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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Kidnapping

IT is quite evident to those who do not forget to-day what took place yesterday that the Churches have resolved to win *their* war before the present Government—overwhelmingly Conservative—dissolves. With equal cleverness it used the publicity given to the terrible slum conditions in London and elsewhere to call attention to what they claimed to be the neglect of religious teaching. It was *clever* tactics to focus attention on the supposed lack of religion and to say that things would have been much better had the religious instruction given in the schools been more definite in character and in the hands of Christian teachers. Amateurs in Christianity such as Miss Dorothy Sayers and professionals led by the Archbishops worked this yarn for all it was worth, and the Board of Education, with many secret "conversations," lent a hand. Christian teaching by Christian teachers became a kind of war-cry. It was also clear that the plotters could not afford to wait until after the war for new legislation concerning Christianity. It is a case of now or never.

Into the arena there stepped the other day Lord Elton. He is well known—mainly through broadcasting. Lord Elton is a born preacher. He has a very smooth—too smooth—voice and also a capacity for turning out common-places with an air of wisdom, and a genius for manufacturing sheer inaccuracies with an air of superlative wisdom. An article contributed by him to the "News Chronicle" on the education question illustrates the man, his methods and his confused simplicity. Here is a cluster of Eltonian gems:—

"One of the most urgent of the reforms now obligatory upon us is the provision of effective religious teaching in the State elementary schools . . . At present the law makes it possible for religion to be taught by men and women who have never studied, and do not believe in it . . . In the course of the war many of our leaders have repeatedly claimed that this is a Christian country."

It would be difficult to get together a greater number of false statements in so few words. I will not say that never before has so few words combined to enunciate so many falsities, but this mixture must hold a very prominent place. To whom is it really urgent that "effective religious teaching" should be given in State schools? Obviously, to Christians of a certain type. Many Christians do not desire it. Most of the clergy do, but that is their trade. And in what sense is Britain a Christian country? Of course we have, as a relic of the dark ages, a State Church; that is a Church subsidised and perpetuated by the State, but there are multitudes of people who claim to be Christians who do not believe in that Church, and other multitudes who do not believe in any Church. What or how are we to reckon them? Is Lord Elton's ideal of a democracy one in which the religious beliefs of part of a national group shall dominate all others? Probably it is, and in that case it looks as though his ideal democracy is one in which everyone may do as he likes provided he does as he's told. It may also give India's 250,000,000 an idea of what a large number of people in this country understand democratic rule to be.

But we are getting on too rapidly. Lord Elton believes that teachers should understand religion before they teach it. So do we. But we mean religion in all its phases, from the most primitive to its present form. Lord Elton says one thing and means another. When he talks of religion he means the Christian religion. No, that is too general. He means a special form of the existing forms of Christianity, a form that was established by law some centuries ago, and which can be abolished, as part of the law, whenever Parliament feels inclined to do so. I should agree with Lord Elton that religion has been a very prominent thing in human history. It has been associated with many good things, otherwise it would never have survived. It has also been associated with a much greater number of bad things, foolish things and dangerous things. There is not an evil thing that religion somewhere or another has not sanctioned and blessed. There is not a good thing that religion, somewhere or the other, has not partly nullified or openly condemned. But I am dead certain that this historic aspect of religion Lord Elton would be the last man in the world to say should be made plain in our schools. He wants all the fundamental lies and follies connected with the Christian religion to be stated without hostile comment.

We believe that children should learn something about religion, and it *could* come about quite easily and naturally by lessons on folk-law, for an understanding of that would help considerably in creating a proper appreciation of current religion when pupils come in contact with it. By all means let teachers be encouraged to study religion. Many of them do, but when they enter the school they are forced to keep their knowledge to themselves or teach

what they know quite well are, substantially, lies. The fondness of children for fairy tales indicates a healthy exercise of the imagination, and familiarity with them would pave the way for an intelligent study of folk-lore. Lord Elton would take advantage of this early and healthy phase of infantilism to perpetuate a form of adult infantilism in the interests of the Churches. Lord Elton is apparently impressed by the fact that

"Last year a deputation representing the united churches asked for such changes that every child whose parents did not object should receive religious instruction by competent teachers, subject to inspection."

That is substantially the law at present; but Lord Elton, omitting the use of inspectors as examiners of the religion given, does not explain that these "competent teachers" are to pass an examination as to their soundness in religion, and that the clergy would say whether they were fitted for the task. Lord Elton is not so simple as he might, on first glance, appear.

But why not alter the rule and say that children shall not be taught religion unless their parents ask for it, and in that case the clergy shall attend the school to give the lesson? The answer to the question is that if this were done, the majority of parents in large centres of population would not ask for religion. It might suit the Churches in small centres, because there the pulpits still exert considerable coercive power. For the real truth is that this row over education is not a parent's agitation. It is a clerical agitation from beginning to end. It was not the people who came to the Archbishops and asked them to publish the famous document—after, we believe, consultation with certain well-placed politicians—it was the Archbishops who went to the people. So does a vendor of some patent food or medicine, or never-wear-out boots or unshrinkable shirts assure the public that they have the very things for which their souls have been yearning.

But I am not one who believes that a parent is of necessity the best guide as to what is best for his or her children. Foolishness runs in families equally with wisdom, and the worst thing that can happen to a child is often to follow in the footsteps of father and mother where life is concerned. But in secular things life itself often corrects the blunders, the foolishness, the moral misdirection that the child gets in many a "good" home. But in religion the foolishness and stupidities of the home are not so quickly corrected. The woman who exclaimed indignantly when advised to do so-and-so, "Actually tried to tell me how to bring up my own child," is not a myth. She is to be found in every street in the country, and the more emphatic she is the more hopeful is the chance of the priest for increased business.

I must confess that I should not have bothered with Lord Elton's performance had I not been interested in what he said from the point of view of one who has paid some little attention to scientific psychology. Imagine the mentality of a man who can picture, as Elton does, the objection to placing teachers under a religious test as equivalent to a teacher giving lessons on arithmetic without knowing anything about it. An apt reply came in the "News Chronicle" from Torquay, that the parallel would hold good if there existed no greater agreement on the multiplication table than there exists on religion.

Lord Elton simply cannot be so foolish as he would appear to be.

He professes wonder at the opposition offered to the Archbishops by the Lancashire Federation of Class Teachers (they know the petty tyranny and the premium on dishonesty in the contemplated new legislation) by saying the demands of the Churches were "eminently modest." We must put that down to humour. He says that the Churches once did not agree upon what religion should be taught, but now they are in agreement. But that is not true. The Roman Catholic Church will not and cannot agree at any cost that its children shall be contaminated with Protestantism. The English Church does not intend to give up its schools. All it wants is for the State to pay the bill and to see that nothing is taught in the State Schools with which it seriously disagrees. The remaining sects ask that nothing with which they disagree shall be taught, and above all "Freethinking" must be kept out. Woe to the teacher who would boil down what modern anthropology has to say concerning the origin of religious belief. The Churches do not agree now more than they did a generation ago. They agree—as Mussolini and Hitler agree—for the purpose of raiding other people.

Two other Eltonian gems. "In the thousands of schools which it (the Church of England) maintains at its own expense." Where? These Church schools draw huge sums of money every year from the national exchequer. "The Church of England announces that it will seek no denominational advantages," says Lord Elton. What fools this man must think is the public to which he appeals! One cannot believe that Lord Elton is so simple-minded that he does not realise that if the schools train children to believe in Christianity, the Churches as a whole, and certainly the Church of England, will benefit from the preparation. As well might a cattle breeder say that he derives no benefit from a free gift of cattle fodder.

I think that last expression puts the situation in a nutshell. The Churches—established and other—know that it is the children or nothing. The whole aim of the Churches is to make the schools a corridor that leads direct to the Churches. As religious bodies they have no other interest in education.

Just over 70 years ago the State—owing to the shocking state of education after centuries of religious control—took over the education of the people. Most of the ardent educationalists of the time hoped that henceforth the State would sever its connection with the Churches so far as education was concerned. Unfortunately a compromise was made with the Churches. That compromise led to trouble from the first moment of its creation. Church schools waged war against State schools. Every improvement was fought because each made fresh demands on the finances of Church schools. The poorer the State schools were kept the less the Churches had to contribute. It split schools into sects where there should have been none. Improvement in education was fought by the Churches as a method of keeping down expenditure. To-day we have to fight an attempt to get back to the pre-1870 position. It will be a sad thing for the contemplated democracy if the Churches win this round. It is time the State stood quite aloof from religious propaganda.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

IS TECHNICAL SKILL THE HALL MARK OF PROGRESS?

IN the third volume of his "Study of History," Professor Toynbee minutely analyses the complex phenomena involved in the rise, progress and decline of culture. The influence exercised by man's increasing command of his immediate environment is obvious, and this is materially increased by means of geographical expansion. Nor can human control of the minor forces of physical Nature be safely disregarded. Yet Toynbee contends that the prevailing sociological acceptance of the theory that technical inventions and appliances furnish proof positive of progress, has little to support it. He asserts that: "The technological classification has been accepted widely and uncritically because it has appealed to the emotions of a society which has been fascinated by its own recent technical triumphs. In inventing this scheme of thought, our sociologists have caught the popular fancy; but in their own mental process they themselves have succumbed to the subtle and insidious influence which the historian's local and temporary environment always and everywhere exerts upon the trend of his historical studies." Archaeological appraisals of past cultures that have survived from successive Stone, Bronze and Iron Age deposits. These ancient tools and weapons have, he thinks, been overstressed. For, while implements of solid and durable substances have naturally persisted, the impress of prehistoric man's milieu, his vanished institutions, his ideas and reactions to his social surroundings, can only be inferred from the beliefs, customs and social structures of still living lowly peoples. This is doubtless true, yet it seems idle to dispute that the thoughts and deeds of long departed peoples are not, at least in some measure, reflected both in their artifacts and in their fine paintings preserved in ancient caves.

Dr. Toynbee argues that it is quite illusory to regard civilisation as unitary and unique in character. No sweeping generalisation concerning it can be framed, for in every epoch known to us, all the past technical appliances that have ever been utilised are represented somewhere on the earth's surface. For instance, he says, "Scandinavia may remain in the Stone Age for thousands of years after Egypt or Shinar, or even the less distant Ægean, has taken to bronze; and then, when Scandinavia has followed the example of her neighbours by discarding stone for bronze in her own good time, she may cling to bronze for centuries after her neighbours have discarded this metal for iron." Moreover, the Professor insists, even now, when the products of Western Industrialism have penetrated all parts of the world, the native tribes of Australia and the Eskimos linger in the archaic Age of Stone.

Our historian contends that for all we know to the contrary, human artifacts, from the most crudely chipped stones to those of smelted metal, may have been independently originated by separate peoples in different ages and countries on several occasions; and, even assuming that the various inventions have arisen in some one favoured habitat, and from thence been diffused in all directions, they must have taken centuries to travel, while some have remained restricted in range. With all their astounding achievements "the Egyptian Society never transcended the Bronze Age nor the Mayan Society the Stone Age, and no known society except our own Western Society has ever converted the Iron Age into the Machine Age."

Toynbee gravely doubts whether we are justified in regarding the Industrial Age as the apex of culture; and he also suggests that we moderns are all too apt to minimise the revolutionary achievements of prehistoric man, which really furnish the firm foundations for all the triumphs of present-day applied science. When compared with the energy displayed and the creative power exercised by prehistoric humanity in surmounting the obstacles

that existed, our remote ancestors' successes eclipse our own, despite the latter's imposing magnitude. Toynbee acutely urges that: "The transmission of the human voice by telephone or wireless is not so miraculous as the origin of articulate language (without which the technique of transmission of sounds would be of no value). The application of fire to drive steam engines or to shoot guns is not so daring as the original mastery of fire: the discovery of how to handle it with impunity and how to keep it alight and rekindle it when it has gone out. The invention of firearms, again, has been intellectually easier than the invention of the first missile weapons: the bow and arrow represents a greater intellectual triumph than 'Big Bertha.'"

Again, Toynbee contends that the invention and successful appliance of the wheel was a more wonderful achievement than that of the locomotive or motor-car. Also, he claims that it was a far more onerous task to tame wild and wayward animals and reduce wild plants to cultivation than to subject the forces of inanimate Nature to human control. In the former case, "primitive" man was compelled to cope with the complexities of living organisms, while in the latter it was only necessary for modern man to master Nature's mechanical laws and adapt them to his special requirements.

Consequently, Toynbee dismisses the assumption that the development of an ordered technique affords any real criterion of civilised life. He cites the circumstance that an advanced technique has characterised every arrested culture so far known. "The Polynesians," he remarks, "have excelled as navigators. The Eskimos as fishermen, the Spartans as soldiers, the Nomads as tamers of horses, the Osmanlis as tamers of men. These are all instances in which civilisation has remained static while technique has improved." But, can such successes, important as they were, be fairly compared with the far-flung conquests of Nature accomplished by contemporary science? Wealth is produced in abundance in normal times, but what is in urgent demand is its more equitable distribution. Were this boon secured, with a reasonable birth-rate, and the complete cessation of the devastating armed conflicts between nations which still curse mankind, the world would be as near perfection as it is ever likely to become.

That the remarkable artistic powers of some of the old Stone Age peoples did not descend to their Neolithic successors seems clear. Yet these later workers in stone had greatly improved the technique of their predecessors. The ancient Minoans, at the highest stage of their technological development, as Toynbee insists, were overcome by rude barbarians whose iron weapons of warfare proved more effective than the bronze swords of the far better cultured Minoans. In early America the story seems much the same. For in "the New World the Mayan Society rose and fell without ever passing from the Stone Age into an age of metal. In Central America the introduction of the metallurgical technique was reserved for two civilisations, both related to the Mayan, which can neither of them compare with the antecedent civilisation in respect to the general level of their cultural attainments."

Other instances are cited by our author which all occasion food for reflection. Even now, it is claimed, the so-called Democracies are waging a war for the preservation of Christian civilisation. Yet Toynbee records a glaring instance in which the non-Christian Turk proved far morally superior to the Christian Greeks. After quoting a 17th century European eye-witness's testimony to the forbearing conduct of Turkish troops, Toynbee assures us that he was deeply impressed when he noted the exemplary behaviour of Turkish soldiers under intense provocation when they reoccupied Ismid after its evacuation by the Greeks in 1921. "Though the Greek troops, before their departure, had massacred the Turkish civilian population, plundered their property, burnt their houses and slaughtered pigs in their mosques, the victorious oncoming Turkish troops

refrained from making any reprisals upon the persons or property or churches of the Greek civilian population which had been left at their mercy by the withdrawal of the Greek army." This was a sinister occurrence. Still, we must honour and acclaim the heroic conduct of the Greek forces in their defensive fight with the invading Italians in the present war, and their comparative success, until they were overwhelmed by the brute force of the German army and air attack upon soldiers and civilians alike.

T. F. PALMER.

NEW TESTAMENT PROBLEMS

SOME weeks ago in these columns the Rev. W. G. Marsden called attention to a point on the "original" language of the New Testament. A Jesuit Father insisted that there was an "Aramaic document originally," and that this was translated into Greek, but unfortunately he was unable to give any evidence whatever for the claim.

It is not clear from Mr. Marsden's letter whether the Aramaic document was of the whole of the New Testament as we have it to-day, or whether only the Gospels were meant. It is not clear either if the Jesuit meant that the Aramaic document was of our Gospels exactly as they stand in one of the thousands of MSS. in existence, or if he knew which of these represents the genuine translation.

In fact, I have rarely come across anything so typically vague except, of course, from professional Jesuits. It is their business to be vague and to bamboozle the general public, and people like Mr. Marsden, who ought to know better. The fact that the Jesuit "gave no directions where to obtain the facts" ought to have opened his eyes to the bamboozling.

Needless to say, there is no evidence whatever that the "original" Gospels or the New Testament were written in the "Aramaic dialectic of Hebrew," as Mr. Marsden put it. There is no evidence whatever that the Gospels or the New Testament are translations at all. Nobody knows when or where the various documents were written, or by whom. Even the authorship of Paul is strongly disputed and his epistles generally recognised as more or less composite documents. But who "edited" them or the Gospels is quite unknown.

This is where that pleasant game variously called speculation or conjecture has such a high old hand. The way in which our theologians, Christian and Rationalist, can play this game often takes my breath away.

Readers will perhaps remember when dealing with the Moabite Stone recently, I pointed out that the "authorities" nearest to its discovery were far more sceptical as to its genuineness than those of to-day. Time plays a great part in these matters. It is necessary for establishing at least some authenticity to that mass of fables, the Bible, to admit almost anything in the way of proof, and the Moabite Stone was a godsend to the Jewish and Christian Churches. The objections were hastily brushed aside and, thank heaven, are now forgotten; and the Moabite Stone is trotted out whenever it can be to overwhelm the sceptic. You will find in the way the Q document theory has been used to prop up the authenticity of the Gospels something analagous to the Moabite Stone.

What is this theory? The answer is that as the three so-called synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all contain similar matter—though certain portions in each are not found in the others—they must have had a common document as their authority. This document has been given the title Q from the German word "Quelle," source. It is quite a good hypothesis, but that is all. There is not a particle of evidence that there ever was such a source of the Gospels, for we know literally nothing about it. No Q document has come down to us, and none of the early Church Fathers or writers even mention it. But as time went on after the theory had been given publicity,

more and more theologians began to take it as a fact. It is now often discussed as if it had been proven to the hilt.

For example, Mr. A. Robertson, in one of the latest volumes to the Thinker's Library, "The Bible and its Background," in discussing the Q document, manages to get two "almost certain lies" in one paragraph: Q was "almost certainly written after 75," and "its place of origin almost certainly Rome."

As a matter of positive fact nobody knows anything about Q—except, of course, in the field of speculation. There one can roam about almost for ever.

How do we know "almost certainly" that Q was written after the year 75? The answer is staggering in its unique simplicity. It appears that "the spoils of Jerusalem," among them a temple curtain with a tear in it, were exhibited in Rome that year. This tear or rent "in all probability" gave rise to the legend that it had thus suffered at the crucifixion and, of course, was immediately monopolised by the writer of Q. Obviously, as soon as his lynx eye spotted the tear, he saw what splendid use could be made of it, and so helped to perpetuate the "legend" that the veil of the temple was rent in twain. In the course of years, the tear had become a rent big enough to divide the curtain. Moreover, nobody else but a writer in Rome could have made use of such wonderful copy; and behold, the Q document is born—or rather becomes "almost certainly" authentic. Mr. A. Robertson admits that the curtain was actually changed every year, and then coolly informs us that "Christians did not know that." Here the "almost" disappears and we get absolute certainty.

The Baconians may indulge in something like lunacy sometimes, but this story of the Q document would be hard to beat even by them.

Now it is impossible for me to say with certainty that there never was a Q. I do not know. But there are not a few theologians who are quite dissatisfied with a single Q and are positing a number of Q's; and they have as much right to do so as any other speculator in the theological field.

The truth is that we simply do not know how the Gospels, as we have them, came into existence. Theories, speculation and conjecture, garnished with many "it is possible" or "probables," form fascinating reading, and I must confess having spent many enjoyable hours with Streeter, Burkitt and Loisy, and hope to enjoy the work of their successors. All the same, facts are brutal things sometimes, and when it comes to the Bible they are hard to arrive at.

But we are entitled to declare positively that we do know some things. We do know, for example, that Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses were written by the score for some centuries after the "birth" of Christianity—whenever that was. Many of these have come down to us, and the making of "genuine" Gospels is still proceeding. We do know that the Gospels recognised by the Christian Churches as the truly "inspired" ones were not known in their present form before the year 150 A.D.; and we do know that the "witness" of certain MSS. proves incontestably that nobody at any time ever knew well enough to put it in writing what the original "autographs" were like.

How much history, fact, fiction or allegory the Gospels as we have them enshrine will, in all probability, never be known. If my own opinion is worth anything—and I have made a study of the subject for many years—I am quite convinced that they were in the first place meant to be allegories; and in this connection writers like Dupuis, Robert Taylor and Godfrey Higgins, and a modern writer like W. Benjamin Smith, have hit the truth with remarkable ingenuity. The Gospels as we have them have been re-written or re-edited so that what was once an allegory is now made to read like the biography of a real man. But on this point every reader must study and investigate for himself.

That the God Jesus is slowly but certainly vanishing into the skies where he always belonged—I am “almost certain” he was meant to by the Gospel writers, anyway, in the Ascension—most intelligent people are beginning painfully to admit. It is our job to see the man Jesus also vanishes in the same way.

H. CUTNER.

CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

Conscience—is its own accuser.—PYTHAGORAS.

“CONSCIENCE, like all other powers, comes to maturity by insensible degrees and may be more aided in its strength and vigour by proper culture.” Thus wrote Thomas Reid in his book “On the Intellectual Powers of Man.”

Religion would say that the term proper culture implied Christianity without a doubt. But that is by the way.

The functioning of conscience has been cleverly explained by Christians. God and the devil provide a short cut in reaching an understanding of conduct. The problem of good and bad actions is a simple one. The good conscience is evidence of the will of God, whilst the bad conscience is that of the devil. The operation or functioning of the conscience is equally simple to understand. Somewhere inside of each one of us are two tug-o'-war teams. God and his angels on the one side and the devil and his angels on the other. (The rope is the one given to anyone who is sinful, and if long enough, will hang him.) Backwards and forwards the two teams surge, and the strength of the pull exerted on the rope is often determined by the value of the prize to be won. Depend upon it, when you hear someone refer to a twinge of conscience it is certain that one of the teams is going all out for a win! Thus, a good conscience signifies that God's team has prevailed over the devil's team. You can picture the latter team lying down and out!

Thus, a problem in ethics becomes a tug-o'-war in the hands of religion, the while culture hangs its head in despair. For who would referee such a match after studying the antics of these centuries-old teams expert in every wile of chicanery?

What then is conscience? It is the knowledge of our own acts and feelings as right and wrong. Rousseau puts it thus: “There is in our heart of hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue upon which we judge our own actions and those of others, and to this principle we give the name of conscience.”

The degree of our acts and feelings is the degree of our culture; and our culture is the moral discipline and training which leads to intellectual development.

The conscience which is conditioned by religion is fed on the promise of reward in the next world, for it is written, “Great shall be your reward in heaven.” The promise of heaven and the threat of hell have caused the “dictates of conscience.” History provides ample instances, and rivers of blood have flowed to satisfy the dictates of conscience. For who can deny that the religious conscience is motivated by the considerations and the possibilities of ascending into heaven or descending into hell after death?

What then of the Atheist who entertains no such hopes and fears? “He is doomed,” says the Christian. “In fact he is damned. Good gracious, is he not without supernatural guidance and uninspired by divine revelation? The devil has prevailed and is in triumphant possession of the Atheist's conscience. Being without God, the unbeliever is unable to distinguish between right and wrong.” Not a bit abashed, the Atheist, having ousted God and the devil from his mind, says, “Thou shalt have none other gods but reason.” In physical appearance the Atheist is no different from the Christian, but when God's angels are out on reconnaissance they take care to avoid him, and look around for much easier prey.

The fervid sectarian believes he is not as other denominators, and so, obeying the dictates of conscience, dedicates his life to

God. On the other hand, the Atheist believes as Henry Van Dyke, who said, “There is a loftier ambition than to stand high in the world. It is to stoop down and lift mankind a little higher.”

The religious conscience is like a shelter. It provides a haven when its owner wishes to escape from the effects of his own hypocrisy—“the Bible tells me so,” he will say in extenuation of his acts. But whilst acknowledging his manifold faults and sins, he asks with super-unctiousness for forgiveness, at the same time exalting his God in fulsome praise and exhorting him to show a little pity for “this miserable sinner.” A sop to Cerberus, as it were! And also a sop to his own dissimulation. For is it not written, “An humble and a contrite heart, O God, thou shalt not despise”? We can feel sympathy for Shylock when he said, “O Father Abraham, what these Christians are, whose own hard dealings teaches them to suspect the thoughts of others!”

Therefore it is not surprising when the followers of the creed of Christianity find themselves in a maze of Old Testament atrocities, contradictions and absurdities and New Testament pseudo-ethical and philosophical thought. How to reconcile the statements of these two Testaments has been the purpose of egregious ecclesiastics and perambulatory pulpiteers for many years. Small wonder that the layman is conscious only of the conscience of religion!

S. GORDON HOGG.

ACID DROPS

THE President of the Glasgow Y.M.C.A. is very much disturbed in mind because the opening of cinemas on Sunday has diminished the attendance at Sunday school. He asks, pathetically: “Is the cinema going to take the place of the Sunday school?” Probably the President would like to make attendance compulsory. It is the only plan that will fill the Sunday schools—for a time.

If the Lord's Day Observance Society continues its present repressive and tyrannical policy of interfering with the innocent recreation of workers on Sundays it might ultimately succeed in putting itself out of existence by causing the Lord's Day Observance Act to disappear from the Statute Book. The Society have succeeded in banning the Sunday performance, at Keighley, Yorkshire, of “Mr. Pim Passes By,” a play produced for the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund. But they have also succeeded in angering the local Trades Council and the local Labour Party to the point of approaching the M.P. for Keighley with a view to seeking the repeal of the obsolete Act under which the Society operates. In the words of the Labour Party President (Mr. J. W. Wardle), “the time is ripe for the community to make a stand and expunge this age-old regulation from the Statute Book.” A few similar moves in other quarters and the desire may become a reality. Thus would good really come from evil.

“Aviation is forbidden by God,” declared a girl C.O. at a Midlands Tribunal. And she proved it by quoting the Second Commandment: “Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth . . .” Certainly ingenious! But then, with a little ingenuity, it was always possible to make the Bible prove anything.

Another nasty shock from the youth movement interviews. Spensborough (Yorks.) Youth Council declares that only 3 per cent. of the children interviewed, between 16 and 18, have any connection with a religious organisation. This question really will have to be dropped if the Churches are to save their faces.

A teacher at Boscombe wants all to pray daily to Jesus to save all Catholic schools. We don't know what Jesus had to do with schools or schooling. There is no indication that he was at all interested, and as his followers understood him to prophesy that the end of the world was at hand, there was not much time for the building up a system of education. But it is

quite usual to make Jesus responsible for anything that is in the air, so why not discover Him to be the founder of kindergartens?

L. H. Marlow, writing from St. Mary Vicarage, Bozeat, Wellingborough, tells the following story in "The Guardian"—Church of England paper. A number of children were evacuated and the vicar, L. H. Marlow, says:—

"I was given to understand a great number of them were going to come to my Sunday school. . . . I approached the headmaster and appealed for help from one or two of his teachers. His answer was: 'I have three Communists, two Roman Catholics, one Jew, one lapsed Methodist, and I don't know what he is.' The truth about the Communists was borne out later when a boy was caught stealing from an allotment. A master passed by as the boy was spoken to, and when he heard what it was about he said, 'Good luck to him. It's as much his as anyone else's.'"

That is his story, but whether the vicar would stick to it, or whether any schoolmaster would say it, is another question. The real venom, religious venom, which is the worst kind of venom, lies in "The truth about Communism was borne out." There is, by the way, a New Testament passage, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie to his glory, why yet am I also judged a sinner?" So we leave it at that.

The Church of England Central Council for Religious Education is now prepared to modify its demands somewhat, "and would not oppose the closing of schools which cannot be modernised." The Council also admits that "the subjection of some 10,000 head teachers to denominational tests is inequitable." It puts many other suggestions in a memorandum and appears to agree that Roman Catholic schools should not be taken into account in these suggestions. What with one thing and another, all believers in secular education will note that religionists will twist and turn; they may give in here or there, but in the end what they want is the Christian religion taught in all schools, no matter how, as long as it is taught, and the State pays for it. That is the Catholic claim, and from that they will not budge; and it is this attitude we must fight. The war for the freedom of the world should surely embrace a war for the freedom of the child.

The Pope recently offered prayers to the Virgin Mary, calling her attention to the state of Russia, and asking her to give help. Actually, the Russians appear to have been getting on very well without Mary interfering, and there is no immediate prospect of her being reinstated. The Russians have done very well, up to date, and it seems rather late—probably too late—for "the Queen of the Holy Rosary" to interfere now.

Originally it was announced that the Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants would worship on Thanksgiving Day and pass a vote of thanks for God's help which should be a joint one. But it was found impossible to get the heads—no reference here to intelligence—to pray together, so that in the end Protestants went to Westminster Abbey, Roman Catholics went to Westminster Cathedral and Jews went to a West London Synagogue. We do not know whether they all performed at the same time, but it is to be hoped that if that was the case, number one explained that he had nothing to do with two and three, number two that he was not connected with one, and number three that he had nothing to do with one and two. Otherwise God might be more bored than usual.

But it seems to us there is a kind of moral about this. Note that these Protestants, Jews and R.C.s can live together, march together, fight—the enemy—together, sleep together, and combine for a hundred and one different things. But the one thing they will not do together, the one that breaks the social bond, is religion. They can be citizens of the same State and glory in their union. They can meet each other on the common ground of parenthood, friendship, and in a dozen other different ways. Introduce religion and that communal feeling is gone. There is trouble about inter-marriage, there is trouble in their approach to God, and each one is sure that the other fellow will

catch it hot when he appears before the throne. There really is a moral here, and it is one that is worth noting.

For downright generosity commend us to the Roman Catholic Church. The Glasgow edition of the "Catholic Herald," in order to show its sincerity and magnanimity, remarks:—

If only all Christians could forget their differences and prejudices and stand behind the Holy Father as a body, ready to back his international lead and judgment. . . . This alone might change the course of history.

It would that. But whether it would be for better or worse is quite another question. However, the generosity of the offer is plain. If everyone will march *behind* the Catholic Church, and act as the Pope wishes them to act, then the Church will forget all its differences. Hear, hear.

The Bishop of Southwell asks: "Why is Hitler so mortally afraid of religion?" The answer is that he is not afraid of religion. He is a deeply religious man. He has said over and over again that he sees in his rise the hand of God working—working through him for the benefit of the German people. Like all deeply religious men he is intolerant because he believes that God is backing him. Like the Church whenever it has had the power to do so, he believes in suppressing all who disagree with him. Like the Churches, he believes in "collaring the kids" and preventing them hearing any opinions with which he disagrees. Also like the Churches, he believes in, as they did and do, suppressing all books that are not written to inculcate his beliefs. He is one of the world's great religionists. That is why he is such an infernal nuisance.

The Archbishop of York (Dr. Garbett) said, in a recent speech: "It is disquieting also to see how many of the civilian population are the prey of any quack who pretends to be able, by astrology, to foretell the future." Come, come, Dr. Garbett, surely this is just professional jealousy. Your Christian creed has been foretelling the future for nearly 2,000 years—peace or torment, and all the rest of it. We recognise your superior standing in this matter, of course. Your Church and the R.C.s are the old original firms, and you are the legitimate professionals. If it had not been for your "preparation" of the minds of the people with orthodox dope, the heterodox dope of astrology, spiritism, and so on, you could not have secured a hold. But even doped intellects are subject to evolution, one way or another, and as they evolve either by finding their way into new dope, or by finding their way out of it, you might as well resign yourself to accepting astrologers as legitimate brothers of your priestly craft.

The Archbishop also said: "Most serious of all is the almost complete ignorance of the Christian faith shown by so many who have been through our schools." But that is not serious for the Church! Ignorance of religious faith is a necessary condition for the survival of Churches to-day. Understanding of religious faith is what the Churches have to fear. Have a care, Eboracum!

The Halifax Licensing Bench is the latest to impose a wet blanket of Sabbatarian conditions on the Sunday concert movement—no character costumes, approved programmes, etc. When will some of these Licensing Benches waken up to the fact that they are not appointed to do the work of the Lord's Day Observance Society, but that, in theory at any rate, they are appointed to cater for the people's needs within the limits of their legal jurisdiction? One day we might create a real licensing authority—one which regards the public as a body of decent human beings who have needs that require satisfying, rather than considered as a gang of potential criminals, who must be restrained and suppressed. Judging from the past history and present behaviour of Christian administrators, however, it seems that such a Bench will have to contain two or three Freethinking members, to give the first impetus to this much-needed reform. The Christians, of course, could step in later and take the kudos—as ever.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
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Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- A. J. ASHBY.—Pleased to hear from you and to know what you are doing for the "Best of Causes." After all, it is not the work for which one is paid that brings the greatest and best returns, but for that additional labour that we give for the sheer benefit of others, or for the satisfaction it brings to oneself. Pleased you think so highly of "The Atheist's Approach." It has proved to be one of our best sellers. Have more books on the stocks.
- J. T. BRIGHTON.—Very sorry to hear of your accident. We hope you will soon be quite recovered and able to resume your work for the Cause. We should be glad to renew our personal acquaintance with Tyneside friends. Our best regards to all.
- A. HATTIE.—Thanks for cutting. You will see we have dealt with the subject named.
- W. G. MARSDEN (Ballycarry).—The part of a teacher, whether scholastic or otherwise, is to lay down principles. That of a politician—when he is honest—is to negotiate affairs in the direction of an end he believes to be desirable. The clergy, in the main, preach principles and live by denying or adulterating. Keep these things distinct in your mind and you will understand better our position.
- Q. WARBURTON.—We had already noted the closing of the Salford Church school by the authorities on account of its inefficiency. Many other schools have been closed for the same reason. Many more would be closed if they were not Church schools.
- G. CAPLAN.—Thanks for addresses. Will receive attention. We are doing what we can to check the tactics of the different Churches. But we always welcome suggestions and help.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—John Cairns, 5s.; E. McCarthy, 6s. 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.

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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

IT has been said, and is still, that this is a Christian country. That, of course, is not true. It is true that the majority of the people in this country profess belief in Christianity, and also that Christians exercise great power in this country. In a larger sense it is true that in the past the Christian Churches have enjoyed much greater power than they wield to-day, and that we still bear the marks of that in customs that we ought to end, laws that should be wiped out, and a degree of intolerance displayed in connection with many subjects, but which have their origin in religion. With those qualifications we may describe ourselves as a Christian country or, more accurately, as a people influenced by the historic dominance of the Christian religion.

But having gone so far, there is a curious and instructive situation. During the last two years we have heard more than we ever heard before of the fact that we are a community with common needs, common interests, sharing willy-nilly in the good

and the bad of a common life, and that the appreciation of this situation must never be lost sight of. For it has taken a world war to bring us to recognise with a strength that has never before been felt this common life that exists. That says very little for the influence of religion. What is more noticeable still is the fact that in the midst of this devastating conflict it is religion that still splits society into groups that nothing can unite.

"Peace upon earth, was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of Mass,
We've got as far as poison-gas."

This is a quotation from Thomas Hardy and may be had on an artistically designed postcard at 1d. each, 9d. a dozen; also we can supply a folding greeting card with a quotation from Colonel Ingersoll, 2d. each, seven for 1s., from the offices of the Pioneer Press, or N.S.S., 2/3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4. Freethinkers can therefore send greetings without troubling the angels, Bethlehem or Good King Wenceslas.

Evil is just as contagious as good, perhaps more so. And at St. Albans the Dean has taken a lead from the B.B.C. methods of discussion where religion is concerned. In this case a tribunal is arranged. One clergyman is selected to defend the Church and another, the Rev. Gilbert Shaw, puts the case against Christianity. One would have thought that a real opponent could easily be found, and failing that, one of those in-between characters who lack the courage to openly express their opinions against belief could have been chosen, who would have admiration for the moral teaching of Jesus. But the Dean of St. Albans follows the example of the B.B.C., one priest attacks Christianity and the other defends it. The Dean of St. Albans wins hands down. We wonder whether the Dean could summon up courage to put his case for Christianity in "The Freethinker," or undertake to reply to an indictment drawn up against Christianity? We suspect not. Christian honesty in these matters has its own methods.

Only once in our experience has a Christian of standing ventured on such a task as the one suggested. The late Canon Edward Lyttleton, an ex-headmaster of Eton, asked permission to state the case for Christianity and against Atheism in the columns of "The Freethinker." Of course the request was granted, on the one condition that each article on the one side was followed by an article on the other. The articles were read with great interest all over the country, and they were reprinted in book form. Now that offer is again open to any representative of any of the Churches, or from any Christian of standing. We shall be greatly surprised if this offer is accepted. But it would give an honest and capable Christian a chance such as is never offered by any Christian journal.

On Sunday, December 13, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture in the Public (Lecture) Halls, Northgate, Blackburn, at 3 p.m., on "The War, the Peace and the Churches." Local arrangements are in the hands of the Blackburn Branch N.S.S., and officials and members hope that all friends of the movement will make a point of bringing at least one orthodox friend to the meeting. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at 1s. each.

To those who are fond of pictorial representations combined with letterpress, we commend "China in Pictures," edited by E. Gordon, Williams and Norgate, 1s. It should set people searching for more and better knowledge about the real China. It is, by the way, illuminating that it is only when China proves to the world that it could fight that this Christian saturated country of ours discovered the Chinese were a great people.

We have to congratulate the editor of the "Bingley Guardian" for reprinting at length our criticism of the Bingley (Yorks) Council in relation to the offering of prayers before proceeding to business.

The Roman Catholic Church is getting seriously alarmed at the probability that when peace comes and the question of creating "a brave new world has to be settled, it may be left out, or play a very subordinate place." The English Roman Catholic papers have been giving us a programme for world settlement which, of course, gives the Papacy a prominent position and a promise of still greater power. Now we have the Vatican Radio informing the world that the reason for the failure of the peace after the last war was due to the "politicians ignoring the Holy See by keeping the Pope out of the discussions." We hardly think the Pope has any belief that the Allies will agree to play into the hands of Roman Catholicism by giving the Papacy a leading influence in any peace conference. The only thing in connection with religion that should be taken in hand is that of insisting that special privileges for religion should be abolished, while leaving all religions free to exercise themselves under the general rule of freedom of opinion.

There are, as all informed people know, very strong influences in this and other countries that would have no objection to seeing the Papacy placed in a really dominating position. On the other hand, there are others who are not likely to forget that the world which is now in such a sad state is a world that has grown, so to speak, inside the Christian Church. Nothing but the state to which the older Church had reduced Europe would have brought about the Protestant Reformation. That, of necessity, meant a greater play of forces for betterment. But again, once the religious forces of Protestantism began to express themselves, the fight against ecclesiastical power was renewed. In our own time we have seen this battle expressing itself in a hundred and one different ways. The choice actually is always that of running the affairs of life in the light of new knowledge, better understanding, and a purely humanistic standard, or submitting to the control of a redressed supernaturalism which must always fight desperately against the creation of a society that will set up a standard of values based upon a belief in the humanising of mankind by man.

It was only with the development of modern thought and the exposure, first of the absurdities of the Christian creed, then the discovery of the origin of essential Christian doctrines, such as the transformation, by a ceremonial execution, of a man into a god, the origin of the virgin birth in the primitive belief that every child born was an incarnation of a tribal spirit, and the primitive character of the whole stock of Christian doctrines, that the Churches tried to create for their religion a foothold in social ethics. It is to the establishing of this falsity that the energies of Christian leaders is now being directed.

EVERYMAN'S BRAINS TRUST

THAT much maligned institution, the B.B.C., has rarely devised so popular a feature as the "Brains Trust." The charm of this programme lies in its spontaneity. Perhaps inevitably this is achieved at the expense of accuracy. It is astonishing that large numbers of people believe that Brains Trust sessions are rehearsed; as if such spontaneity could be simulated! What is less widely suspected is the careful censorship of all controversial questions. The Brains Trust is bombarded with questions inquiring whether they favour equal broadcasting opportunities for religious and political minorities. Embarrassing questions of this kind are consigned to oblivion long before they approach the microphone. Visiting "experts" whose opinions are well known to the B.B.C. give a semblance of impartiality to Brains Trust sessions. They can be relied upon to champion orthodoxy in the subjects that matter.

An enterprising journalist has sought to provide a medium more accurate and impartial than the B.B.C. Brains Trust has proved itself. His monthly publication, "Questions and Answers," invites questions upon any subject, the more controversial the better! Subscribers to "Everyman's Brains Trust" are denied the pleasure of a spontaneous and possibly witty reply over the radio. As some compensation they know that their

question will be published and the answer will be as precise and accurate as the best available references make possible.

Freethinkers will be delighted by the rationalism of "Q. & A.'s" editor. I cannot do better than quote from this lively periodical. The paper was asked: "Do you think the Christian's theory of life is socially convenient?" The reply was:

"To be strictly logical, all Christians should be one with Christ, and live the life of ascetics. Riches, pleasures, wars, and all that degrades humanity must be eschewed. Christians must prepare themselves for humiliation and the assaults of unreason, prejudice and bitterness. But since the whole social fabric of this country is utterly at variance with the Christian ideal, we assume that the Christian's theory of life is—well—just a theory.

What would the B.B.C. Brains Trust—or Mr. C. S. Lewis—say to the question: "How should one read the Bible to-day?" "Q. & A." replies:—

"Obviously as literature. To read the Bible as the final word on either human or heavenly things is to erect it as an obstacle in the pathway of progress. To read it as a record of Man's spiritual and moral development is to strengthen faith in the future. The Bible of the Race has yet to be written, for each age, as the poet expresses it, 'Adds a verse to it.'"

A Putney reader asks: "What would be the best form of protest to the B.B.C. against the appalling drivel of the Forces programme? Shall I shoot both producers and artists?" The reply is in lighter vein than usual:—

"No, don't shoot. Lord, have mercy on 'em! Letters to the Corporation are quite useless. A deputation might be received by those in power, but we fear the nuisance would continue. If the Secretary of State for War could be persuaded to send an armed force to Broadcasting House with orders to shoot unless amends were made within a stipulated time, his action would meet with almost universal approval. In the meantime, try to be patient."

Here is a question which Sir John Reith might ponder on: "Can you tell me why the B.B.C. insist on imposing the Calvinist Fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible on long-suffering listeners?"

"This is one of those questions difficult to answer. Why not write to the B.B.C. about it yourself? It can be argued that minorities have a right to be heard, but why should those who differ be denied the right to 'air' their own opinions? There are hundreds of doubters in this country, also a sprinkling of Buddhists, Mohammedans and Parsis (all subjects of the King) who are not permitted to broadcast their religious persuasions. The R.P.A. publish an excellent pamphlet called 'B.B.C. and Religion,' by Clericus."

The editor of "Q. & A." is really unkind in his reply to a correspondent who is writing a book on Platitudes and seeks classic examples. He is told:—

"Study Hansard. Read the speeches of A. J. Balfour, those of honourable members of the House of Commons, also Communist, Conservative, Liberal and Socialist leaders. Peruse the daily Press, listen-in to the religious services of the B.B.C., however wearisome it may be to you. In all of these you will reap a rich harvest."

I have not space to quote the whole of "Q. & A.'s" reply to the question why Dr. Temple and other Bishops "presume to occupy seats in the House of Lords, and together conspire to bar much progressive legislation," since Dr. Temple has categorically declared, "The Church can never have a precise social programme . . . its job is to preach the Gospels and proclaim the principles that are involved in the Gospels." The extract that follows will be largely seconded by Freethinkers:—

"No religion can be successfully run without organisation, and politics enter very largely into the organisation of the

Christian religion. Indeed, by and large, Christianity is more political in its implications than many people believe. God has to assume all the manifold weaknesses of humanity to be at all understandable. He must uphold the traditions of our country, prove himself a good Conservative, be opposed to innovations that affect the interests of 'big business,' can never be a Communist or even a Liberal, must always be assumed to be angry with trifles, must always be a friend with wars that are waged 'in good causes,' never be squeamish about unemployment, or even remotely interested in the starving millions. Having moulded God in a form conforming to their heart's desire, and finding the deity acceptable and understandable to the common people, the Churches have standardised their religion and made it into a sort of limited liability company in the sure knowledge it will continue to flourish until such time as its shareholders become dissatisfied with the dividends."

"Questions and Answers" is, of course, concerned with all subjects. It is refreshing to meet a paper so free from cant and prejudice. Its publication is evidence that serious thought and scepticism as regards the political and religious "status quo" is increasing. The publication is obtainable, price 7d., post free, from 35, Doughty Street, London, W.C.1.

JOHN DARKER.

A MISUNDERSTOOD PROBLEM

AS an Atheist of 40 years' standing I am puzzled by the inter-
necine ill-humour which this Jesus business seems to excite
among fellow-Freethinkers. Take Mr. C. M. Hollingham's
article of November 15. He calls me "self-elected judge and
jury in my own case." What damaging imputation this is
meant to convey passes my understanding. If to venture an
opinion on a disputed question (and that is all I have done) is
to be "self-elected judge and jury in my own case," most of us,
I imagine, are in that invidious position most days of our lives.

Since the mere mention of Jesus causes some people to take
leave of their sense of proportion, I will state the question at
issue impersonally. Three documents, A, B and C, purport to
relate the life of a person D. As history, these documents are
all three gravely discredited by their contradictions, their
extravagant fund of miracle and the absence of any contem-
porary corroboration. The question arises whether they are
100 per cent. fiction or are written round an historical nucleus.
In this inquiry a material exhibit, so to speak, is a passage
occurring in all three in which D, addressing his followers,
predicts that some of his hearers will not die till a certain extra-
ordinary event takes place. The phrase describing the extra-
ordinary event varies in A, B and C; but all three call it the
coming of a "kingdom": A calls it the kingdom of the Son of
Man, B and C the kingdom of God. In any case, it was not an
event that had happened when the prophecy was committed to
writing. The inference is that at that time some of the hearers
of D were still alive: hence, that D, to whom the words were
attributed, had really lived, however extravagant the legend
might be that was written round him. The essential factors,
it will be seen, are (1) the ascription of the words to D; (2) their
prediction of an event within the lifetime of bystanders on the
occasion of its utterance; and (3) its non-fulfilment, though those
who ascribed it to D must have expected its fulfilment.

Mr. Hollingham (civility costs nothing, so I give him his full
name) tries to overthrow the argument, firstly, by a parallel
from Ezekiel. In the parallel, however, while factors (1) and (3)
are present, factor (2) is not; i.e. while the prophecy in Ezekiel
was ascribed to Yahveh and was unfulfilled, there is no question
of bystanders on the occasion of utterance. Ezekiel, following

common form, claims that Yahveh inspired *his* prophecy. Mark
says, not that Jesus inspired *him* to make the prophecy, but that
Jesus, living on earth some time ago, addressed the prophecy to
certain persons who still live—a totally different thing. The
parallel therefore is not made out.

Mr. Hollingham ridicules my reference to "specified dates." But the date of Pilate's procuratorship (26-36) is definite enough, and is connected with the career of Jesus in all our Gospels. There is no parallel to this in the case of Ezekiel's Yahveh.

Secondly, Mr. Hollingham seeks a parallel in the expectation by Australian aborigines of a deliverer from the white man. This is a parallel to Jewish Messianism in general. But Mr. Hollingham forgets the difference in cultural background. The Gospels, though riddled with what, by our standards, is gross superstition, were at any rate written for people who could read and who lived in a civilised society. So different, indeed, on Mr. Hollingham's own showing is the background of the Gospels to that of the Australian bush 100 years ago, that he speculates on an astronomical interpretation of the Gospel text! I happen to have enough astronomy to know what the "vernal colure" is. How many readers of this journal have? And if most of us do not know it, how many first readers of the Gospels are likely to have known it?

Mr. Hollingham does not know what was meant by the kingdom of God, and thinks the Gospel-writers did not know either. We know at least what the average Jew of the centuries round about the Christian era meant by it. A host of apocalyptic writings from Daniel onward are there to tell us. It meant the utter end of the existing world-order—not the secular shift of an imaginary line in the heavens due to the precession of the equinoxes, discovered by Hipparchus in 130 B.C. and known to few outside the lecture-rooms of the astronomers. Nothing in the New Testament (except the isolated texts Luke xvii, 20-21, and John xviii, 36) suggests that the average Christian differed in this from the average Jew. The very name "Christian" (i.e. Messianist—a politically-sounding adjective formed on the analogy of "Caesarian" or "Herodian") indicates the reverse. New movements do not win the masses by allegorising about the precession of the equinoxes, but by offering escape from earthly evils. The political history of the time is more germane to the inquiry into Christian origins than are the signs of the Zodiac.

Mr. Hollingham disclaims drawing any parallel between the Synoptic prophecy and the Lazarus miracle. I am glad for his sake. But he still seems to think the Lazarus affair somehow relevant to this discussion. I therefore point out that the statement by John (writing probably early in the second century) that many Jews *had* known of the Lazarus affair 80 or 90 years before is one thing, and the statement in the Synoptic source that Jesus predicted the end of the world-order in the lifetime of men to whom he spoke is another thing. The two have nothing in common.

But enough. I am interested in the Bible only as a world classic; in the historicity of Jesus only as a conundrum; and in this dispute only because I regret that Freethinkers should treat as part of their case a disputable theory, the truth or falsehood of which is entirely irrelevant to the business of fighting superstition.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

MORE ABOUT AN ATHEIST IN THE FORCES

A DEBATING and discussion group started at our camp three weeks ago, sponsored by the C. of E. chaplain and his assistant.

The first week's subject was "The Influence of the Cinema"; the second, "Communism: What Is it?"; and the third, "The Case for Secular Education." The first I could not attend, but

hearing the review, felt I could have said much; particularly as no mention had been made of the idiotic "A" film condition of a parent or guardian accompanying the child. But that is not the subject of this article.

The second I attended and enjoyed. It was so nice to hear the parsons uttering fulsome praise of Russia's war effort. Not that they could believe the evidence of their senses. They believed in Communism, indefinable, inexpressible, ineffable—but with God in it; they were adamant in their assertions that it had to have that ingredient. They mentioned Christian principles and then left (on principle?) before I could cross swords. The field was left to my R.C. friend and myself. He voiced the orthodox Catholic position, "We are reluctantly compelled to accept and admit their (Russia's) help now; but we shall kick them in the pants afterwards if Holy Mother Church has her way."

The few Communists present were forceful and earnest but, to me, made the mistake of giving a finality to their aspirations. A heaven on earth—or contemplation of one's navel through all eternity. There would be nothing left to fight for.

The "Case for Secular Education" I proposed, and is the excuse for these further jottings of an Atheist in the Forces. My case I had prepared from experience (my home is in Liverpool); from conviction (I have a young son); and from wider knowledge of the subject in reading the Secular Education League's "Case for Secular Education," Chapman Cohen's "Fight for the Child," and "The Freethinker" articles on the current controversy and religious plot.

I was well armed, but held my fire. It came about in this way. Prior to the meeting the chairman for the evening, a young sergeant of earnest face and manner, said: "It should be an interesting discussion to-night, although I don't know anything about it or what it means."

I excused his ignorance and promised enlightenment later. The meeting was opened for discussion. I should have risen—remembered the sergeant—and waited. The enemy opened fire, or more correctly, presented me with some extra rounds.

"Mr. Chairman," began the padre, "what is secular education?" and proceeded to show he did not know, anyway. I could excuse the sergeant, but not him. Shorthand is not my accomplishment, but the following gems I took in longhand and read for his approval when following in the discussion. He spoke for some ten minutes, obviously without the slightest preparation or research, but forgot he hadn't the sanctity of the pulpit to protect him. Here are his scintillating effusions:—

1. Secular education, I suppose, may mean education without any reference to religion. I say education on background of any philosophy, however false, is preferable to that.

2. There is only one example of secular education—France—and look at her now! What a spectacle she presents.

3. Education in this country owes everything to Christianity, and we need more Christianity in the schools.

4. Secular education would give no anchor in life.

5. You can only train children to live when you give them some idea of purpose of life and what good character is. Education is based on what is good—and that is God.

6. The Christian position is that if religion is not true, goodness is not justified.

It is surely not necessary for me to give my replies here to the above gems, nor would space permit. I dealt with them as I came to them in the course of my prepared case.

My audience was small but very attentive. Representative, too, since it included (and almost comprised) two Canadians, a Scotsman, a Jew, an R.C. schoolmaster, the station education officer and, of course, the two C. of E. padres. They did not leave early this time, but were compelled to hear the Canadians,

the Scotsman, the Jew and the education officer assert they had come with open minds; that they had heard the evidence of both sides; and felt compelled to agree the only equitable solution of educational advance was the secular one.

My R.C. schoolmaster friend had done no more than repeat in essence the statement of his Liverpool Archbishop in 1925: "I want to let it be known to the Government and to all concerned that having put up these schools and provided places for every Catholic child, we do not mean to be swindled out of what we have done. Catholic children are going to stop in their Catholic schools, and if a score of other places were provided, our children are not going there." This, after the Liverpool Education Authority in 1924 had condemned 40 schools, 16 of which were Catholic. And Dr. Downey's statement when the blitz on Liverpool was at its height: "Rather than Catholic children should be evacuated to places of safety where they would not get Catholic instruction and atmosphere, it were better for them to stay and be bombed." That is quoted from memory, but the essence is correct, for my R.C. friend supported it!

The debate closed at 9-45 p.m., but not the discussion. We continued unofficially until 11 p.m. The sergeant and myself finished at 1 a.m.! But then I said before he was an earnest young man. He wanted to know so much; I had so much to tell him.

If religion is not true, goodness is not justified! This weekend my Atheist better half, doing her bit on war work to help the family budget, visited a sick workmate (of recent acquaintance) to take her a few flowers and share her wage packet with the invalid. Well, well, well. She deserves to go to hell!

A. J.

OUR SCHEME OF THE UNIVERSE

(Being a chapter from the Text Book of Esoteric Priestcraft for Young Priests on the Sophisticated Register. We wish to state that the book was *not* obtained surreptitiously from the secret archives of the Vatican one day when the Pope had gone out. No. It was obtained in a perfectly honourable manner out of—the author's own head.)

THE Universe consists of:—

1. Heaven.
2. Hell.
3. Purgatory.
4. Earth.
5. Space containing millions of stars, etc., and in which Earth is a speck of dust. (No. 5 may be ignored.)

The population of the Universe consists of:—

1. The One Supreme God who is also (to the delight of our clientele, who love contradictions in terms) Three Gods but yet only One.
2. The Queen of Heaven, once a human female but now, somewhat unconventionally, the King of Heaven's Consort. (Unconventionally because the only marriage lines known in connection with her were not in connection with the K. of H. but with an obscure Jew, Joseph, who also resides now in heaven.)
3. Angels, good and bad, created seemingly by mere fiat of the K. of H., the good living in heaven, the bad in hell, but both kinds also floating, casual, round the Universe.
4. Miscellaneous patriarchs, saints and other lucky humans, bred and born on earth, but now residing permanently in heaven.
5. The damned, bred and born on earth, but now consigned permanently to hell.
6. An intermediate class, humans bred and born on earth but undergoing a (temporary) roasting in purgatory preliminary to a final residence in heaven.

7. Humans, bred and born on earth and temporarily residing there while qualifying for either hell (permanently), or purgatory (temporarily, as a stage en route for heaven for keeps).

As there are enough angels, both good and bad, there is no talk of any further supplies of them being produced. Earth appears to be the sole spawning ground of the Universe, and though it produces billions of living creatures in hundreds of thousands of varieties, our God is only interested in one species, namely humans. The rest are of no importance as far as we or our clients are concerned.

The logical deduction from the above scheme is that the most important thing for a human being in this life is to arrange to give hell a miss and get properly ticketed for heaven, and this, of course, is where WE come in. We tell our clients that Our organisation is God's Own, organised specially for guiding Our people safely past hell and mailing them to heaven. We assert that Our President is God's officially appointed Manager for the Earth and the Rest of US are his staff, superior to all other humans. WE are for the purpose of supervising mankind, telling them what God's purposes and instructions are, offering them Salvation, and we are also authorised to give them hell if they do not accept our terms and put themselves under OUR supervision and ordering-about. The ticketing for heaven is OUR job and OUR'S ONLY.

Put thus in brief, naked, stripped of trimmings, the Tale is a bald and unconvincing narrative; in fact, in its nakedness it is indecent. That, of course, is more or less true of all confidence tricksters' tales. It is OUR-YOUR trade and job to make the tale plausible and profitable by giving it such a jungle of trimmings that the dupes cannot see the wood for the trees.

We have many ways of impressing our clientele with the "truth" of our pretensions. At one end of the scale we cater for the "intellectuals" and purvey theology, which is the "science" of God. Rambling round about and about with theology keeps quite a lot out of worse mischief. Our system traces back to God the Creator of the Universe, All Wise, All Powerful (note, by the way, the beneficent beneficence of Capital Letters). Neither we nor anyone else can prove the existence of God. No one can put him personally in evidence. But the big battalions *want* a personal God, and to "explain" the Universe as having been made by somebody satisfies them; and they want more than this. The world seems to carry on in a reckless, haphazard way the big battalions do not like, and they *want* to think that there is something more to it than this. Of course, the theory of God the Creator does not necessarily include God's continual interference in his creation. He might have made it and then, as a matter of curiosity, left it to see how it would go on by itself and where it would land itself. This would not satisfy the believers in God the Creator. For their mental comfort God must be Creator and Continual Interferer. Now this further assumption is a very large assumption indeed, though having managed to believe in what after all is only an assumption, namely the idea of God, they can and do make the next step without any consciousness that they have gone too quickly. If God created the Universe what more "reasonable" than to think that he interferes in it? It is perfectly easy for him to do it, therefore he does it. Oh, very reasonable. But we are getting into a danger zone. If you start with a correct premise and build on it logically, you go from one correct conclusion to another. But if your premise is incorrect your logical sequences on it will sooner or later bring you to a conclusion that is an obvious *reductio ad absurdum*. We have got to the stage where the "interference" of God is quite "reasonable." (We are using the word interference in its strictly scientific sense.) Very well. A common (asserted) "interference" is an "inspired" message from God. Nothing unreasonable in this. Quite easy for God to do. No objections to it. In fact, quite likely that he *should* thus get into communication with his

"children." Oh certainly. But now we come to the snag, to the "reductio." Lots of asserted-to-be inspired messages from God have come, and they don't tally with each other. In fact, they mostly contradict each other. (The same applies to the messages and the respective sets of believers!) In fact, strictly between ourselves the message question is a thing *pour vive* for anybody with common sense. But luckily for us the majority consists of "mostly fools." This majority does not see the *reductio ad absurdum* of the "inspired messages" mix-up. What happens is that by a sort of snobbery, people of the type of our clientele give their patronage to some particular "inspired message" and then, because it happens to be "theirs," they uphold it against all comers. They take a proprietary interest in it; which means that the *reductio ad absurdum* is for them pushed several steps further on.

1. The "absurdum" can be moved on best by short steps.
2. If many people are simultaneously urged down the slippery slope of credulity the herd instinct helps considerably. Where an individual would feel silly alone he feels quite all right in company. People can be led to believe the silliest absurdities if supported by a crowd.
3. (Perhaps the best way of all.) Get your absurdities into children. They will enjoy swallowing marvels that would choke an adult.

C. BOYD FREEMAN.

CORRESPONDENCE

AN APPEAL

SIR,—I know your readers are not believers in the Christmas myth, but a holiday time gives us a chance to think of the poor children of the East End who may be in hospitals in East London. They are in great need of small toys. I have been able to purchase only very few. Will your readers who love children look in their cupboards and send what they can spare to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Hackney Road, London, or to me at 27, Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2.

Thank you.—Yours, etc.,

HELEN LUCAS.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; Parliament Hill Fields: 3-30 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11-0 Professor G. W. KLETON, M.A., LL.D.—"Some Makers of Modern England: (3) William III."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

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

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Open Meeting—"Cremation."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. U. K. KRISHNA MENON (Secretary of India League)—"India."

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