegration of Christianity. Ajax defying the lightning was child's play compared with this.

So when the question was put before the Committee of Christians who should talk about religion before the microphone, the Committee, with a unanimity worthy of a mediæval Inquisition trying a heretic, answered the question with a unanimous "US." It was, indeed, for that purpose the Committee was formed. The writer of the letter sent to the South African questioner must have indulged in a very wide grin. It was, of course, not intended for the home audience. Lies do not always come home to roost, but this one managed to do so.

Our Farcical Brains Trust

It really was a clumsy lie to say that Freethinkers and Agnostics could freely discuss their opinions in the Brains Trust. When has any such discussion taken place? And even if it did, how can that be considered fair play when religion is at it from morning till night, and no criticism of religion is permitted?

Consider what the Brains Trust is. It is made up of people selected by the B.B.C. and a session lasts for 45 minutes. Not more than five minutes can be given to any subject. It is true that a large proportion of the questions could be found by reference to an ordinary encyclopædia, and the whole was done better in the old "Notes and Queries" and in numerous cheap periodicals. But anyone can realise the absurdity of even trying to expound the bearings of modern anthropology on religious beliefs in five minutes shared by four or five people.

To say to a correspondent in South Africa that the views of Agnostics and Freethinkers—we presume that this includes Atheists, although one could not expect the B.B.C. to use that terribly honest word—are dealt with is a deliberate falsehood. When have the views of non-religionists and anti-religionists been permitted in two or three minutes' talk or in a set broadcast in either the semi-farcical Brains Trust or in the ordinary programmes? We have not listened to all broadcasts, of course, but we should be obliged to get that information from the B.B.C.

Perhaps some of our friends will inquire. The dictator of the letter must have grinned while it was being written. It is obvious that it was not meant for wide circulation. It would be interesting to discuss the question "Can the Brains Trust account for the fact that no question directly hostile ever turns up in the questions put to members of

the Brains Trust?" Is it a case of divine interposition? We expect Commander Campbell would discover some marvellous analogous case in South America, and Joad would find some very remarkable experiences he had in a wayside inn. And now we see it announced by C. E. M. Joad that the B.B.C. has forbidden any discussion of religion by the Brains Trust.

More Humbug

Light is thrown on the situation in an article which appears in that organ of the B.B.C., "The Listener," for October 22. In that issue there is a discussion on Freedom, and one of the Governors, the Hon. H. Nicolson, explains what the B.B.C. understands by freedom of discussion. He agrees that the B.B.C. "must avoid taking sides"—a bulge might have been noticed in one of the cheeks of Mr. Nicolson at this point—"but we had to remember that the B.B.C. is speaking to people in the intimacy of their homes." He pointed out that wireless was one of "the most potent instruments of publicity that has ever been devised." Further, care had to be taken because when broadcasting opinion "loses its true proportion and becomes disguised or amplified beyond life size." Therefore it is the duty of the B.B.C. "to present a picture which shall be coherent, balanced, representative and true."

I am too old a hand to be shocked or surprised at the curious turns taken by propagandists, particularly when it is concerned with politics or religion. But I do like to see falsehood set forth with some skill. It may then be interesting or amusing. But Mr. Nicolson—"Honourable" is a title, not a description—is neither amusing nor instructive. Consider him! The B.B.C. must avoid taking sides. We have a committee composed of representatives of all the—respectable—Churches, who decide what form of religion shall be advertised on the air, and which also decrees that nothing in direct opposition to Christianity shall be broadcast." The grossest distortions of history, insults to non-Christians are sanctioned, the preacher dodges in and out from early morning to late evening, but never a word from those who have something to say on the other side. But, Mr. Nicolson says, "the B.B.C. must avoid taking sides." Communism is to-day a subject of great interest to large numbers of people. When has that been heard on the wireless from accredited representatives? There are several million Freethinkers in this country. When have they stood before the microphone and been permitted to make a straightforward criticism of religious beliefs? In the campaign of lying that was carried on against Soviet Russia, and for which we are now paying dearly, did the B.B.C. place its platform at the disposal of those who might have told a little of the truth? Why, after Russia was recognised as an Ally in the war, the B.B.C. dropped for some time the National Anthems before the 9 o'clock Sunday News rather than include the "International." Yet, says Mr. Nicolson, the first duty of the B.B.C. is to "avoid taking sides"—and Brutus-cum-Nicolson is an honourable man.

That lump in the cheek must have swollen still larger when Mr. Nicolson told the world that the B.B.C. must be careful because it is speaking to people in the intimacy of their homes. Does he mean that truth can flourish only outside the home, or that the majority of Christian homes are so helpless and ignorant that they cannot be trusted to

listen to anything that may upset their minds? If neither of these things are true, what does he mean? Did he mean anything at all? Perhaps it was just the intellectually paralysing effect that religious broadcasting appears to exert. I think Mr. Nicolson had better be appointed to be one of the 7.55 terrors.

Mr. Nicolson does stumble—I use the term because I am not sure that he saw it in its full form—on a truth when he says that a message on the air is apt to lose its proper proportions and to be unduly magnified. But that is precisely one of the principal reasons why broadcasting should be unflinchingly honest instead of being so unflinchingly dishonest. Religious broadcasting is carried on by professional preachers or by non-professional preachers who deserve sentencing to a pulpit for the rest of their lives. In such circumstances, how are the poor half-wits in British homes—this is Mr. Nicolson's valuation, not mine—to know whether what they are listening to is right or wrong? For my part, I believe that British homes have their share of intelligence and can look after their own welfare. Cannot Mr. Nicolson earn his governorship without talking like a travelling padre? I do not think that people are as mentally helpless as Mr. Nicolson assumes. They do *not* as a whole swallow the nonsense that the B.B.C. sets before them as profound wisdom.

Some years back, Mr. Churchill—who was not then in favour with the Government—was refused the use of the microphone. In return he denounced the B.B.C. in the House of Commons, and declared that it had no representative quality whatever. Is it any better to-day? Or, if so, how much better? If Mr. Nicolson is to be believed, it is even worse than it was when it chucked out Mr. Churchill. It has now decided that in the interests of truth the British must not have much of it, and as things broadcast may be distorted out of all proportion, the plain truth is never set before them.

I think the B.B.C. is still without representative capacity, for the plain sense here of "representative" should be to set before the public both sides of an opinion—not variations of the same opinion—and let the public decide for itself. At present one might as well call the Roman Catholic Church representative of British opinion as the B.B.C.

There never has existed in this country a more subtle method of preventing the development of independent opinion than that practised by the B.B.C. The Churches are obviously one-sided and are taken as such by most. The statements of professional politicians, from the Prime Minister downward, are taken with a grain—or a lump—of salt. Newspapers may lie, but the lies of one paper are held in check by the lies of another, and readers may reach the truth by balancing statements. But the B.B.C. has entrance to every house in the country, and the unseen speaker's message comes with all the mystery attaching to a voice from heaven. It is because the B.B.C. enters into every home that there is created the necessity, not for a monopoly as to what shall be heard, of a statement of both sides. If broadcasting is to maintain a monopoly, it is, as conducted now, one of the greatest threats that can be made to the development of a real democracy. The lie on the air is more dangerous than the lie that meets us on either the religious or the political platform.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

RELIGION AS "COMFORT"

A SPECIOUS argument, often heard, is that though conventional religions or the Christian religion may be false, it is wrong to disturb other people's religious convictions because they are a comfort to the holder.

"It is cruel and unnecessary," runs the argument sometimes, "to take away or disturb poor old Mrs. Blank's faith, which is her only consolation in life, and which enables her to face the distressing facts of her lost loved ones, her disease and her coming death.

"Why distress her, why disturb her? You may be enlightened, you may be right, while she is foolish and wrong—but why not leave her alone?" On other occasions the argument is put in a wider form: "Religion may be opium or an opiate, as Lenin and others have said. But man is a superstitious animal by nature. Religion keeps man in order and is a real comfort and consolation to many thousands of harmless, devout or semi-devout, or ordinary non-devout folk. Irreligion or Atheism has nothing to put in its place except the dreary truth about life. Besides, a mental drug, like a physical drug, has its beneficent uses, and if religion, like other romantic fiction such as novels, makes life more bearable, why not leave it alone?"

It is not only the uneducated or the semi-educated who reason thus. Many a clear-sighted and well-read unbeliever feels much the same. So do calculating politicians and States, who use religion as well as other forms of government, to control the behaviour of the populace. Unless my memory mistakes, the Marlborough Street magistrate not long ago rebuked an Atheistical speaker in Hyde Park on this very ground that he ought not to disturb what was a comfort to so many folk, whatever he, the speaker, might think.

But it is of the very nature of thought that is alive that it should disturb and arouse. Live ideas, especially if new-born, are as disturbing both to their progenitor and those to whom they are communicated, as crying new-born babes. New ideas upset most people; especially most English people whose minds are conventionally set in habitual grooves; and to most English people the very commonplaces of freethought are entirely novel and profoundly disturbing. People live in extraordinarily restricted mental worlds: the tiny world of a popular newspaper, the home, the office or factory. An idea, new and alien to them, such as the idea that there is no heaven or hell or that Jesus Christ is not, as depicted by the Churches, an entirely perfect Human Creature, comes into their minds with the explosive force of a bomb. They are outraged and hurt by it.

This cannot be avoided: it is in the nature of things. But the question is first whether poor old Mrs. Blank should not be safeguarded from mental, as from physical, shock. For my part, I would concede that there are Mrs. Blanks who should be. It is useless to tell an old lady of 90 on her deathbed that she will not see Jesus and her long-lost children shortly; it is also ill-mannered and cruel not to let her cherish her comforting life-long delusion to the end, when it leaves her naturally with all other things. That Sairey Gamp should love the brandy bottle is sad. But at last, Sairey is a hopeless case. On the other hand, there are old women of both sexes who would be the better for a few mental and physical shocks, and what need is there to spare such because they dislike a shock? There is, too, the Mrs. Blank who ennobles her religion as everything else, "thoughts and affliction, passion, hell itself, she turns to labour and to prettiness," like the mad heroine of Shakespeare. One may well treat her religious delusions as tenderly as her delusions about her husband or children.

But the other Mrs. Blank, whose religion degrades her as she degrades even her fool-religion: what need is there to have mercy upon her folly? There is a time for intolerance as for tolerance. One tolerates in a Zoo or under a microscope what

one would not tolerate in a bedroom; and that is tolerated in Stalingrad to-day which would not be tolerated in Surbiton.

Looking at the wider form of the argument—which is, in a sentence, "do not propagate freethought"—it is obvious how monstrously impossible that is. Humanity does not exist merely to be comfortable. Slaves may hug their chains: it is none the less a duty to strike the chains off. The spectacle of man's mind in fetters is equally intolerable and equally cries aloud for succour. Religions may be, at times, beneficent opium, but opium for all, and for all of the time, is an unbounded evil.

Nor is religion merely an opiate. It has effects other than soporific—as indeed opium has. True, it puts some minds sometimes to sleep so that they care nothing about the evil, disease and folly existent around them, and tamely endure all these, lulled by hopes of "a better world." But its effect on other minds at other times is to create bigotry, hatred, combativeness, bloodshed and a host of other ills too numerous to mention. At its best religion closes the mind and narrows its activity. Religion is inimical from its very nature to experiment and progress in science, art, literature, politics and economics. Still more is it a weapon of control for such interests as Church and State to wield to the detriment of the individual.

Put in a word: to clear and clean the human mind of falsehood and superstition is a duty upon us all. There can be few nobler or more necessary duties. Upon success in that task—no light or easy task!—great human happiness and all real human progress in the realm of reason and emotion, depend. But what an Augean stable the collective mind of mankind is, and even a Hercules might well sit down in despair over the task of cleansing from it the accumulated ordure of superstition choking it! There is no Hercules to divert a mighty rushing river to wash the mind of humanity clean, and each of us can only bring his tiny cup of water to the labour. Let us contribute our mite, for slowly but surely from generation to generation the work goes on. Much decayed and decaying stuff already has been washed away.

Nothing to put in its place? Nothing? That is like saying that when the surgeon cuts from a man's eyes the disabling film of cataract and gives him his clear sight again, he has put nothing in the place of the film. This is literally correct but it is also untrue. We have clear sight to put in the place of bandages, reality in place of superstition, truth in place of falsehood. If the blind man whose sight is restored by a miracle says: "I do not like the world I see," the surgeon may well reply: "Friend, I did not create the world. Nor did your sight create it; it was there before you had your sight."

That one who cannot bear the sight of this life-as-it-is, a tragic thing at best, is unfit for life. Like Benger's Food "for infants, invalids and the aged," the lying fairy-tales may serve the mental coward, the mental child or the mental dodderer.

"Tell us a story," begs the infant. "Don't tell a true one because the made-up ones are always the best." Yes, indeed. But in the morning the children wake to other activities than even the nicest "made-up" stories, and when they grow up the stories are forgotten or smiled over.

Humanity must grow up.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

THE FOLLY OF MAN

We all rejoice in the wisdom of Man. He has conquered the earth, the sea and the air. Great is the power of Man. But the power of foolishness and ignorance also grows, almost in proportion to the growth of wisdom. For folly may destroy in a day the results of wisdom that has taken generations to acquire. All praise to wisdom, but let us never forget the power of folly.

ACID DROPS

ACCORDING to a report of the London Diocesan Conference, London is in an "extraordinarily serious situation. This is not due to want of funds, to an outbreak of disease among the clergy, or an epidemic of straightforward honest speech. It is something more serious. In 1913 the number of assistant clergy was 493, in 1938 it rose to 500, in 1942 it was 307. Evidently the war has not helped the Church so far. But it is good to note that better-paid jobs in the Church are all full.

The Bishop of Norwich is "aghast at the appalling power of evil in the world," which he believes to be "of satanic origin," but he says this evil has "grown out of conditions which man has made." A rather artful gentleman is the Bishop of Norwich. He must have the devil on hand—that is part of his creed—but if he blames the devil too much, man will not be repentant enough to come to church. So he adds that man made the conditions out of which the evil has come. A very artful gentleman is the Bishop of Norwich. He has the horse backed both ways.

The Roman Catholic Church continues to advertise new converts. There are no means of checking the truth of the statements, but one thing is noticeable. We are not told how many are leaving the Church, and whether we have a net increase or not. We know that the number that abandon the Church of Rome is very great, and we have every reason for believing that the number that come out is much greater than those who come in. Like every branch of the Christian Church, the losses are far greater than the gains.

A correspondent of the "Daily Herald" suggests as a means of saving fuel that people should go to church every Sunday evening. But why not morning and afternoon as well? Or why not go to the cinema? Or play darts at the local pub? Our suggestion seems quite as good as that of going to church in the evening.

The chief causes of the war have been disclosed by Fr. Owen Dudley (R.C.). The war is the result of the fact that for twenty years after the war of 1914 we were indifferent to God, His name was never mentioned at international conferences, etc., etc. So we have all been laying too much blame for this war on the Germans. It was largely our fault. We did not mention God's name frequently enough. And as a punishment God is now getting his own back. If we will not praise Him, He will not help us. More, he will see that we get it hot and strong—from the child who had never heard of Him to the man who had forgotten Him. So the real cry of the Churches is: "Let us praise and advertise God or we shall get it where the rabbit got the chopper." But what a God?

Mr. Hannen Swaffer gets a neat rap over the knuckles in the "Southwark Diocesan Gazette" for his patronage of what is called the advanced guard of the Established Church. Mr. Swaffer wrote: "The Church of England—at last—is moving forward. It has gone into the battle for the new social order." The Gazette quietly remarks that journalists have short memories, and that the criticism is a little hard on Gore, Kingsley, Holland, Maurice and a long list of other leaders in the Christian Church. The rebuke was asked for, but both Swaffer and the "Gazette" are miles and miles off the real issue.

There have always been men in the State Church, the Nonconformist Church, and men outside the Church—the latter being, in proportion, large if we remember the number of each group—who have worked for a new social order of a kind. After all, Churchmen are human before they are Churchmen, and often despite being Churchmen, and it is just thickheadedness or sheer humbug to credit the number who rise above their creed as owing what they did to their creed. We are not sure that journalists have short memories, but judging them by their output, it is certain that they are poor historians and still worse philosophers. To seize on the phase of the moment and "splash" it is a characteristic of the modern journalist, and Mr. Swaffer deserved what he got. So far, the vicar had the best of it.

But Mr. Swaffer and other journalists should bethink themselves that if all Christians, priests and laymen had always fallen into line with the Christianity of the day, we should never have emerged from the Dark Ages. Men and women are human before they are Christian, and if now and then the humanity of the few rises above the religion of the many, we see no reason for even a journalist to go out of his way to give the Church of England praise.

We should like Mr. Swaffer and the "Southwark Diocesan Gazette" to tell us what reforms in social life originated with the Church—any Church—and what part non-Christians played in their development?

When that has been done we should be glad to hear from Mr. Swaffer whether he really thinks the Church of England will agree to any radical reforms if it threatens to injure the status, the power or the wealth of the Church? Such expressions, by whoever used, as the fight for a new social order, establishing the freedom of man, the equality of man, etc., etc., sound well, but we should like to see the Archbishop of Canterbury or any other leading and alleged reforming priests—from Cardinal Hinsley to the Salvation Army—explaining precisely what they have in mind when they talk of the new social order. At present, all we have is declarations in headlines and lofty aims in phrases that may be used by Halifax, Hoare, Simon or any other hawker in words.

Here is, for example, another Christian body, the Lord's Day Observance Society, with plenty of money and a fairly large number of followers—among them the Lord Chief Justice, who was for a long time chairman, or president, or whatever they call the leader of this survival from the Stone Age—and this batch of Christians also talk of the "New Order," bringing people "back to God," the importance of following Jesus, etc., etc. It was this lot that recently threatened some actors, who were giving their services on Sunday, with a prosecution if they dared to dress for their parts. The people interested in Sunday freedom could knock the Sunday laws into a cocked hat if they took their courage in both hands and defied them. They would be removed if all those concerned had the courage to act.

Perhaps we ought to remind readers that the show—intended to benefit British prisoners of war—had to be abandoned, and the Lord's collection of religious freaks had their way. But they were undoubtedly real, sincere, good Christians.

The "Church Times" publishes a manifesto from nine Bishops in favour of presenting to the people a Bible that shall be a "Living Book." But the only way in which the Bible can be made a living book is for the people to accept it as nothing but a collection of primitive religious ideas. For nearly 500 years the Bible has been under criticism, the aim being to so interpret the Bible as to make it agreeable to advanced ideas. The result is that the real Bible has dropped into the background and a "rationalised" volume has taken its place. But all the time the Bible as Christians once accepted it has been falling into the background, and that process has resulted in a loss of power and influence of the Churches. Matthew Arnold was correct when he pictured the Bible as the "Old Man of the Sea" of the Churches. The only honest plan would be for the Churches to give up the Bible altogether and hand it over to the folklorist. But that would be for the Churches to act honestly, and that would spell ruin.

What is wanted is a book clearly and plainly expressed that would follow the lines of the volumes of Frazer on "Folklore in the Old Testament," and carry it right through the New Testament. If that were done the Bible might become as useful to the man in the street as is an up-to-date work on folklore. If some wealthy man would come along and pay someone to do the work, we should be delighted to do our share as director "free, gratis and for nothing." Properly done, it should settle the Churches in a generation.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. CLOSE.—Order safely to hand and dispatched to addresses Thanks.

J. W. PATTERSON (N.Z.).—Thanks for letter and wishes; same heartily reciprocated. Money order made payable at Ludgate Circus, London, quite in order; will overseas subscribers kindly note.

For circulating and distributing "The Freethinker":
M. Feldman, 9s.; T. A. Quinn (U.S.A.), 7s.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—B. B. Bonner, 1s. 6d.; London School of Economics Rationalist Society, 3s. 2d.

A number of replies are held over till next week.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Farnival 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, Farnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

THERE is no mistaking the demand for the reissue of the "Bible Handbook." Orders have been coming in rapidly for several weeks and they continue to come. We must therefore ask for the patience of all who have written, as copies are being dispatched as quickly as possible. The "Handbook" should render particularly good service in the present situation.

One of the pressingly topical questions asked at a recent meeting of the B.B.C. Brains Trust was whether people would ever be able to fly to the moon. Lady Astor was one of the special "guests," and she made known her determination not to make the journey. We understand that this decision has greatly disappointed many in the House of Commons—and outside. Quite a number would have readily contributed towards the expense of the outward journey.

In the Leicester Secular Hall to-day (November 15) Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture on "The War, the Peace and the Churches." It is an afternoon meeting commencing at 3 o'clock and should arouse interest and discussion. The hall is in Humberstone Gate and is the home of the Leicester Secular Society, where a syllabus of Sunday afternoon lectures till the end of the year may be had. We have no doubt the members are on the look-out for those Christians who are not so sure of their religion as they were before the war began, and will bring them along to the hall.

The following appears to have been written in all seriousness by the editor of the "Daily Sketch" for October 27:—

"In olden times the leaders of the Church made a practice of going into battle alongside the fighting forces. May we earnestly and respectfully suggest to the Archbishop of Canterbury that at this moment his presence on the field of battle, secured through a flight to Cairo, would give our troops spiritual encouragement.

"It would be a stimulating illustration of practical Christianity."
The picture of the troops being overjoyed by a visit from

Dr. Temple is interesting. We can think of many other things that would give the troops much greater pleasure. Our readers will complete the description. But what made the editor say it? There seems something behind it, or something happened before it.

Which suggests a test. Why not form two regiments, one made up entirely of believers in religion, the other made up of non-religious men; note the positions which face the men in battle and note the casualties in the two regiments, and the measure of success with the job they have in hand. Let us get some facts.

At Cardiff two people—spiritualists—were charged with "unlawfully pretending to hold communications with the spirits of dead people." That law should be either abolished or extended. Consider. Cardinal Hinsley provides thousands of medallions for Roman Catholic soldiers, and these soldiers wear it believing that it acts as a talisman and may save their lives. There is no evidence that it has saved a single one. The Roman Church accepts "gifts"—as do spiritualists—to perform magical ceremonies in the shape of prayers that will benefit dead people. There is no evidence that any such benefit has been derived. The Church of England has a day of national prayer for victory in war, for better crops, etc., etc. There is no evidence that this has any effect on the harvest, or that it helps towards victory. What we should like to know is in what respect these businesses carried on by the Churches differ from the spiritualist's alleged conversation with the spirits of dead people. Cannot we be a little more sensible with even our superstitions? To regard spiritualists as rogues or fools is ridiculous, particularly while our clergy are at large.

Needs must when the fourth member of the Christian Godhead—Satan—drives; and this, we may presume, accounts for the recent exchanges of religious friendships between the Archbishop of Canterbury and Metropolitan Sergius—particularly as Sergius appears to be a supporter of the Atheistic Government. Dr. Temple calls him "My beloved brother in Christ," and Sergius claims that "it was God who brought about the friendship between Russia and England." More particularly it should be attributed to the good sense of the people of both nations. If the Roman Church has its way that friendship will stop with the close of the war, and there are many who are not Roman Catholics who will be with the Roman Church in that respect. In any case, it is not religion that has brought about this friendship, but other forces, and it can only persist if religion is kept in the background.

The Archbishop of York says that the Church's attitude to political questions "can hardly be expected to be the same under existing conditions as seemed proper and right last century." Of course not, but it puts out of court any special claims that could be set up for the Church. What it means is that the attitude of the Church must be determined by existing circumstances; and that means a rule is adopted by all really sensible people. But wherein lies the distinctiveness of the Church if it acts only as other people act? And why a salary of £10,000?

The "Morning Advertiser" appears to be going violently religious. In a recent lengthy leading article it went all out for Lord Winterton, defending a position now worn out—that is, worn out among reasonably-minded men and women. It was not pleased with Lord Winterton for objecting to the description of the war as one for the preservation of Christianity, and reminds him that "civilisations that are built on ethical foundations other than Christian are built upon sand." That seems to us a weak echo of what a certain number of clergymen have been saying. But it is just damn nonsense, whoever says it. The "Advertiser" would do better to stick to its last—or its trade. Amateur theologians are nearly always more laughable than instructive.

But if the editor of the "Advertiser" wishes for something in the way of sociology to soothe his idle hours, we advise him to tell the world what ethical action is possible with Christianity that is not equally possible without it; and next, if others have reached a decent level of behaviour without the help of God, what is the matter with Christians that they cannot, without supernatural help, be as good as other folk?

The "Church Times" laments that the Roman Catholics "usually manage to get all they want from the Board of Education because they know exactly what they want." The English Church does not." There may be something in that, but we also think that the success of the Roman Church with the Government is due to placing so many of their men in key positions and in high places. More or less, the Roman Church is a country within a country taking its marching orders from another State. When we say key positions, we mean governing positions, whether the post is a high one or a low one.

The "Church Times" also rebukes the Church for their readiness to leave out anything in their statement of principles that is thought to hinder "agreement." We agree that is rather a dangerous procedure, but what is the Church to do? There is nothing on what all Christians really agree; and we are strongly of opinion that the only thing on which there is agreement is the title of the New Testament. Trouble begins directly the Christian gets to the text.

Somehow the situation reminds us of the 1914 war. One of our readers wished to join the Army. The question came: "What religion?" "Oh," said the would-be recruit, "What are you short of?" If religion is really necessary to win a war, it has never been able to stop one occurring; the answer was quite a sporting one.

It is about time the people of this country made up its minds as to whether we are really aiming at creating a Democracy—we are a long way from being one at present—or are we out to camouflage the maintenance of vested interests—particularly with regard to the Churches. We say the Churches particularly, for it is plain in every book written that during the times—say a century and a half ago—when children were being treated like cattle and men like serfs, while we were building up our commercial supremacy, those who fought hardest against the evil state of things that existed in the mines, the workshop and in other branches of life, never weakened in demanding that children should be brought as "sound" Christians. They fought against children of seven being prohibited working in factories, or killed by being forced to sweep chimneys (climbing them), but they always said they must have the catechism. The moral of this should not be hard to read.

Now that situation is with us still. Thus, the Manchester Watch Committee received a request from the Council of Christian Congregations that children should not be permitted to visit cinemas on Sundays unless they were over 16. The Watch Committee decided to wait until it saw whether visiting cinemas on Sunday had a bad effect on "children," particularly how it affected Sunday Schools. So a lady member of the Manchester City Council raised the question—presumably the Sunday Schools are in a desperate condition—and the Council was so "haggard" by the Churches as to agree that the Home Secretary should give the Council power to prohibit attendance at cinemas of "children" under 16. Then they could, we presume, go direct from Sunday school to the Army, and that is certain to please those survivors of the Stone Age, the Army padres, who at present have to deal with some awkward customers. "Oh Freedom," etc., etc. Everyone knows the old tag. Hitler understood it when he invited the German people to regain their freedom—under him.

One reader—a new one, clearly—asks whether we deny the existence of any god. Not at all; on the contrary, we affirm the existence of all the gods—so long as people believe in them. We are more Catholic than the Pope, and our capacity for believing in gods is greater than that of the man who changes his religion every year. All the gods that man has believed in have existed, all that are now believed in exist, and will continue to exist so long as anyone believes in them. Gods exist in the minds of men; they have never existed elsewhere. But so long as they are believed in by anyone, so long will they continue in being. Those who understand the A.B.C. of modern psychology will agree with us in this. A delusion exists so long as anyone accepts it for a reality.

LUCK

LUCK accounts for much more in our lives than the majority of us appreciate. For instance: by ill-luck (as it appeared at the time) and long before we were born, our father may have just missed catching a liner which later went down with all hands, passengers included; so by good luck (as it turned out to be) we arrived on the scene. By good luck, we will say, we happened to have been born of parents who were both physically and mentally fit and so had a good start—although by a half-turn of events bad luck might have dogged our parents' footsteps, causing them to be just the opposite from what they actually were, and for that reason we might just as easily have made our entry into the world with a tremendous hereditary handicap. But that wasn't our "luck"; no, everything was fair and plain sailing to begin with and ever after. Our home life was extremely happy, we were sent to one of the "best" schools; on leaving school we were put into congenial employment; later on we married and settled down, and led a normal, contented life. Luck—pure luck! and, when you come to analyse it, there's little or nothing to our credit.

But how different things might have turned out. By chance it could easily have happened that, even with such a fair and favourable beginning, we "took the wrong turning" and went down the hill of life instead of up it. A playmate at school, or someone whom we met in our young manhood, might have influenced us to such an extent that we got into serious trouble—perhaps landed in gaol! It is said that the so-called fair sex can and do influence a man for good or ill, but, of course, the reverse is equally true. That is to say: just as a woman, possessing the necessary qualifications and given the opportunity, can make or break a man, so can a man, be he so constituted and she pliable, put a woman on a pedestal or drag her down into the gutter. The meeting and mating of the sexes is often enough a matter of sheer luck. There are, no doubt, a certain number of men and women who calculate in advance and quite dispassionately what an alliance with a particular member of the opposite sex might mean, and accept or reject an offer of marriage according to the results of their calculation. But human nature being what it is, it is probably correct to say that in the great majority of cases the alliance is a more or less hit-or-miss affair—with the inevitable result of such a haphazard business.

Equally so, two people of the same sex can meet and the one influence the other up hill or down dale. What happens depends, naturally, upon their build and burden.

Books too can, and in many instances do, have a profound influence on us—one way or the other—according to the author's ability to amuse or instruct or debase us and our receptivity for that sort of thing, whatever "that sort of thing" may be; and a book may come into our possession either by way of a friendly introduction, through rummaging a bookstall, or by an advertisement or a review catching our eye. Pure luck again. We did not set out to meet that friend, or with the intention of turning over that old stack of books in the side street, or pick up the paper with the advertisement or review in it, deliberately to look for something new to read. The one thing or the other just "happened," and the result was that a new line of thought, or a new world, was opened up to us and we are so much the better—or worse—in consequence of the experience.

Orthodox folk would say that we were "led" in this direction or that by some "unseen guide," some guide akin to ourselves in character, in order that we might satisfy our craving for suitable sustenance—suitable to us, that is, we being whatever we are. But we prosaic folk, who are apt to look facts in the face and not pull our own legs, put it down to mere chance. We may at times have the urge to go searching for something to satisfy our peculiar taste—indeed, we frankly admit that there are occasions when we feel compelled to do something or the

other: to find a particular kind of book, if you like—but we do not attribute this compulsion to any “unseen hand,” but to our mental make-up and the workings of our own mind at a given moment; and we are also the first to admit, to ourselves at any rate, that whatever is the effect of our reading a book it is due in part to the author’s power over us, and in part also to our comprehension—or lack of it. We are lucky, we think, in getting what we wanted in the shape of reading matter, and the rest follows by reason of what we are, and without any other outside influence.

No matter what we may choose to call it—good luck or ill luck, good fortune or bad fortune, fate or what you will—we are influenced by it, little or much and in some way or the other, throughout our lives. You may be ever so well bred and highly educated and get nowhere in particular, according to the prevailing social standards, because opportunity did not come your way—not the opportunity you were looking and hoping for: some schemer may have got in your way and thwarted your legitimate aims and aspirations. On the other hand, with less family and mental equipment you may have the good luck—as it appears to you—to meet with such conditions all your life that you just cannot help getting on in the world of men and their affairs. You just happened to “appeal” and fit in in some particular scheme of things, and you were literally pushed on because—well, because you are what you are and you suited the purpose. Lucky? Of course you were lucky—in a sense, just as the other man, also in a sense, was unlucky.

All of which is not to say that character and brains do not tell. Of course they do tell and are in themselves valuable assets; also they bring their own reward, to repeat a hackneyed phrase. But let us not disguise the fact that good breeding and patient industry are not in themselves a guarantee that the possessor of those qualities will automatically get to the so-called top of the social or business scale. Many a one with little to recommend him has “arrived,” while another and far abler man, from all points of view, has been left behind.

And a lot of it was due to “luck”—good luck or bad luck, according to the way you look at things.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

MARK IX. 1, ETC., v. EZEKIEL XXVI. 1-14

I ENJOYED Mr. Archibald Robertson’s riposte in par. 2 of his letter (“The Freethinker,” November 1, p. 456). I was made careless by the charming aroma of red-herring about his contention (“The Freethinker,” Sept. 20, p. 394) that the comparison between the two prophecies “is not a parallel but a parody,” because “Ez. does not represent Yahveh as a man who walked the earth between certain specified [!] dates, making disciples,” etc. I am at a loss to know what connection there is between the entourage, so to speak, of the alleged prophecies and the prophecies. The aroma persists when he continues, “[Ez.] does not predict that Tyre will fall before the last of those who have seen Yahveh have passed away.”

By the way, Ez. does not predict, he alleges that Yahveh predicts, just as Mk. alleges that Jesus predicts. The kernel of both prophecies is their fulfilment within a short time. Whether the addressees saw or did not see the speaker has no bearing on the case that I can discover, and the objections seem to be sheer irrelevancies. This Mk. ix. 1, etc., proof of a human Jesus (“The Freethinker,” September 6, p. 368) puts me in mind of those algebraic puzzles which seem to prove that $1 = 2$, i.e. cleverly constructed to give a predetermined result, though in the Jesus case the question is obviously begged and the matter does not seem to be bettered when Mr. R. says (“The Freethinker,” September 20, p. 394): “The mere fact that it predicts the return of Jesus in the lifetime of men who had heard

him, precludes a date much later than A.D. 75-80,” for this assumes that the Mt. Lk. dates are fairly correct, which seems to be by no means certain.

As Mr. R. does not seem to like the Ez. comparison—and I do not wonder at it—I will try to entertain him with an extra-biblical “parody,” very much condensed, from Smyth’s “Aborigines of Victoria,” vol. 1, p. 444, cited by G. Massey, “Natural Genesis,” vol. 1, p. 302. Late in A.D. 1840 the natives were wildly excited, the day of Myndie was at hand; apparently almost immediately; when he would destroy the white people. All the tribes knew him, his district was Lillgouer, N.W. of Melbourne, near Mt. Bukerbrunnel, and his only tipple was water from Neelcunmin creek. It must be confessed that only one family visited his place, therefore any parallel fails because Jesus visited the family, not they him, and the story is only a “parody” because Myndie drank water but Jesus drank wine. However, apply the Jesus argument to this black Messiah, complete with prophecy, followers, domicile, drink and visitors, not to mention the power to work miracles, and you will prove the historical existence of a sheerly mythical being.

In par. 3, after citing Mt. xvi. 28, etc., Mr. R. says: “The prophecy, as even my critics must admit, has failed.” I neither affirm nor deny it, for I do not know—any more than the writers did—what was meant by “the kingdom.” If in Mk. ix. 1, etc., it is taken to mean the end of the world, it cannot be denied that the primitive Zions believed such an event to be imminent and, in a sense, they were right, even though, according to modern astronomy, a little late if the Gospel dates are accepted; also on this view we are deep in myth and the prophecy is *ex post facto*, so again exit Jesus, for in 255 B.C. the vernal colure passed gamma Aries at the Equinox (see E. M. Plunket, “Ancient Calendars,” plate 1), and c. 60 B.C. entered Pisces (L. Hogben, “Science for the Citizen,” p. 64), and such a change of signs was the end of an æon (see Biblica 1,373-84, “close of the age”) and the beginning of a new kingdom, not on earth but in heaven (cf. Biblica, 1,777-20, “. . . in essence ‘the hour is come’ means ‘Thy kingdom is already come’”) in Pisces (note fish and fishers in the Gospels and also Ichthus = Jesus) so, by the Zion mode of reasoning the Messiah must have predicted the end of the world; world, because a story of the heavens had been terrestrialised and the actors humanised; in like manner as the writers make Jesus do things and have things happen to him “that it might be fulfilled,” etc.

In par. 4 Mr. R. gives a reply which is no answer to my suggestion that the charming picture in Mk. x. 13-16 might be a case in which the first canon of literary criticism failed, though there is no proof. Without going to the Talmud, one remembers, e.g. 1 Cor. iii. 1-2 and Acts xi. 1-3, with Gal. ii. 11-13, so one at least suspects that the touching, very human story is a piece of symbolism, a—so to say—nasty crack at the Jerusalem party. Of course, if anyone finds unction for their soul in a picture of Jesus dandling babies, that is their affair and in strict accord with the first canon of literary criticism.

In par. 5, Mr. R., self-elected judge and jury in his own case, asserts: “The parallel between [Mk. ix. 1, etc.] and the miracle of Lazarus fails, for John nowhere says that anyone still alive saw Lazarus (xxi. 24 is by a later hand),” etc. What Jh. xxi. 24 has to do with the Lazarus affair is beyond me, but this is a complete distortion of the case. I drew no parallel, but, in answer to the argument (“The Freethinker,” September 20, p. 394) 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,” adduced Lazarus, described by Jh. to be widely known, to show the folly of the “plausible” plea. Plausible! Wide-throated Credulity swallowed anything and Faith was the all-sufficient evidence!

CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

WOMEN, HOW SAY YOU?

You, who have lost a relative or friend,
Do you believe in God?
In God Almighty, Who could make an end
Of slaughter, dust, and mud?
Can you, who weep, cross your sad heart and say,
"I thank the Lord that I have seen this day"?
You, who now follow with anxiety
The fortunes of your man,
Who faces wounds and death; with what propriety
(Come, tell me if you can);
Will you join in the praises of Jehovah?
Will God provide your man with shield and cover?
You, who have borne your load with cheerful courage,
For your dear man "out there,"
Smiling while you for food and fuel must forage,
Can you still offer prayer
To such a Monster dwelling in the sky?
Is not the Bible Story but a lie?
You, who believe no more in Santa Claus
—You are not still a child;
You, who have learned of Science and its laws,
Are you not driven wild
To hear a parson babble in his church
That God leaves no believer in the lurch?
You, who can trust no more your Heavenly Father,
You have the right to say
That you believe no more; that you would rather
From God's House stay away:
If "God so loved the world," then let Him show it,
And if He will not, tell the parson—"Stow it!"

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CORRESPONDENCE**THE COMMUNIT**

SIR,—The letter which appeared recently from Mr. Dan Griffiths under the above heading calls for some comment. Why "The Freethinker" should be accused of helping to establish a servile state because its columns contained a book review takes some explaining. I have been a regular reader of "The Freethinker" for many years, and am conversant with practically all the writings of the Editor, and I cannot find anything in these writings to justify so sweeping a charge; on the contrary, "The Freethinker," week after week, is uncompromising in its exposure of all forms of servitude and tyranny, religious, political, and economic. It is fighting against the ecclesiastical control of the schools, the religious control of the B.B.C., the blasphemy laws, and is attacking all forms of Fascism. It supports the Sunday opening of cinemas, and maintains that all recruits joining the forces should have the right to attest that they are Atheist, agnostic, or anything else.

"The Freethinker" was amongst the first of journals to protest against the suppression of the "Daily Worker," and one of the first to advocate the lifting of the ban.

If these aims and objects can be construed as helping to establish a servile state, then language seems to have lost its meaning to at least one of your readers.—Yours, etc.,

W. RICHARDS.

SIR,—Mr. Dan Griffiths suggests, without, I suspect, reading "The Road to Total War," that the "Communit" system of co-operative living will lead to the Servile State. Probably 20 million British citizens eat at least one communal meal per day in Service or factory canteens. There is no evidence that the political and social apathy we have experienced since 1918 has been increased by communal feeding. In any case, the demand for cheap, well-cooked meals has come from the people. The Greeks thought communal feeding democratic.

Service flats might be described as Communits operated for profit; their administration costs are included in tenants' rent. The Communit is essentially run by and for the residents, food being purchased wholesale from Co-operative Societies, and many of the administrative problems being shouldered by public-spirited residents.

Possibly residents would prefer to pay a manager to save them the trouble of thinking and discussing. In this event, don't blame the Communit idea, blame the educational system which produces unthinking robots.—Yours, etc., JOHN DARKER

AN OUTLOOK.

SIR,—I have been a reader of your "Freethinker" for only a few weeks, and I would like to tell you that I have found much of it interesting and attractive, especially an article by Dr. Morrison, published in your paper on the 11th October, entitled "What is it all about?" This contribution is remarkable for containing much condensed information on human life, and especially old age and the inevitable sufferings that accompany it. It is very dreadful reading, but obviously only too true. Some day it is to be hoped that such lingering and protracted sufferers—waiting for the final gasp—will not have to continue as at present. Of course, it will be science which must rescue humanity from such evils. I cannot help feeling, however, that the facts as contained in the article are far from desirable for the young people beginning life. They will need only anticipation of a good time before them.—Yours, etc.,

(Rev.) W. G. MARSDEN.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
Report of Executive Meeting held on
November 1, 1942

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, Rosetti (A. C.), Ebury, Bailey, Horowitz, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Quinton and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Bolton Branches and the Parent Society.

Information to date concerning the Chapman case (India) was noted, also that probate had been granted in the Walter Payne Estate.

Lecture reports were announced from Glasgow, Blackburn, North Staffs and from Messrs. Brighton, Clayton and Ebury.

Correspondence from members in the Armed Forces on matters connected with religion was dealt with and instructions given.

The date of the next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Sunday, December 6, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,

General Secretary.

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: C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit., "The Countryside and its Future."

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. ZENOO, "Bradlaugh, Footes, Chapman Cohen and the New Civilisation."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate), Sunday, 3-0: Mr. R. H. ROSETTI, "The War, the Peace and the Churches."

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Café), 7-0: Messrs. J. POWNEY and J. T. BRIGHTON.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

South Moor, Sunday, 10-30: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.