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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

More About the B.B.C.

JUDGING from the letters received, the two articles I wrote dealing with the B.B.C. have proved to be of general interest. I believe that a number of readers have sent letters to the B.B.C., but they are not likely to see the light of day. The B.B.C. believes in giving every listener the right of protest, but it counts the votes itself and seldom publishes any direct attack or sound criticism. The Roman Church denies the right to freedom of criticism to its members, but that is well known, and people usually can openly challenge the right of the Church, and the Church has no control—that is, no recognised control—over outsiders. But the B.B.C. is a monopoly. It commands the air, and it has become almost a necessity to the country. There is hardly any limit for good or evil that such a monopoly may not realise.

It will be remembered that a few weeks ago we published a letter from one of the Directors of the B.B.C. that the policy of handling religious subjects and of preventing any adverse criticism of Christianity was decided by a committee of Christian clergymen. The Director then went on to explain that Freethinking opinions, which must include criticism, could be offered in the "Brains Trust and similar programmes" where free discussion was encouraged. The first explanation was an exhibition of undiluted intolerance and a disgrace at a time when we are paying such lip homage to "Democracy" and personal liberty. The second was a deliberate falsehood. Criticism of Churches may be permitted—provided it is mild enough, but what listener has ever heard a straightforward criticism of religion? I remember a case of a manuscript in which the writer, in dealing with the first expressions of a particular theory, now accepted by all, wrote the sentence "The Churches, as usual, opposed this new theory." The censorship of the B.B.C. changed the sentence to "The new idea met with opposition." The first version was an historical generalisation. The second was just—nothing, for every idea has met with opposition. This kind of thing will go on until men of standing throw popularity and payment

to the winds and insist on having their speeches broadcast as they are written. One hardly knows which is the worse in such cases, the censorship which cuts and alters or the speaker who submits. Some, of course, have refused to submit to the indignity. But they are few. Others, whom it was known would not submit, are never invited to speak.

Samples from Bulk

Now let us look at the Brains Trust, where *free discussion is encouraged*. I recently took notes of three successive "sessions of the Brains Trust." They are, I must emphasise, successive, not three selected as they suited a set purpose. Here are the questions put for which a very lavish payment is made, to say nothing of the advertisement.

First Session.—"At what age should children enter elementary schools?" "Shall we ever have legal clinics established?" "What are the best and most accurate histories to read?" "What is the average age of an M.P., and what chance is there of a young man getting into Parliament?" "Are Aberdonians mean, and do they lack a sense of humour?" "Would the Brains Trust advocate mixed sexes in schools?" "What accounts for the different height of the tide at the two ends of the Panama Canal?" "What is the secret of learning to love poetry?"

Second Session.—"What is the meaning of Fifth Column?" "Can we have Democracy without having Bureaucracy?" "Is it true that dreams last only a few seconds?" "Should there be free traffic for the people?" "How did different languages originate?" "How did the Romans make their calculations in numbers?" "What is to be said in favour of altering the rule of the road?" "Is the split infinitive necessary?" "Can the Brains Trust explain the cause of a 'second wind'?" "If Parliament was composed of independent members, how would it work?" "Why do germs affect people differently in different countries?" "Why is yawning infective?"

Third Session.—"Can we say that we are better than our fathers?" "What is the difference between Republican and Democrat in the U.S.A.?" "Why is it that horses and cows do not take cold in the open and humans do?" "Has propaganda played an important part in the present war?" "What is the ideal job?" "Is the influence of women on affairs greater in the U.S.A. than it is here?" "Is there a criminal streak in all of us?"

Here now are *three sessions*. Some of the answers were absurd in their triviality—such as the contribution of C. E. M. Joad that in America the men spent their time in making money and so women were left to encourage art and music. That will have caused a hearty laugh to those who are acquainted with the valuable research work that goes on in the U.S.A. in pure science, in anthropology and in ethnology. My own bookshelves bear ample testimony to this.

For some unfathomable reason, all but one question is said to be unknown. That condition is illustrative of the childish planning of the whole thing. For the people who ask for information—which they could get by writing to many of our current journals—wish to get the correct answer, they are not testing the knowledge and memory of those present, just as the teacher of a class might test the general intelligence of his pupils. If these questions are worth answering—at twenty guineas per head per sitting—they should be given out the week before, then people would get the correct answers, or at least the considered opinion of those who reply.

But I am more concerned with the kind of questions asked, or, one ought to say, with the kind of questions that are permitted. First of all, in spite of the deliberate statement made by a B.B.C. Director, all questions that would be likely to criticise religious beliefs are carefully excluded. So are all other questions that come under the head of "dangerous." The B.B.C. works on the principle of selecting the questions and, to a considerable extent, determines the answer. Some may remember that a well-known scientist, said by Professor Julian Huxley to know more than any other man he knew, bluntly met a question that had slipped in when he was called on to answer a question, "Do you really wish to have it answered?" There was a dead silence, and that scientist has never been invited to come back. The Romans had a maxim, "Give the people bread and the circus and they will be content." That really gives the B.B.C. Brains Trust policy in a nutshell. The Brains Trust gives the impression of probing into things, and it really does that, but in reality only "safe" questions are asked. But whether the questions that are selected by the B.B.C. as being quite safe deserve to be called educational is quite another question. Not to find an outlet for human curiosity would certainly be a dangerous policy. To find harmless outlets for superabundant mental energy is a wise precaution. Even Hitler would not object to Germans discussing most of the subjects talked about by the Brains Trust.

A Licensed Fraud

Look at the three successive programmes! In one of the wisest of his writings—the one on Education—Herbert Spencer wrote that it is not a question of whether certain information is good or bad, but what information is of most good. I think that applies to the Brains Trust. The items may all be interesting, but the main point is that, first, they can be acquired with fair ease in a decent public library, and second, they keep the mind employed away from pressing problems, the frank discussion of which would be really helpful at a time when understanding of these problems are vital to the future of the world. It will be noted that serious and fundamental discussions on economics, on religion, on politics, on the family, and so forth, are all carefully avoided. They are, we know, sent in, but they are carefully set aside, and whenever there is a tendency for an answer to approach a "dangerous" idea, the master of the ceremonies carefully wards them off or shuts them out. And the older the Brains Trust becomes, the more firmly this method is established, the more certainly it is followed by all those who are invited to advertise. As one of the Governors of the B.B.C. explained, the microphone goes into every

home, and the most ignorant of these homes is taken by the B.B.C. as a guide. The Roman plan, give the people games and bread, is carefully observed.

Some of my readers may remember "Dooley," a fictitious character who flourished during the time of the Boer War. A vital question—an artificially made one—was whether the Outlanders should have a vote or not. Said Dooley: "If I had been President Kruger I would have given the vote—and done the counting myself." The B.B.C. Brains Trust is Dooley incarnate. It says to the public, "Send us your questions and we will provide experts who will discuss them." But it reserves and practises the right to say which subjects shall be discussed. I am convinced that Goebbels would endorse that policy—in fact, he practises it. To say to the people "Thou shalt not think" would be ridiculous. You can no more prevent the human brain functioning than you can prevent water finding its level. It is the control of opinion that is important to all tyrannies, whether religious or otherwise. The B.B.C. is a State-created monopoly. Some kind of an antidote to its calculated misdirection—in the avowed interests of the Churches, and unavowed interests in other directions—would exist if, like Canada and the United States, rival broadcasting systems were permitted. That, however, is denied us. And the subjects by the B.B.C. are not determined by the best intelligence of to-day but by the lower. So far, we can agree, the Brains Trust does its work well. Bread, and the circus for ever!

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE NEW CANDIDE Or the Best of All Possible Worlds

(With apologies to the Shade of the illustrious Saint Voltaire)
WHEN Monsieur Voltaire left Candide and his little company to cultivate their garden, each of them expected to enjoy the felicity of a tranquil life. With the inevitable optimism of human creatures, they reckoned without their own natures and the blessing of the present European War (which was destined, like all wars, to bring so many wonderful benefits to mankind). On September 3, 1939, Candide and his household joyfully gathered round the wireless to hear that best of all possible Prime Ministers, Neville Chamberlain, tell the best of all possible countries, the British Dominions (and anyone else who could understand English) that Britain—without knowing it—had declared war upon Germany.

"Bad news," declared Martin, sourly.

"Sad news," amended Candide, remembering his soldier days and the deaths, mutilations, woundings, burnings, wastages, destructions and diseases he had known in the last war, which had begotten this one.

"Glad news," contradicted Dr. Pangloss, as optimistic now as in younger days, "for now we shall fight for Christianity and freedom; and what can be better? Moreover, self-sacrifice will take the place of selfishness with the whole nation—except perhaps a few Government contractors and munition-makers who, strangely enough, do not seem to be infected with the prevailing spirit of noble patriotism and zeal for the general welfare. Also there will be deathless deeds of heroism and matchless courage, and heroes will be as plentiful as potatoes. Is not heroism, after all, the greatest of virtues? It is certainly a noble thing."

"I doubt it," retorted Martin, gloomily. "There is nothing noble amongst mankind, if you ask me."

"Why can't we have Christianity and freedom and self-sacrifice and heroism without fighting, if we really want such things?" inquired Cunegunde with feminine spirit. "For my

part I am prepared to do without all of them rather than have nice young boys killed or horribly hurt."

"So am I," agreed Paquette. "If it were the old politicians who took the risk of death, there'd be no war, in my opinion."

"Women don't understand these things, my dear daughters," declared the Rev. Father Giroflée. "You are better guided by Holy Church, which teaches us that there are righteous wars, of which this, no doubt, will be one. There was even war in Heaven when St. Michael and his angels fought the Dragon and his angels. Fortunately the clergy are exempt. They have higher tasks than fighting for righteousness."

"But holy father—" Cunegunde was beginning.

"Hush," said Candide. "Listen to Chamberlain."

They heard, with awe, the Premier's statement.

"Fighting against evil things," Martin echoed Chamberlain's words. "The other side is always evil. I remember the Boer War and the first Anglo-Franco-German War—we were told the same tale. Yet Jesus said 'Resist not evil.' Germans will be told they, too, are fighting evil. Yet when Britons and Germans believe they are fighting evil, the truth is they are only fighting—each other."

"But Nazism is evil—very evil," objected Candide.

"So it is. So is British parliamentary hypocrisy. So are all human systems of government. No government at all would be better," said Martin.

"I did think Chamberlain's voice sounded trembly," interrupted Paquette, bored as usual by masculine disputes.

"It trembled with determination," said Candide.

"It trembled from senility," sneered Martin.

"It trembled from a very proper sense of the occasion," said the Rev. Father.

"It trembled from fright," said Cunegunde.

"At any rate, it trembled for the best," opined Pangloss.

"Indeed, if it had not, his audience might have thought him callous. Like that arch-devil Hitler."

"Or that other horrible fiend Stalin, linked with him in the Russo-German Pact," declared Father Giroflée. "That Atheist is destined to the everlasting bonfire."

"Still, Father, that Pact is for the best, as it prevents Russian Atheism from being allied with British Christianity, which would never do in the sight of Heaven," said Pangloss. "Everyone except Bernard Shaw seems to be convinced of that."

The Reverend Father Giroflée warmly agreed with good Dr. Pangloss, whose metaphysico-theologo-cosmologo-noodleology was as admirable now as when Voltaire first revealed it to an appreciative world. He said that, as usual, the learned doctor's views upon Russia were not only exquisite good sense, but also in excellent taste, as well as in accord with the opinions of our Holy Father the Pope.

Dr. Pangloss bowed and said that it was always a pleasure to have the approval of the reverend gentleman. Compliments were ended suddenly by the loud, raucous and dismal wailing of a number of air-raid sirens, which immediately began as Chamberlain ended.

Startled, the little company gazed at each other with blanched faces and questioning eyes. Each (as folk will in sudden emergency) called upon his or her god quite involuntarily.

"Holy Virgin!" said Paquette.

"Goodness me!" said Candide.

"My hat!" said Martin, meaning, no doubt, its contents.

"Blessed Saint Cunegunde!" said Cunegunde.

"God!" said Dr. Pangloss—not specifying which god, but doubtless meaning the best of all possible gods.

"Holy Saints!" exclaimed the Rev. Father.

Then they began to reassure each other. It did not mean that the Germans had been listening to Neville and had immediately swooped. Or if it did, they had a long way to go from the coast to Candide's house and garden in the country. Or the sirens were only being tested to make sure that they would be plainly heard

—as they certainly could be! Or it was to test British nerves and get them used to such assaults.

Still—you never knew! That man Hitler was so extraordinary. He was capable of anything. He might have his aeroplanes waiting behind the cliffs of Dover, and out of devilish spite, at Chamberlain's very proper remarks about Germany, have launched them upon this always-unprepared and righteous country. Dr. Pangloss thought this possible. Father Giroflée thought it probable. The fair Cunegunde was sure of it. As to Paquette, she was more than certain of it.

(It was not until next day's newspapers that they learned that the sirens, like most war happenings, were a plain and simple blunder.)

"Well," said Candide with false gaiety, when they were tired of the discussion and no bombs had dropped, "war or no war, we must cultivate our stomachs. That, with all respect to my creator, M. Voltaire, is even more important than cultivating one's garden. Now, what about luncheon?"

Dr. Pangloss and Father Giroflée beamed approval, and even Martin nodded assent. Mankind, which disagrees about God, religion, politics, metaphysics, science, literature, music and everything indeed upon which disagreement is possible, always is able to agree upon—having lunch! Cunegunde, in spite of her "neat hand with the pastry," frowned, for she was tired of everlasting daily cooking, but she and Paquette, in accordance with the traditional duty of woman, rushed off to the kitchen.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

(To be concluded)

THE ENGLISH GOVERNMENT

As for the English Government, it clearly arose in conquest; and to speak of a British constitution is playing with words. Parliament, imperfectly and capriciously elected, is supposed to hold the common purse in trust; but the men who vote the supplies are also those who receive them. The national purse is the common hack on which each party mounts in turn, in the countryman's fashion of "ride and tie" . . . As for our system of conducting wars, it is done over the heads of the people. War is with us the art of conquering at home. Taxes are not raised to carry on wars, but wars are raised to carry on taxes. The shrewd hard-hitting blows range over the whole surface of existing institutions. Godwin saw in the follies and crimes of mankind nothing worse than the effects of "prejudice" and the consequences of fallacious reasoning. Paine saw more self-interest in the world than fallacies. When he first came to preach the abolition of war, first through an alliance of Britain, America and France, and then through a confederation of nations and a European Congress, he saw the obstacle in the egoism of courts and courtiers which appeared to quarrel, but agreed to plunder. Another seven years, he wrote in 1792, would see the end of monarchy and aristocracy in Europe. "Shelley, Godwin and their Circle," by H. N. Brailsford (1936).

THE RAVAGE OF WAR

Fancy what we should have had around us now, if, instead of quarrelling and fighting over their work, the nations had aided each other in their work, or if even in their conquests, instead of effacing the memorials of those they succeeded and subdued, they had guarded the spoils of their victories. Fancy what Europe would be now, if the delicate statues and temples of the Greeks—in the broad roads and massy walls of the Romans—if the noble and pathetic architecture of the middle ages, had not been ground to dust by mere human rage. You talk of the scythe of Time, and the tooth of Time: I tell you Time is scytheless and toothless; it is we who gnaw like the worm—we who snite like the scythe. It is ourselves who abolish—ourselves who consume: we are the mildew, and the flame; and the soul of man is to its own work as the moth that frets when it cannot fly, and as the hidden flame that blasts where it cannot illuminate. All these lost treasures of human intellect have been wholly destroyed by human industry of destruction; the marble would have stood its two thousand years as well in the polished statue as in the Parian cliff; but we men have ground it to powder, and mixed it with our own ashes.—RUSKIN.

ACID DROPS

THE Headmaster of Winchester School and the Hampshire County Council have worked out a scheme by which a limited number of boys from the elementary schools may be taken into Winchester. The scheme is to start in 1944. We are sorry to get the news. Such a plan will simply not do. Consider: from many thousands of schoolchildren a mere handful of the best is selected and sent off to first-class boarding schools. Ten are to enter each. Result: in nine cases out of ten he takes on the pattern of the public school and looks upon his elementary schoolboy comrades as of an inferior brand. It is that kind of thing we want to abolish.

There are many good features in these public schools, but they *must* be made available to all, not to a selected few. Neither money nor position should have anything to do with securing admission. The only condition of entering these upper schools should be ability—the test of examinations. Finally, the education should be free to all who can qualify to enter. At present the majority of the pupils in these public schools are there because their parents have money enough to pay the fees. Free education from infant school to University should be the rule. Then the mixing of all classes would really do something to create a democracy in fact. At present it is largely a mere term. A political democracy that does not pave the way for a social democracy is at best but a poor thing.

We have said many times that the Churches, particularly the Roman Church, are not really interested in education. They are interested, first, in holding their flock together; second, to gather more sheep when possible. The "Universe" for November 27 says without hesitation, in a leading article, that "The supreme purpose of education is to prepare us in this life to enjoy the eternal happiness in the next." That is plain. Education under Roman Catholic auspices is of no earthly use—it is to get us ready for the next.

What puzzles us is how it can be done. If the next life is different from this life, how can we train for it in this one? One doesn't live on water to foster a taste for whisky. You simply cannot prepare for life in the tropics by spending a year in the Arctic. If, on the other hand, the future life is similar to this one, then, if we go on making the best of this life, we need not bother about the next. It will come, and we shall be ready for it. That looks as though the secular plan to which all Christians are more or less opposed, is the better after all. It seems clear that the Christian plan is of no earthly use from whichever point of view we study it. Long ago Gibbon said that it was not in this world that Christians aimed at being either happy or useful. He appears to have hit the nail on the head.

We notice a well-worded letter in a recent issue of the "New English Weekly" (November 26), by Ad. Corrick. The plea for secular education as an act of justice to the child and to citizens is persuasively put. We should like to see letters of the same kind in many other papers.

Actors are, on the whole, a very generous body of men and women. In the course of each year they frequently give their services for this or that charitable purpose. Since the war commenced they have given a very large number of performances for the benefit of the forces. Among those who have cheerfully "done their bit" are well-known characters such as Fay Compton, Leslie Henson, Jessie Matthews, and others. Probably £100,000 has been raised by them since the war began. But recently that stupid and bigoted crowd, "The Lord's Day Observance Society," threatened that if costumes were worn at a certain performance (they are forbidden by these idiotic Sunday laws) they would enter an action against those taking part in the play. So the performance was abandoned. Thousands of deserving people are thus going short of what they might have had. We are a free people and so intelligent that we permit the bullying by one of the most fundamentally

ignorant crowds in the country to stop a theatrical performance on Sunday. Pantomimes must be performed in churches only, on Sunday.

We repeat the advice we have often given. There is only one thing to be done with some laws—break them. Let the actors take their courage in both hands. Get someone to rent them the building and then "on with the show." Two or three prosecutions would rouse such a storm that the Acts would be repealed. More than one reform has been brought about in that way.

We are reminded by a reader that a few years ago it was suggested to the then Archbishop of Canterbury—he was chairman of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners—that from the £280,000 received annually by the Church of England as mining royalties from Durham and Northumberland, £50,000 should be given to the old people of Durham and Northumberland. The Archbishop replied that this money was intended for the Church and it must not be used for other purposes. Of the total sum, the Commissioners invested £80,000, which left £200,000 for distribution—among the churches.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has been talking largely on his desire to rebuild society, and even attack investments. But nothing has been said by him of the huge income of the churches from ground rents and royalties. He has shown himself eager—with the assistance of the Government—to get the children well in hand, and we do not think he would dispute the statement that if the people are not caught by the Churches when they are very young they will not be converted when they have grown up. All the same, it should be good news to the miners of Durham and Northumberland that of the huge sums paid in mining royalties, £280,000 goes for very pious uses. Probably Archbishop Temple would explain that this money is given to God. In that case there should be a change of collectors now and then.

The Roman Catholic "Universe" also runs a Brains Trust and, to do it justice, is a more honest, and therefore more honourable than that of the B.B.C., for it does what it claims to do—answer questions bearing on the Roman Catholic religion. But to one question the other day, whether a rosary had been made from the tree that supplied the thorns for the head of Jesus, the reply was that it was open to doubt. We are getting on. But what of the miracles of Lourdes, of the Neapolitan flask of blood that undergoes a change when certain prayers are said? Can the cause of the liberality of opinion be financial? Buying crowns of thorns for head-dressing is never likely to be very fashionable. But a bottle of the darkness that overspread Egypt, the impress of the face of Jesus on pieces of linen, and so forth, are promising stocks to have laid by.

Among the other curiosities of religious literature, there has just been issued a "Bedside Bible." The use of a bedside book, we take it, is to encourage sleep. There are unquestionably many parts of the Bible calculated to induce sleep, and some other parts, if those who read the Bible believed in them, would keep them awake from sheer fear. But if the news of a bedside Bible reaches heaven we can imagine god-almighty getting rather riled at finding his only adventure into literature turned into a sleep-creating specific.

But why go to the Bible for a narcotic? What is the matter with thousands of old sermons, and very many new ones? Many have been the complaints that members of the congregation went to sleep during sermon-time, and in the seventeenth century—we fancy even later in America—an official would walk about the church with a long cane which he used for waking up those who went to sleep during sermon-time. Decidedly many of the old sermons would do much better for a bedside narcotic than would even the Bible.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. O.—Thanks. Will be used.

C. P. THOMPSON.—We have neither received, nor do we expect, any replies to our criticism of the B.B.C. Those immediately concerned have at least the wisdom to remain silent. Perhaps they are not quite so foolish as they appear at first glance.

B. WILLIAMS.—A good way to break down our ridiculous Sunday laws would be to ignore them. That is the final treatment for unjust, out-of-date and stupid laws.

E. CRUMPTON.—Many thanks for book; very welcome.

C. H. CARTWRIGHT.—We noted the phrasing, but one should not be too critical on such occasions. Still, literally it is not correct for any Prime Minister to describe himself as the First Minister of the King. He is where he is as the First Minister of the People, for it is the people who send him into Parliament, and it is they he represents—for good or ill.

"CÆSAR."—We do not think anyone is seriously alarmed about what the Archbishop of Canterbury has said concerning reform, for most would agree with his generalities. But a number of people are alarmed by what many have taken the Archbishop to mean. That is the danger they fear. Some years back Bishop Magee said that any country that tried to put the teachings of Jesus into practice would fall to pieces in a very short time. But he stuck to his office.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—T. Hewson, 2s. 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.

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

WE are pleased to learn from our correspondence that quite a number of groups are initiating a Brains Trust, following the B.B.C. Brains Trust. But as these are not under the control of the B.B.C. they are conducted with greater fairness, and all sorts of questions crop up. Nor is there anyone to watch the questions as they arise. Religious questions are discussed with others, as they should be, and we are informed are welcomed by all—except when these meetings occur in military centres, and then the poor padres appear to have a warm time. Some of them must long for the protection the B.B.C. gives its preachers, although it may be that some of these Army clergymen have more self-respect than have most of the B.B.C. clerical army who welcome the protection offered.

"The Free-Will Controversy," by M. Davidson, D.Sc. (Watts and Company, 7s. 6d., pp. 116), offers a useful summary of the different opinions held from early times to the present on the subject of *Free-Will*—a rather unfortunate phrase for which Mr. Davidson is not responsible. If that term were dropped and a better and more modern one used it would help to clear the way for understanding. It is a pity that in a short glossary Mr. Davidson defines Materialism as "The doctrine that all the phenomena of the universe, including mind, can be explained in terms of physico-chemical realism." Philosophically and scientifically, that definition is hopelessly out of date. Those

who carry a little philosophy with their science will readily, we think, agree with this. And if that definition is revised or discarded the "problem" becomes no more than why does any combination of distinctive things end in producing some quality that is not found in any of the constituents. Hume was keen enough to see that much of the confusion round this question of "Free-Will" was due to the terminology used, and much has been done since his time. But Mr. Davidson has provided a useful summary of the opinions of a number of leading writers, and so makes for both reading and understanding, particularly the latter. For, as the Bible somewhere says, "Get knowledge, but above all get understanding." And it is understanding that is required here.

At the Barden House Club, Burnley, a debate will take place to-day (December 13) at 10.30 a.m. on "Is Christianity True?" between Mr. J. Oldham, who will take the affirmative, and Mr. J. Clayton, who takes the negative. Debates are always attractive, and we are confident that the Freethought case is in capable hands. Freethought in Lancashire owes much to the continuous work of Mr. Clayton in all parts of the county.

The Bishop of Norwich says there is an urgent need for every diocese to have "a council of the best and wisest men and women" to look after religious education in the schools. The difficulty is that the best and wisest men and women who have a real interest in social welfare are not likely to act as caterers for the Churches in this matter.

There is a row going on in Glasgow over the question of Sunday bowls. It seems that God does not object to golf on Sunday, but he has a great dislike for bowls. Presumably bowls is very common, and God dislikes common things.

Blackburn and District Freethinkers are reminded that Mr. R. H. Rosetti lectures to-day (December 13) in the Public Halls, Northgate, Blackburn, at 3 p.m. on "The War, the Peace and the Churches." In spite of the many handicaps resulting from war conditions, the local N.S.S. Branch has carried on its work, and it deserves the support of all friends of the movement in its area.

The most impudent document ever issued by the London County Council, or any other body, is surely a circular which it has sent round to all the elementary schools under its control. The circular presses upon teachers the necessity of religious teaching. The Council expresses its deep sense of religious education, and promises them "whatever help and support the Council can give." Adding hypocrisy to impudence, teachers are told:—

The Council has no desire to press any teacher to strain either his conscience or his intellectual integrity, but . . . the teaching body will not find it impossible, or even difficult, to give the children and young people in their charge instruction in Christian principles.

But suppose teachers decline to lend a hand at this wholly unwarrantable attempt to turn the schools into training grounds for the sects, what then? There are few teachers who will not recognise this advice as an order, and who will not be aware that a body that can issue such a document will not hesitate to penalise any teacher who has sufficient self-respect, and concern for the mental integrity of his pupils, to resent this attempt to turn schools into training grounds for the sects.

We have said often enough that the situation can be largely dictated by teachers. Is it too much to press on teachers the need for making a stand where a stand is so needed? If they belonged to an ordinary trade union such a step as that taken by the L.C.C. would be at once resented. Cannot the teachers be brought to stand for the dignity of their profession? If they can, the L.C.C. may receive a shock. Our after-the-war world looks as though it will need careful watching. It is certain the majority of teachers will not welcome the circular. Have they enough courage to stand against it? And is there no Member of Parliament who will at least ask a question? There are plenty of Members in both Houses who are opposed to the Churches dominating the schools. Will they act? After all, the whole of them cannot be given posts.

DID BRADLAUGH RECANT?

"IS it true that Charles Bradlaugh recanted, and turned Christian, just before he died?"

This evergreen, ignorant, Christian defender's question, with its lie by imputation, was asked of me at a public meeting recently. Usually, I consider that such a question merits only the answer that Mr. Chapman Cohen has so often given—that it doesn't matter how a man died, but how he lived.

In the case of Bradlaugh, however, there were circumstances surrounding his death that make this question of recantation of rather more interest than usual. There certainly was a recantation connected with Charles Bradlaugh's death; but it was not the sort of recantation of which Christians like to be reminded. Rather was it one of which every sincere and honest man, who happens to be a Christian, should feel thoroughly ashamed. Most Christian historians, however, are careful to see that hardly anybody will feel ashamed, because they conceal the facts that would produce the feeling of shame.

In view of the number of recruits to the Freethought movement in recent years, and in view of the number of "Freethinker" new readers who may not be so well acquainted with the history of the movement, it might be useful to recall the circumstances of Bradlaugh's later years, and of the amazing recantation that took place as he was dying.

Charles Bradlaugh, who founded the National Secular Society, and was its first President, was famous, or notorious, during the last half of the 19th century as one of the world's great Atheists. As such, he experienced more persistent personal persecution from Christians than any other Victorian Atheist, except, perhaps, Richard Carlile, the Freethought publisher, who suffered years of imprisonment.

But Bradlaugh, as the Americans would say, knew how to take it, and in the teeth of the bitterest opposition, in which every principle of decency was discarded by his Christian enemies, he finally became an elected Member of Parliament for Northampton. This was in April, 1880. Election to Parliament for most men means the smoothing of many paths, but not so in Bradlaugh's case. His election to Parliament was but the beginning of his hardest fight.

On going to take his seat in May, 1880, Bradlaugh asked to be allowed to affirm his allegiance instead of taking the oath. Obstructionist delay began at once by the appointment of a Select Committee to consider his claim. The committee reported against Bradlaugh, whereupon he presented himself to take the oath, as the only legal means of taking his seat in the House. The next obstruction was an amendment by Gladstone that Bradlaugh's claim to take the oath be referred to a Select Committee. This committee later reported that Bradlaugh could not properly take the oath, but should be allowed to affirm at his legal peril.

A motion by Mr. Labouchere (his fellow Member for Northampton) that Bradlaugh be allowed to affirm was defeated, so Bradlaugh again claimed the right to swear by means of the usual oath. He made a speech at the Bar of the House, and then refused to withdraw, being taken into custody as a result. He was released the following day.

The obstructionist procedure wasted three months, but in July Bradlaugh was allowed to affirm, "at his legal peril," on a motion by Gladstone. On giving his first vote on the following day he was served with a writ suing for a penalty for "illegally voting." Judgment was given in the court against Bradlaugh, and he also lost on appeal, thus rendering the Northampton seat vacant. Before the end of these proceedings a full year had been wasted by the Christian obstructionists.

Undaunted, Bradlaugh went back to Northampton, and was re-elected to the vacant seat, only to return to a House full of more than ever determined religious bigots. For almost another year he fought to secure his seat in the House, and to give the

electors of Northampton their rightful enfranchisement, the struggle ending once more with Bradlaugh's expulsion, and another vacancy at Northampton. So back to Northampton he went, and back to the House again, elected Member for the third time, to fight the Christian bigots for almost two more years before he was again expelled. During this period he was also involved in the blasphemous libel actions against "The Freethinker," together with Foote and Ramsay, the editor and publisher respectively.

Once again, for the fourth time, Northampton sent back its Atheist Member to do battle with the representatives of the "religion of love" for nearly two years more. It was not until the General Election of 1885, when Bradlaugh was elected for the fifth time by his Northampton supporters, that the power of the Christian cowards was broken. On the assembling of Parliament in January, 1886, Speaker Peel allowed Bradlaugh to take the oath and to occupy his seat without interference—though interference was attempted.

Thus, after almost six years of bitter, scouring struggle, did the first Atheist enter Parliament with his Atheism unconcealed, his record unbesmirched by hypocrisy, mental cowardice or humbug. Two and a half years later Bradlaugh finished the great fight, not only for himself but for every one of us that followed him, by securing the passing of the Affirmation Bill, which gives you and me the right to affirm without degrading ourselves by invoking God's help in order to speak the truth. Yet some of us have not even the 1 per cent. proportion of Bradlaugh's courage that is necessary to use the right he won for us, and for which he cut years off his life.

So many years of his life did he give for our cause that he was soon (1891) lying on his deathbed, his giant physique and powerful constitution spent at the age of 57. Few men could have survived what he survived even to that comparatively early age.

Then came the great recantation. But it was not Charles Bradlaugh who recanted. To the end Bradlaugh remained as he had lived—a militant Atheist, an honest, courageous being, whose thoughts were never of his own post-mortem future, but always of the living present of others.

No, my misguided Christian friend, Charles Bradlaugh did not recant. It was the British House of Commons that recanted—that great, Christian legislative body, the Mother of All Parliaments. The hypocrites, the bigots, some of them even moral scoundrels. They it was who recanted.

And it was the most astonishing recantation in the history of modern times, for a Christian Parliament actually apologised to a dying Atheist for the infamous injury that it had done to him because he had been brave enough to be honest, and clever enough to fight them to a standstill. One man against nearly 600! Yet he triumphed in the end.

On January 27, 1891, on the motion of Mr. W. A. Hunter, the House passed a resolution expunging from its records the resolutions of Bradlaugh's expulsions. Strangest irony of all, prayers for the recovery of the "infamous Atheist" (now "Mr. Bradlaugh") were offered in many churches. Oh, the humbug of Christianity! But it was too late. Charles Bradlaugh did not hear the news from Parliament; he did not hear the recantation; he did not hear the prayers.

With the dignity that marked his life he entered into death. Bradlaugh did not need to wait!

F. J. CORINA.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK

For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians

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MORE WAR BOOKS

Out of the People. (J. B. Priestley; Collins, in association with Heineman.)

Priestley has a great love for, and belief in, the "people." Nothing is so good that it cannot come out of them. We dehumanise them if we think of them as the "masses." What he most wants are "a few real statesmen and several million politically-minded citizens." And the monarchy can be kept "as a symbol of executive power."

As regards religion, he deplores that "the decay of belief is one of the obstacles to democracy." "A healthy society should have a religious basis." "The militant crusading spirit of the Freethinker," he says, "hardly belongs to the present era," and "the English people, who have never in fact swung from fervent piety to blank, despairing materialism, still let their judgments rest on religious values," for "a bare-faced cynicism, appealing to self-interest and shrugging away all other considerations, would be denounced by the people as an outrage."

From which it would appear that Priestley equates "religion" with "morality" and "materialism" with "wickedness." The only defence I will stay to make for him is that not even his best friends have ever claimed for him even a tincture of philosophical knowledge. His smug garrulousness, however, appears quite acceptable in some Left quarters, though decidedly not in all of them. Let us pass to a scientifically conducted examination of the mentality of his beloved "people" in war time as reported in—

War Begins at Home. (Mass Observation Report; Chatto and Windus.)

Mass Observation, I should think, has a "future." Its methods remain to be perfected, and will be, but the statistical information collected over a wide area in the first months of the war hangs together in a convincing way. These young investigators are doing a real service to psychology. It is only possible in this brief notice to touch the fringe of a most interesting and tempting subject, and to glance at just a few aspects of the work.

First, then, Astrology. One of the journals, "Prediction," has a circulation well above that of such as "Time and Tide," the "New Statesman" or the "Spectator." Astrological journals and columns are found to be very important in forming "opinion" (if it can be dignified by that name). "My wife follows Lyndoe in the 'People,' and says there will be no war." Such was the type of comment heard in August, 1939, when, on the last day of the month, it was estimated that only 18 per cent. expected war (not that astrology was wholly responsible, of course). But Lyndoe "was one of several who had an immense influence in preventing people from taking the danger more seriously and getting on with their precautions. When rational forms of reassurance had broken down, the irrational was at a premium." "Astrology, prayer and non-worry philosophy are all invoked to ward off the bogey." The spirits also predicted "no war" at seances.

How is it that, proved wrong by events, astrologers who make definite predictions still manage to keep going? The answer would seem to be that there is a fool born every minute.

Here is an editor of an intellectual quarterly, "Astrology," explaining his mistake: "It would seem that I laid too much stress on the spring ingress and the eclipse of last April, in square to Pluto," and judged that Hitler wouldn't start war "when h was on his radical O; but I did not attribute enough importance to the transit of PL. over his M.C."

Which, being translated, means he should have minded his P's and Q's.

"Your cheerfulness, your courage. . . ." We all remember the Government posters at the beginning of the war. It was discovered that word posters were read more by men, and picture

posters by women. Very few people, it was found, could explain what "resolution" meant. The word posters appealed to wags: e.g., "Your cheerfulness. . ." "has bloody well gone up to 2½d. a gill."

Naturally the phrase "will bring US" played into the hands of malcontents. (I am not criticising malcontents.)

The Betrayal of Christ by the Churches. (J. M. Murry, 1940; Andrew Dakers.)

Here Mr. Middleton Murry returns to his favourite theme. He describes himself as a near-Communist of the Left Book Club. But Stalin, to him, is little better than the Pope of Communism. The Marxist criticism of capitalist society, he says, should be adopted by Christianity, and it would thus itself become more substantially Christian. He favours a "non-Russian" Communism, in which the world is to be regenerated by love, and "of that world of Love Jesus is Lord and Master." Christianity must become "instinctive, unconscious spontaneous."

Again, we seem to be dealing with one who understands Christianity to be synonymous with decent behaviour. In the only sense in which Christianity has any meaning he is asking us to have an instinctive belief in the holy trinity, an unconscious acceptance of the immaculate conception and a spontaneous knowledge of the Fall and Atonement.

On the political side he desires a society of European nations after the war (apparently non-Russian), and he supports Toynbee's teaching that nationalism is the result of the compression of democratic sentiment into the unnatural mould of the nation, because there was no other vehicle to receive it.

"The End of This War." (Storm Jameson; 1941, Allen and Unwin, P.E.N. book.)

Nazism was not forced on the Germans, but accepted by them—that is the contention. When Hitlerism arose there was no opinion in Germany strong enough to combat it; and here is the real quarrel with the German people.

This does not say they are savages; it says "something more serious." They bred Nazism.

To the Pacifist argument that if we submit to the aggressors, decent principles will appear in them after a time, the author cannot take this high view of human nature, much less of Nazi nature. The Germans have to be re-educated politically: it is not so much that they have a different nature, but a different nurture, from ourselves. G. H. TAYLOR.

CHRISTIAN FORGERIES

FORGERY, which has invaded every department of literary activity, has made its most complete conquests, and left its most indelible marks, in the field of ecclesiastical literature. The composition of works in support of definite ends, though it long preceded the Christian era, seems to have acquired increased impetus after the introduction of the new religion had supplied new motives for fictitious writing. The contest from the first between different opinions and doctrines led naturally to works composed in defence of the writer's views, and to their ascription to names which might serve to claim attention, and to clothe them with credit. The consequence has been the hopeless bewilderment of critics of a later date who have vainly attempted to separate the wheat from the chaff and to distinguish between the genuine and spurious works of the early Christian Church. . . .

When forgery became ecclesiastical it touched the infinite. The greatness of the interests at stake, the rivalries of doctrines and Churches produced for an insatiable demand a boundless supply of false documents. False epistles and false martyrdoms entered so widely into the history of the Christian Church as to have rendered that history mainly hypothetical. . . .

No denial of the numerous and cruel persecutions of the early Christians which have blackened the pages of history is involved

in the proposition that in no other direction did exaggeration and invention become more conspicuous. . . .

The false decretals constituted, as it were, an additional in an edifice of falsehood. It is difficult to say at how early a date the wilful falsification of history for ecclesiastical purposes began, but a vigorous attempt in this direction had already been made in the sixth century. . . .

What may not have been possible in the line of forgery in the times when a forger had no publicity, no scrutiny, no printed versions of his fabrications to reckon with? The possibilities were simply limitless, and almost justify the scepticism of Hardouin, the Jesuit, who held that most of the Greek and Latin classics were the works of the monks in the Middle Ages. —From "Literary Forgeries," by J. A. FARRAR.

THE WAY TO FREEDOM.

Light, light and light! To melt and break in sunder
All clouds and chains that in one bondage bind
Eyes, hands and spirits, forged by fear and wonder,
And sleek, fierce fraud, with hidden knife behind;
There goes no fire from Heaven before their thunder,
Nor are the links not malleable that bind
The snared limbs and souls that are thereunder,
The hands were mighty were the head not blind.
Priest is the staff of king;
And chains and clouds one thing
With fettered flesh and devastated mind.
Open thine eyes to see,
Slave, and thy feet are free;
Thy bonds and thy beliefs are one in kind.

—SWINBURNE.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN.

SIR,—We read in the Press about an "agreed syllabus" of the Christian religion which would be suitable for the use of school-teachers in their religious instruction of children, if, that is, they themselves hold religious convictions. What these convictions stand for is left in the air.

The mind of the child can, however, cope only with the concrete. We all start with being materialists. So the question that now arises in connection with the teaching of religion to the young is whether the belief in supernaturalism—a supernatural agency which hedges it round—is to be handed on as religious truth in an age when, owing to scientific observation and enlightenment, is has been practically ruled out?

Teachers and parents also must find their own answers to this question. Some have already found it in a simple form of what is known as "comparative religion," using such books as those written by the late Edward Clodd, and in treating the Bible as early religious literature and not as divine utterance.

Some history of religion and knowledge of the Bible are a part of general education in this country. Its spirituality, if this comes, belongs to later years.—Yours, etc., MAUD SIMON.

Q AND MR. CUTNER

SIR,—In your issue of December 6 Mr. Cutner, in the course of an attack on "Theologians, Christian and Rationalist" (what a Rationalist theologian is he will, no doubt, tell us), refers to a paragraph in my book, "The Bible and Its Background," in which I am alleged to discuss the Q document. This is not the place to defend my book; but as a matter of mere accuracy may I point out that the paragraph referred to by Mr. Cutner is not about the Q document at all, but about the "triple tradition" common to all three Synoptic Gospels? Q is the term used to denote matter common to Matthew and Luke, but not Mark.

Mr. Cutner at the end of his article makes a curious statement. "The God Jesus is slowly but certainly vanishing into the skies. . . . It is our job to see the man Jesus also vanishes in the same way." I should have thought the job of Freethinkers

was to drive all gods from the skies, and to leave the man Jesus in his present obscure status while we fry more important fish.—Yours, etc., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

NOTE BY H. CUTNER.

I did not "attack" the Q document, or the "triple tradition," but criticised them as conjecture. On the other hand, I did attack the two "almost certainties" in Mr. Robertson's paragraph—and he has vouchsafed no reply.

OBITUARY

The cremation of the remains of an old and militant Freethinker took place on November 17 at Glasgow.

William Morgan was born in Ireland in 1867 of devout Roman Catholic parents. As an altar boy he was chosen to take part in a Mass to a Bishop. He grew out of his religion, however, after he settled in Scotland at the age of 14, when he was introduced to the writings of Paine, Voltaire and Ingersoll. He was intimately associated with Robert Smillie, Keir Hardie and Jim Connelly and was a foundation member of the I.L.P. A regular reader of "The Freethinker" for nearly half a century, he was assiduous in introducing the paper into many homes. His own family carry on the good work.

The Secretary and President of the Glasgow Secular Society attended the funeral and a Secular Service was delivered by Mr. R. M. Hamilton, the Glasgow President.

J. D. MACDONALD.

We regret to announce the death of W. Pickard, of Ackroyd Avenue, Gorton, Manchester, on November 10. He was a member of the Manchester Branch and a very earnest Freethinker. F. G.

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, C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.—"The Arguments For and Against the Existence of God; (1) The Arguments Against."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Halls, Northgate, Blackburn): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. R. H. ROSETTI—"The War, the Peace and the Churches."

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

Burnley (Barden House Club): Sunday, 10-30 a.m., a Debate—"Is Christianity True?" Aff., Mr. J. OLDFHAM; Neg., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, off Duke Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow): 3-0, Sunday, Mr. A. COPLAND—"The Origin of Religion."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. J. M. CAMERON (of Vaughan College)—"The Future of Education."