

# THE FREETHINKER

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## CONTENTS

Views and Opinions—The Editor...	33
Statistical Shock!—F. J. Corina ...	34
Acid Drops ...	36
To Correspondents ...	37
Sugar Plums ...	37
Some Aspects of Freethought and Atheism—Maud Simon ...	38
Books on Russia—G. H. Taylor ...	38
Truth Comes to Tea—A. W. R. ...	39
Sunday Lecture Notices, Etc. ...	39
A True Cosmological Perspective—Geo. Ivor Deas ...	40

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 23)

### Phases of Faith

IT appears to be fairly hopeless to define Christianity in a way that would be acceptable by all Christians. The fashionable attitude to-day amongst Christian publicists is to offer a description of Christianity as consisting in a manifestation of the common decencies of associated life. But these are the monopoly of no religion, class or country. They exist wherever human beings are found, because they mark, generally, the conditions under which associated life is possible. But religion, instead of making for a further and deeper commonality of these forms of conduct, tends to distort them, and in all cases narrow them. The physical cream of our own country is to-day engaged, and for three long years has been engaged in one of the deadliest wars in history. The men engaged in it live together, eat together, fight together and play together. But the one thing they will not do, the one thing that their religion forbids their doing, is to be religious together. When religion operates it is far more divisive than anything else. The believers in this or that form of Christianity and in this or that religion demand a separateness that if persisted on in every direction would make civilised life impossible.

The Mohammedans called Christians the "People of a Book." That is a fair description because it is a book that definitely—so far as Christians are concerned—separates Christians from other religionists. Moreover it is not, so runs the Christian claim, an ordinary book composed as other writings are composed. It is, says historic and official Christianity, the only book that God himself has written, or at least inspired. The Bible is a "sacred" book, and the whole meaning of "sacred" is something that is devoted to God. Little over a century ago Christian leaders could be found asserting that every book, every chapter, nay, every word, comes direct from God, and by English law and religious custom people were imprisoned, tortured and in the earlier centuries executed for bringing that conception of the Bible into disrepute. So late as the coronation ceremony of King George VI. the Bible was handed to the King with the admonition

that "these be the oracles of God." Actually it was a very close repetition of the ceremony of the incarnation of the tribal or national deity in the King.

### God and the Bible

The "sacred" books of the Christian religion were issued in two parts and at different times. We may let that go, although the two volumes which comprise the "Oracles" are made up of many parts issued at various times. The first volume of the Bible gives a number of laws, the story of the creation, a history of God's chosen people and some of their experiences. The second part was written some considerable time later and contains an account of God's adventures on earth in the guise of his own son. No one appears to have been aware that the Jewish God had a son or any family until this escapade happened. On earth the son-father complex went through a number of adventures, almost prevented the Mother of God marrying the man to whom she was betrothed, performed a number of miracles—as other gods had—was finally executed as part of a "plan," and a few days after his execution rose from the dead and went back to heaven. This second part of the "divine" narrative is called the New Testament. It should be added that no one knows the exact date of the appearance of either of these books. There are many guesses but no dates. Nothing is certain. All we know is that these books exist.

The larger number of Christian believers are under the impression that the only books connected with the foundations of Christianity are the two books named. That is not the case. There are numbers of other books, which exist, and a much larger number have existed. So far as the Christian part is concerned, a number of these books are contained in a volume bearing the general title of "The Apocryphal Gospels." The word may be taken as standing for doubtful origin, although save to serve the interests of established Christian Churches they have as much right to be considered the works of God as any part of the Bible and the New Testament. The division is purely one of ecclesiastical construction.

It is curious that the God-Jesus wrote nothing while on earth. The New Testament says that he on one occasion wrote in the sand, but that may have meant no more than the strange figures people draw on a sandy beach. But how much might have been cleared up if we had a book "By Jesus" instead of one on Jesus. Mark Twain said it was unfair that all the accounts of the Devil we know of were written by his enemies. To judge fairly we ought to be able to have Satan's side of the case. So with Jesus. We have only the name of his fanatical worshippers, and their evidence, standing alone, would be suspect in any Court of Justice in any country. A book by Jesus might put a very different look on the whole story. The scandal published by the Church concerning his mother might be completely disproved.

Nevertheless, the Apocryphal Gospels should be read by all. The information they convey is nowhere else to be found. The "Gospel of Mary," for example, gives information concerning the early childhood of Jesus, and a more detailed account of the feelings of Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary, when he received her startling news. The book explains that Joseph, "Going to the Virgin in a free manner, and talking familiarly with her, perceived her to be with child. Being a just man he was not willing to expose her nor defame her by the suspicion of being a whore, since he was a pious man. He purposed, therefore, privately to put an end to their agreement and as privately to send her away." The "Protevangelion" gives us a more elaborate account of the feelings of Joseph concerning Mary, which ends with Joseph being quite satisfied, and he "glorified God." "The Gospel of the Infancy" tells us that Jesus was a rather loquacious person even while in the cradle. It was then that he made his status known. To his mother he said, "Mary, I am Jesus, the son of God, that Word which thou didst bring forth according to the declaration of angel Gabriel to thee, and my Father hath sent me for the salvation of the world." One is not surprised that Mary arrived at the conclusion that "As there is not any child like to my son, so neither is there any woman like to his mother." When seven years of age, the same Gospel explains how Jesus made figures of birds from clay which flew into the air when he commanded them to do so. At about the same age Jesus displayed a love of mischief quite common to healthy children. Seeing many pieces of cloth hanging in a dyer's shop, Jesus took them and "threw them into the furnace." When the dyer protested, Jesus "began to take the cloths out of the furnace, and they were all dyed the same colours which the dyer desired." In the workshop of Joseph—his mother's husband—when certain pieces of wood were not of the desired length, Jesus kindly stretched them to the proper size. And at the trial before Pilate the Roman flags dutifully bowed to him of their own accord when he entered the court room.

As a boy Jesus gave little promise of being "meek and mild" or gentle. Evidence to the contrary is given. In one instance when a boy had angered Jesus, he said, "Behold now thou shalt wither as a tree . . . and immediately he became withered all over." Yet again, "Jesus went forth into the street, and a boy running by rushed upon his shoulder. At which Jesus, being angry, said to him, thou shalt go no farther. And he instantly fell down dead." There is also a fairly full account of the visit to hell by Jesus—in the Gospel of Nicodemus—of the way in which he forced open the gates of hell and took Adam back with him to heaven.

These Apocryphal Gospels throw a light upon the conditions amid which the Jesus legend was planted and developed. They provide a viewpoint, an atmosphere which is not easily obtained if they are left in the background. The way in which some governments provide their people with a history of events that suits the occasion is a very old performance. One may say that the later Christians took that method from governments who learned from the Church. But the likeness between them is very marked.

Eventually the Church had to come to a conclusion concerning the large number of "gospels" that were in circulation. Instead of the orthodox picture of the books

of the New Testament being composed by those who were either witnesses of the events narrated therein or had the story handed to them by these assumed eye-witnesses, the picture which forms itself in the mind of a scientific historian is that a very widespread number of superstitions, all of which were current, apart from Christianity, in substance or form, and existed before the "Gospels" were compiled. There is no substantial difference between the documents approved and those disapproved. But the undisguised superstition of both gives away the game. Emphatically, the Apocryphal Gospels should be read, must be read, by those who wish to understand the nature of the Christian legend.

It is not quite clear on what grounds the number of acceptable documents was settled. There are various stories concerning what happened. One is that the whole pack was placed under the table, then, after much praying for help from God, the *true* gospels jumped on top of the table, the others remaining where they were. We like this account; it sounds more convincing than the others. At any rate, it was ultimately decided that the official New Testament should be the one we have. This contains, according to the Church of England Prayer Book, "all that is necessary to salvation." That is rather artfully worded, we may note. It does not say that all of it must be believed to escape damnation, only that all necessary to salvation is there—if you can find it. It is quite plain that the genealogies, or a deal of the nightmare contents of part of the Revelation of St. John, is necessary. So far as that book is concerned, much would seem to depend upon the state of one's digestive organs. Or the explanation may be that an official clergy could not afford to have a "revelation" that could be easily understood by all. A professional priesthood must have their "mysteries," and a revelation which explains itself would be of no commercial value.

In the whole of its history no Christian Church has ever claimed that salvation is a simple process. It needs guides, and the clergy are those guides. Christians are saved by what they believe, not by what they understand. Were it otherwise, they would be damned, every man Jack of them.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

## STATISTICAL SHOCK!

SOME time ago I was "denounced" by a Freethinking friend because I had declared, at a public meeting in Yorkshire, that 80 per cent. of the people of this country had no use for Christianity as a practical creed; and because I held that it can no longer be claimed that this is a Christian country from the point of view of public interest in the religion.

My friend, whom we will call "T," told me it was no use to blink at facts. "Most of the people in this country are Christians," he said, "and it does not help the Freethought case to say otherwise."

I repeated what I had said at the meeting—that fewer than 10 per cent. of the people attend the recognised Churches, and, allowing another 10 per cent. for those who are actively attached to "fancy" Churches and religious movements, we are left with 80 per cent. of people who have no religious activities. Therefore, as the great majority of people do not actively support Christian organisations, and even refrain from nominal membership, the country is no longer Christian in the sense that the Christian Churches can claim to represent the people; and that

is the only sense that really matters in considering the point. The fact that Christian institutions continue to impose their ideas, their customs and methods upon the people, cannot alter the fact that most of the people have given up Christianity as a philosophy or guiding creed, and have turned their thoughts (if and when, they do think) in other directions.

Church membership figures for all the denominations with more than 3,000 members in Great Britain show a grand total of less than 10,000,000 supporters, including Sunday school attendances. As these figures are extracted from the Churches' own statistics, they may be regarded with some measure of caution. To say the least, there is not likely to be any error on the under side. So that at the best, taking the figures as they are, they represent only one churchgoer or Sunday scholar in every four and a-half people, or approximately 22½ per cent. On the showing of the Churches themselves, then, there is an "unattached" population of 77½ per cent., which can very reasonably be called 80 per cent., having regard to the source of the figures, and having in mind that Church officials are as prone as other officials to the habit of zealous exaggeration.

I thought this information would finally convince "T," but it was not to be. He still insisted that people were Christian, on the whole. "They prove it when they get married and when they get buried," he declared. "Take the vital statistics, and you will soon find out that there are very few who are not Christians."

Now, in the first place, I could never accept it as proof that people are interested in Christianity just because they use a Christian marriage service and funeral service.

Conventionality has much more to do with that than Christianity. Many people take great care to practise conventionality, but few are sufficiently interested in Christianity even to read the "Old Book" to learn something about it. Other than the almost compulsory dope of religious instruction in schools, and the B.B.C.'s Department of God, most people know nothing about the Christian religion. Like so many parrots, they repeat what they are told, neither thinking nor understanding thereon. With the same mentality, we could produce similar results if we taught evolution in the schools every morning, and had a B.B.C. department to "flog" evolution on the air. But it would no more make this a nation of evolutionists than the present system makes it a nation of Christians.

Most people never set foot inside a church except on those occasions when it happens to be "the right thing" to do so. And they do "the right thing" on such occasions for the same reason that they stand up and take off their hats when "God Save the King" is played in public. Most of them don't care a damn about either God or the King, but they do hate to be "different." So, hating to be "different," they all remain alike.

How many people stand up in their own homes when the National Anthem is played on the radio; how many kneel in prayer in their own homes during the radio services? These are the tests of sincerity. The other examples are manifestations, very largely, of hypocrisy, or of the fear of being thought "different."

As I have said, I could not accept "T's" argument as being valid, because the point could be explained by something other than a liking for Christianity. But I was not wholly satisfied that the point was even superficially true, and I (perhaps foolishly, from the point of view of the time involved) began to compile a record of funeral statistics for a representative area of Yorkshire with half a million population, also making an analysis of the religious quality of the record.

I have recorded 1,270 funerals, quite consecutively, as they occurred, in the area concerned. Of the total, 130, or near enough to 10 per cent., were cremations, so that it is reasonable to assume that about 10 per cent. of people are cremated in

these days. But that is by the way. The religious aspect is shown by the following table:—

Nonconformist (all kinds) .....	280
Church of England .....	250
Roman Catholic .....	60
No Church connections .....	680
Total .....	1,270

The striking feature of these figures is that they show that well over half the people concerned had no connection with a Church, even after excluding from the table 23 cases in which the parties were clearly hostile to any religious manifestations, and who might be presumed to be either atheistic or agnostic, or at least anti-Christian! Apropos a recent article in "The Freethinker" on Catholic strength, it will be noted that the 7 per cent. estimate of R.C.s is reduced in this table to just under 5 per cent.—60 out of 1,270.

I do not propose to consider how many of those who had a denominational service were receiving the attention of "our parson" for the first time since they were married. I do not know. But readers can make their own estimates from experience of their own acquaintances. Nor can we know how many living Freethinkers were turned into dead Christians by respectable relatives and persevering parsons. We know that it does happen. Further, we cannot know how many "nothingarians" had a label stuck on them because it was considered "the right thing."

Taking the figures as they stand, however, they still demonstrate that more than half the people concerned had no connection with a Church. Out of the 680 in that class, 220 had "undenominational" services at the cemeteries, but here again "the right thing" would have a good deal to do with the fact. Yet, after conceding everything in favour of the Christian aspect, 460, or more than one-third of the grand total, did not have services!

In one case known personally to me the widow was visited by a body-hunting vicar after her husband's death. He tried to persuade her to agree to a service at his church, but with great courage and dignity she replied: "You didn't take much interest in J— when he was lying ill for three months. I don't think he needs anything that you can offer him now."

This must be a frame of mind that is growing, for despite the efforts of such body-snatching parsons, the vacillations of weak-kneed relatives and the pious pretensions of case-hardened undertakers, more than a third rejected the "benefits" of a Christian service, and dispensed with the Church's guarantee of safe passage to heaven.

This is something to ponder over! A statistical shock indeed for those who claim, with "T," that this is still largely a Christian country. Bear in mind this: if 1 in 3 of the people at the dying end of the population scale reject the Churches, how much greater must be the proportion in the younger generations? We all know that the older generation forms the backbone of the church-going section and the religiously unemancipated.

In regard to marriages, I have not had time to secure comparative figures between church and register office ceremonies; but it is common knowledge that the register office rate is constantly rising, so the church rate must be dropping in the same degree. Here also it is obvious that people are dispensing with the one-time indispensable blessing of God when embarking on the sea of matrimony.

With 80 per cent. of the living people declining to associate themselves with the Churches, despite the perpetual propaganda of Press and radio on behalf of Christianity; with more than a third of the dead rejecting the ministrations of the Churches, despite the powerful social odds in favour of the Churches; with more and more young people entering the bonds of wedlock without the intervention of the highly instructive Holy Ghost,

(Continued on page 39)

## ACID DROPS

IT will be remembered that when Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group, was in London he made some very valuable "contacts" with a number of people in "good society," and who, unfortunately for the country, were able to pull a great many social and political strings. Buchman had publicly thanked God for Hitler, and at about the time when many of our short-sighted politicians thought they could use Hitler to block Russia. When war was declared Buchman disappeared, leaving the "Group" behind him; no one seems to know where he is now. His followers, or a number of them, pleaded for relief from conscription on the same ground that ministers of religion and theological students are relieved.

Buchman also formed a body of followers in the U.S.A., and it was noticed in the American Press that this particular sect of religionists had plenty of money at their command. Perhaps they earned it. But they applied to the American courts asking for relief from military duty on religious grounds, one point being that they were working for "moral disarmament." The court with which the decision lay decided that the claim was unjustifiable, and dismissed it. Now these followers of Buchman that came before the court cannot be found. Perhaps they are giving the Americans a lesson in how to run away.

The Archbishop (R.C.) of Liverpool has decided that if men are to live together in society there must be a guiding and directing authority—that is just a plea for the Church. The next step is that if a guiding authority is necessary it must come from God—that is a plea for the Roman Catholic Church, which would keep all authority under its control. And both pleas are as nonsensical as they can be. To be quite fair, in substance it is what our own Archbishops, with the half-mentally baked members of the English clergy, are preaching.

And yet it is completely false. The better type of character requires neither a God nor the compulsion of an established regulation to lead a life of decency and usefulness. Let anyone consider whether their neighbours are really dependent upon the watchfulness of the police for their good conduct and he will find the answer to the question. If our priestly leaders were both able and honest they would recognise that a man who needs watching—either by God or a policeman—is just an undeveloped person, or one who has developed criminal tendencies. But if they admit that, then away goes the only reason they can find for bothering about Gods or Devils. And we should like one of our leading ecclesiastics to explain whether the necessity of belief in a God is what compels them to behave themselves? That might be a question for the B.B.C. Brains Trust—only the Brains Trust taboos all questions of a seriously useful quality, and no question that might reflect against the established religion would be permitted.

Here, by the way, is something that appeared in the "Evening News" of recent issue. "Judging by many broadcast sermons, preachers have nothing to put forward but 'sweet nothings' or 'threadbare platitudes.'" That comes from the pen of the Rev. F. C. Baker, Vicar of St. Stephen, Coleman Street. We have often felt that even many of the clergy must be ashamed of the "tripe" that comes over the air where religion is concerned. We should like to see more opinions published by the better type of clergyman.

After nearly 2,000 years of Christianity the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Rev. J. S. Whale, as representing the Nonconformists, have issued "A statement of Christian Belief." During a very large part of that 2,000 years the Christian Churches have had things pretty much their own way. They have suppressed, so far as the State—inspired and backed by the Churches—could manage it. They took charge of the children of the nation directly after birth, and made it risky for anyone seriously to question the truth of Christianity. Moreover, the Christian teaching was given direct by God himself, and he made a special journey to earth to see that the teaching was properly

delivered. And now the Churches are issuing a manifesto telling the world what Christianity is. Nor should we forget that a very large number of Christians brandishing the same Bible as the other fellows, inform the world that the Archbishop and Mr. Whale have got the wrong end of the stick. What a wonderful creed Christianity is! It took a God to frame it, and up to date there is no agreement among God's followers as to what Christianity means:

Both Dr. Whale and Dr. Temple are agreed that this is a world that "exists by the righteous will of the living God," (he was a dead one for several days according to the New Testament), but is full of evil and wrong doing—which looks as though the "living God" made a slip somewhere—and the cure is for each one to sacrifice himself for the benefit of his neighbour, which looks as though the statement of belief is a bit mixed. For if A sacrifices himself for B, then B must be ready to sacrifice himself for C—unless one side does all the sacrificing. But if both sacrifice themselves for each other in the conviction that each will be the better for it, then to call it a sacrifice is a misnomer. It is not a sacrifice, it is an investment with a large dividend promised. These philosophic Christians do get into a frightful muddle.

We offer a suggestion to Christian preachers in general. It concerns the persistent repetition of preachers and laymen of the weakness and general worth of those who go on their knees to God and inform him how poor and erring and generally useless mortals they are. And they ask to be "saved" on those ground. We suggest that is rather a risky proceeding. For God may take them at their own valuation and decide that so worthless a lot is not likely to pay for the trouble of collecting.

Perhaps the meanest thing in the way of speech—and feeling—that is crawling round this country at present is the remark that one is often hearing, "We are glad the Russians are on our side during the war, but when the war is over we don't want any Russians here." Put into plain English, it is: "Of course, we will make whatever use we can of Russia, but when the war is over we will get back to the old situation and have no more very friendly relations with the Soviet Union." We note this meanest of mean things and attitude because we are convinced a peaceful world without the co-operation of Russia is a practical impossibility.

But this is the attitude of most of the Roman Catholics in this country, and it was re-echoed by Archbishop Williams, of Birmingham, the other day. He said: "We admire the resistance that Russia is offering to Germany, we admire her soldiers and her spirit . . . Russia is fighting against a ruthless invader now, and we support her, but we don't want her Communism." Decency would have let it go at "Russia is our Ally," but what we get is "we are helping Russia," as though we were not receiving from Russia as much help as we are giving. Russia's internal economy is her own business. If we are wise we shall learn all we can from it, and we think that is what Archbishop Williams and his like fear. And we are sure of one thing, that is, a peaceful world is an impossibility with Russia left out and treated as a pariah nation.

The Roman Catholic "Universe" runs a column in which it supplies suitable answers to suitable questions. In the issue for January 8 an answer is given that it is the opinion of the theologians that, whether old or young at the resurrection, all will be of "the perfect age of about thirty." That is very interesting. The mother looking for her baby child, the young person looking for an aged parent, the child who is looking for its playmate, the old couple looking for each other, all will be faced by someone of about thirty. What a disappointment there will be for everybody. But why fix thirty as the age for all in heaven? We presume thirty is selected because it is a very comfortable age here. But in heaven time will have lost its significance and age its meaning. The "Universe" had better reconsider that answer, otherwise it may dawn upon some of its readers that their religion is among the most ridiculous things on the face of the earth.

## "THE FREETHINKER"

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### TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. MILLWARD.—Thanks for New Year greetings, which are never too late. We quite appreciate your compliment that the militant Freethought movement could not have a better leader, but we hope that when our period is finished still better will be found. Freethought has never yet failed to attract great men and women, and we do not believe it ever will. Shall look forward to seeing you.

A. J. ASHBY.—Vahinger's "The Philosophy of 'As If'" was published in English in 1924; we think the price is a guinea. Publishers, Kegan, Paul Trench. The "As If" has reference to the fact that our "laws of Nature" are creations of our own. By noting that things act in such and such a manner we are able to create a scientific conception of natural phenomena, to understand what has been, and safely to assume what will happen in given circumstances. The test is, does this or that natural "law" properly sum up our experience. The main idea was expressed by Jeremy Bentham more than a century ago. We should be very pleased to meet you any time you are in London, but advise us beforehand, if 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

THERE is a desperate attempt being made both in this country and the United States to boom the Bible. In America 1,250,000 copies of the New Testament are to be given to those soldiers who want them, and the London Bible Society is to give 1,750,000 copies to the British soldier. As announced in the "Evening Standard," "there is a world boom" in Bible-reading. One he more or less does not matter, so one is not shocked by the report of a "world boom" in the Bible. But we are doing what we can to help by the series of articles now running through this journal, which will put the real Christianity before the people. But the game of these Bible distributors is very simple. Huge quantities of the Bible are printed for free distribution. The soldiers are easy game for their receipt. The book is forced on them, and the free gift is then transformed into an anxious demand for them, and in the main the distributors are paid for their work.

What we do know is that we are selling copies of our "Bible Handbook" in greater numbers than it has ever been sold before. And these are *not* bought by those who wish to wallow in the stupid account of Bible influence for good, but rather to supply a text-book which will place before men things that are kept in the background by preachers and professional Bible distributors.

We note that Mr. F. A. Hornibrook is due to speak before the Leicester Secular Society, Humberstone Gate, to-day (January 24) at 3 p.m. on "The Social Consequences of V.D." It is an arresting subject and Mr. Hornibrook is a forceful and fearless speaker. We hope that he will face a good audience.

We wish to thank all those who have sent us copies of questions sent in to the new religious Brains Trust—"The Anvil." Of course, not one of these have been used, and none will be so long as they are at all likely to let in the truth about religion. The new B.B.C. Brains Trust is just as dishonest as the older one, but for an appalling display of puerility it leaves the older one miles in the rear. Neither has the honesty to permit a plain, honest discussion where Christianity is concerned. Heine called the Papacy the great lying Church. We wonder what he would have said to the B.B.C.'s policy of professed freedom and practised deception. Still, we must pay it the compliment of saying that it knows its religious public, and many people who are not professedly religious, for they listen and think that people are being instructed. What is happening is that they are getting information on things that don't matter very much, and so are kept from understanding things that do.

It looks as though there might be some trouble with the B.B.C. and the more enlightened and fair-minded section of the public. Mr. Alfred Edwards, M.P., is to ask a question in Parliament concerning the "censoring by a civil servant on the staff of the B.B.C. and the further emasculation by the Governors" of news, etc. Mr. Edwards thinks that the Brains Trust is becoming a "comic turn." We hope Mr. Edwards will receive support in the House of Commons, although so many of them either hold jobs and are muzzled, or hope for jobs and so muzzle themselves.

In addition to this, a recent issue of the "News Chronicle" reports that Joad and others are heading a revolt with regard to the Brains Trust. The complaint is that members of the Trust are never permitted to discuss religion, economics and politics. This lot think that more serious and urgent matters should be discussed. Commander Campbell thinks that the Brains Trust should continue amusing the public. We are not surprised at that. Campbell is born to the part, but the proper place for a comical entertainment should be the music hall, where they do it much better. Campbell also says that the last few sessions have been "as dry as dust." We think the public may safely relieve Campbell of responsibility for this. There is always something to laugh at when he is present.

We hope that the better type of men and women will not merely threaten the Trust, but will act. And the way to act is to refuse to be made puppets by either of the Brains Trusts deliberately excluding genuine questions of general importance. Neither the lavish payment nor the degree of advertising secured should make men consent to be made tools of. So far as the Brains Trust is concerned, payment could be abolished altogether. Twenty guineas for less than an hour's presence, and the answering of subjects that are mainly fanciful in character, is absurd. We feel sure there are men of responsibility who would cheerfully give their services for a brief period. This might stop the deliberate lying and falsification practised by the B.B.C., some instances of which we have given in these columns. No greater falsehood, for example, was ever told than when one of the B.B.C. directors informed a South African correspondent that religious subjects could be freely discussed by the Brains Trust, and no greater piece of stupid special pleading could be made than that of Mr. H. Nicolson, one of the Governors, that the microphone got into myriads of homes, and therefore opposition to religion must not be heard. That looks well for the kind of liberty we shall have after the war—if the B.B.C. remains as it is.

Anyway, we feel we may congratulate ourselves for substantially contributing to this threatened revolt. For many, many years we have been exposing falsehood after falsehood told by the B.B.C., its methods of distorting facts, the insult offered to men of standing by insisting upon their manuscripts being read by censors, and the habit of discussing subjects without ever touching essential aspects. A great instrument is being put to the worst of uses, and this will continue just as long as the denial of free speech is permitted, and men and women known to the public submit to a censorship and to bogus discussions. Up the revolution!

## SOME ASPECTS OF FREETHOUGHT AND ATHEISM

THE Right Hon. J. M. Robertson, whose versatile scholarship and phenomenal literary output place him in a class alone among the world's Freethinkers, was also, like Bradlaugh, a born and pugnacious fighter. Yet he favoured the use on occasion of the term non-theism in preference to Atheism, probably because of the obloquy which the religious world rarely loses the opportunity of casting upon the latter.

An exception may be mentioned here in the case of a clergyman who, in a letter to "The Times," wrote:—

"... the desire for a settlement of all international quarrels without recourse to arms is not peculiar to Christian thinkers. Men of other nations opposed to Christianity and professed Atheists and Agnostics share this reasonable desire."

But surely it is the business of the Freethinker to free the terms, Atheism, Atheist, from the association and the bad company that are so often thrust upon them, to say nothing of social and Press ostracism. This should be easy when it is recalled that religious beliefs and, in the case of Christianity, the clash of these within the same religion, are associated with or directly responsible for some of the blackest pages of history, to say nothing of mistaken causes which owe their origin to them. And they have been held by the most infamous characters, and in connection with infamous practices. Ivan the Terrible, first Tsar of Russia and a human monster, was, so his latest biographer, Mr. Stephen Graham, tells us, a man of "undoubted piety combined with hideous debaucheries."

In one of a series of articles on "Masterpieces of Freethought" in "The Freethinker," Mr. H. Cutner wrote:—

"It is easy to deny pagan deities. Even Christians readily admit that Krishna, Osiris, Attys, Jupiter—in fact, all the gods of mythology, as well as those worshipped by various so-called savage tribes, never had a real existence. Thus, Christians are Atheists as far as all these particular gods are concerned, and only become Theists when it is a question of defining—however badly—their own God. Yet, as has been so often pointed out even by Agnostics, there really is no difference between the idea of the God of Christianity and the God of, say, Hinduism. In the ultimate, almost all the believers in gods will agree that their deity does not reside in any particular image of him made by man, but is some great Unknowable residing in something also unknowable, and moving heaven and earth to suit his own purpose, or moved thereto in response to the prayers of the faithful."

If this is admitted it follows that the reverse side is equally true. The Mahomedan, for instance, is an Atheist so far as the Christ "very God of very God" is concerned, and the orthodox Jew is in the same position.

The great variety and wide diversity in theistic beliefs point to the conclusion that Theism and Atheism are equally the result of human interpretations of the universe. Unless they are treated as metaphysical concepts quite apart from the religious standards, the dividing line between the two is the claim to superhuman origin, which the one lays down and the other repudiates.

Freethought in religion is freedom from fetters forged in the ages of faith when supernaturalism, often posing as magic, was generally accepted—as it still is by backward races—as an active agent in everyday life and miracles as common occurrences. Humanity enlightened by methods of scientific accuracy is shaking off shackles on Freethought which, as history shows, have been imposed for the retention of power and the restraint of liberty. The modern conscience is becoming more and more disposed to let progress stand on its own merits, and to leave causes to make their own appeal unhampered by supernatural

assumptions which have proved such dangerous and misleading weapons in the hands of mankind.

The temper of our own times is far removed from the days when any notable expression of Freethought, then termed heresy, in Christian countries led to the torture chamber or the stake.

But institutional Christianity and especially that of the Church of England—which now flies so many colours that it is often difficult to distinguish it from Freethought—is still extremely fashionable, and no one really enjoys being "out of the fashion." Our State churches, and many free churches also, are not only religious but social and philanthropic centres, and this is especially so in the case of the Church of England in country districts. In cathedral towns the position is intensified. Both at home and overseas the English Church is bound up with many sides of social life and beneficent activity, and what its future will be, faced as it is with a diminishing dogmatic status, is on the lap of the gods.

The present policy of the Church of Rome, and probably that of the Eastern Church also, is to maintain its orthodoxy without a flaw, and to ignore the great Freethought movement altogether, banning any of its members who become involved in it; and this ostrich-like attitude is not uncommon among our own State Church ecclesiastics. It is certainly a refuge for those who have neither the taste nor the power to strike out on new lines, and are content just to abide by the prayer book. But even that support has become uncertain ground. There is now a second prayer book in the field, though it has failed to pass the Parliamentary test.

Apart from these and many other aspects of the subject, Freethought admits, or should admit, that considered psychologically, religious conviction and experience, being essentially subjective, are to some extent untouchable. They consist of an emotion which blissfully frees the individual from the trammels of dogma and from the Modernist's struggle to fit this into facts.

The question may perhaps be put: But does not this last passage reopen the whole question?

This is not the case, because this point of view is concerned with inner conviction, and however strong this may be, there is no more authority for the inner conviction of the Theist than for that of the Atheist. Outside the subjective attitude of religious faith or non-faith, the conflict is narrowed down to myth, dogma and vague historical settings on one side and, on the other, the ever advancing march of science.

"Mysticism," writes Mr. Clodd, "is not a concrete system of thought, or of speculations on origins and processes. It has neither creed nor ritual; hence no sect is begotten of it, nor any organised Church built upon it." (Quoted from "Hibbert Journal," January, 1922.)

MAUD SIMON.

## BOOKS ON RUSSIA

**Russia and Ourselves.** (Victor Gollancz, 1941; Gollancz.)

Chapter 1 must be one of the shortest chapters on record: "All possible aid to the Soviet Union." What follows is largely a criticism of the Communist Party policy in its vicissitudinous career from September, 1939, to June, 1941. The author finds that Russia's foreign policy from 1934 to 1939 was of an "incomparably higher standard" than ours, in realism, morality and firmness. Then, from the Nazi Pact (August, 1939) to the Nazi attack (June, 1941), it was what ours had been previously in the period of what he rightly calls Chamberlain's disgraceful sabotage of Russia's efforts to provide a common front against Nazism. Now that those evil days are past he hopes for the post-war co-operation of Britain and the U.S.S.R. for a World United States. Each can give an important contribution; Russia a centrally planned economy for the public good, Britain a deeply rooted love of personal freedom. He considers that we

have not fought with a "revolutionary dynamic" as the Russians have, comparing their scorched earth policy with our "stay put" plans. We should at once, he thinks, advertise our honest aims by giving self-determination to India, and by utilising what he is pleased to term "the compelling power of the Sermon on the Mount" and the "potentially revolutionary teaching of the Christian ethic." The "hate Germany" propaganda, he thinks, impedes victory: we are fighting Nazism, not the German people. "Essentially this is not, nor ever has been, an imperialist war," though it doubtless has imperialist elements, and he recalls that the Communist M.P., Gallacher, pronounced himself "agreeably surprised" at Churchill's immediate "aid for Russia" policy. The Communist Party, says Gollancz, had been imagining how things ought to happen in an abstract world rigidly governed by "laws." Why, he asks, didn't the Communist Party support the war before—the same war, same Hitler, same Churchill, same Governments? "Either their present support, or their former condemnation, must be wrong." The only difference was the addition of Russia to the total of Hitler's aggresses. Apparently Churchill's pro-Russia was too good to be true for some Communists, and one of their leading writers, Palme Dutt, wrote of Britain's "policy of temporary collaboration with the Soviet Union."

**The U.S.S.R.—Its Significance for the West.** (S. C. G., 1942; Gollancz.)

This is published on behalf of the "Socialist Clarity Group." While admiring Russia, the writer is of opinion that wrong turnings have been made at critical junctures: the most serious error has been the attempt to combine a concealed dictatorship with a sham democracy; this, however, in "the most economically progressive country in the world." In the Nazi Pact, for instance, the opinion of the masses played no part, such questions being decided on the basis of external events by the small group in whom the power ultimately rests. We must therefore regard the Soviet Union as an ally and not as a model.

**Russia on the March.** (Murphy, 1941; Bodley Head.)

A study of Soviet foreign policy, this was written to predict Russia's entry into the war, justified as the author got proofs from his publisher. A Marxist himself, he regards the Communist Party as nowhere prepared for the Nazi Pact, but he makes the usual observations on the faults of the British Government in its refusal to co-operate with Russia in the near past.

**Europe, Russia and the Future.** (G. D. H. Cole, 1941; Gollancz.)

He sees only two possible endings to the war; either the Nazification or the Socialisation of Europe. The nationality idea is obsolete as the basis for independent statehood, and he tries to set down the real requirements of nationality as a basic psychological force. He would encourage everyone to become politically conscious, so as to get an enlightened democracy, describing himself as a Democratic Socialist, not Communist.

**STATISTICAL SHOCK**—(Continued from page 35)

can it any longer be argued honestly that this is a Christian country from the people's standpoint? To be Christian implies at least a measure of consistent adherence to Christianity, but that qualification is strikingly absent. To believe in a thing, implies a fairly substantial amount of support for that thing, but support for Christianity is singularly lacking among those who are said to believe in it.

It seems fairly clear, then, that the sticky bog of Christian belief is drying up rapidly; but the tough, peaty residue of clericalism remains, and its uprooting is perhaps the hardest task that faces us to-day.

F. J. CORINA.

**Russia in Peace and War.** (Pat Sloan, 1941; Pilot Press) foreword by M. Maisky.)

Sloan is a leading authority on Russia over a longer period than most (see e.g. his "Russia Without Illusions" and his "Soviet Democracy"), and he is here supported by illustrations in giving an interesting account, not only of the Soviet constitution, but of the general background of Russian life.

**The Spirit of the Soviet Union** (1942; Pilot Press; with a foreword by Lord Beaverbrook, together with illustrations by Russian artists, anti-Nazi posters and cartoons.)

**Strategy and Tactics of the Soviet-German War** (1941; Hutchinson and Company.)

Taken from accounts of Red Army officers and Soviet war correspondents, and published by authority of the "Soviet War News"; issued by the Press Dept. of the Soviet Embassy. It is remarkable to see how profitably the Russians had studied German tactics in their previous campaigns in Europe. For instance, the Germans stole the plans of the supposedly impregnable Belgian fortress, Eben Emael (Liege), built a model in Poland and practised attacking it by parachutists so that the latter knew to an inch where to go and what to do. It is noteworthy that no such treachery was allowed to grow in the Red Army as it did among Jugo-Slav officers, Greek generals and French Government members, to name only three cases.

G. H. TAYLOR.

**TRUTH COMES TO TEA**

IT was a very cold day when Christian, the munition worker, returned home to find his wife entertaining Truth, a very neglected friend of theirs. Warming his hands at the glowing electric fire, he said, "Brr! It's cold. Aren't these radiators a godsend?"

"Nay," replied Truth, "surely God sent the cold, and man made the radiator?"

"But," said Christian very patronisingly, "man is an instrument of God."

"Then why does he alter God's purpose by making electric fires to make up for the cold weather sent by God?"

"Bah!" said Christian, and turned on the radio.

(Continued on next page)

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.**

**LONDON—OUTDOOR.**

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY.

**LONDON—INDOOR.**

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11-0, C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.—"The Arguments For and Against the Existence of God; (2) The Arguments For."

**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, Mr. J. W. TAYLOR—"The Beveridge Report."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK—"The Social Consequences of V.D."

Rossendale Branch N.S.S. (2, Philipstown, Whitewell Bottom): Sunday, 2-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

On the wireless it was announced that the following Sunday would be a national day of prayer.

"Will you be going to church on Sunday?" asked Truth.

"Indeed not!" Christian answered swiftly, "we are very busy at the factory and, in any case, the double time they pay on Sundays is always useful."

"But don't you think a national day of prayer will help to win the war; have you no faith in prayer?" asked Truth.

"Of course I have," Christian exploded indignantly, "but God knows we are right, and with his help we can't lose."

"Does the German race know that?" asked Truth.

"Bah!" said Christian.

"Anyway, you still make munitions, don't you?" persisted Truth.

"Bah!" said Christian once more, "let's have tea."

Christian made a good meal and lit a cigarette with a sigh of content. "Thank God we still have plenty to eat," he piously exclaimed.

"Wouldn't it be better," interjected Truth, "to thank the Merchant Navy, who brave the dangers at sea to bring food here?"

"Yes, in a way," admitted Christian very magnanimously, "but God looks after his own and brings them safely home."

"Then," said Truth, "are the torpedoed seamen not God's own, or isn't he looking after them?"

"Well, God can't do everything . . . I mean, it is His Will. After all," Christian stuttered, then suddenly alert, he cried, "Listen, the sirens!"

"Is that God's will?" asked Truth.

"Don't be ridiculous," replied Christian angrily, "these Heathen Huns who bomb women and children have nothing to do with Him."

"But Christian, darling," said his wife at last, "I thought you made bombers at your factory!"

"Oh, shut up!" cried Christian, glaring at his wife, "You are as bad as her!" pointing vehemently at Truth.

"Dear, dear," said Truth, "perhaps I'd better go. You don't seem to like me."

"No," said Christian, "you are very upsetting, and I do not like you. Remember Truth, that not for you or anyone else will I alter my views or convictions. Good-bye."

"An revoir!" said Truth, and left.

A. W. R.

## A TRUE COSMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

IT is astonishing how many usually reasonable people there are who believe that the Universe revolves around the human race; that the world has been created and ordered solely for the use of mankind; that a benevolent deity has created plants (and animals too, if you don't happen to be vegetarian!) for the feeding of Man; flowers, forests and scenery to delight him, and the vast spectacle of the skies only to excite his awe and wonder. However beautiful and poetical this notion of a designing and paternal god might be—an idea most gratifying and consolatory to the weaker-minded—it must be confessed that it is the greatest illusion in which a human being can indulge, as well as being the most prevalent. Countless "Galileos" of science and speculation have arisen from time to time to explode this myth; but men apparently so love an agreeable self-delusion rather than a stark and (for them) pride-wounding truth, that the refuters of this theory have been consistently disregarded.

But does it depreciate the human race in any way to see Man in his true position on the ladder of evolution? In the light of scientific reason (the candle of theology being snuffed) Man is seen to be merely a single numeral in a long arithmetical progression of figures that stretch backwards into one infinity and will stretch forward into another. He is not a final keystone

that some self-satisfied god has set on his creation: he may only be a minor supporting brick a few feet above the foundations. Nevertheless, the proof of his non-divinity does not detract in any way from his qualities. The nutritious corn and vegetables he grows have been reared from poor grass and roots; all the foods he eats have been industriously cultivated. His energy and inventive powers have given comparative comfort and freedom from disease, and control over tremendous servants such as electricity and coal. In fact, the more one reflects on the heights to which Man has risen from the hardships and wretchedness that must have existed in prehistoric times, the more one feels that in reality Man himself is the god he worships.

So Humanity is not part of a Divine "Plan"? What, then, is the function of this "minor supporting brick" in the fabric of universal progress? Is the motion of human existence on this planet merely to be as a leaf, that buds in April, expands in June, shrivels in September and at last dies, worn out, in December? Or from mankind will a greater and finer race evolve? In answer to this last question, all the noblest minds among men—Plato, Lucretius, Jesus (the real de-religionised one) and ten thousand others—have cried out "Yes!"; but the vast sterile masses of the people, slow to move or be moved, quick to sink back into their primitive slough of superstition again, seem to reply, "No! Never!" The question is unanswerable: the possibilities of human progress are unforeseen. If only one of us could stride through some three or four million years of time and then look back with eyes ten times sharper than any of our anthropogenists, he would perhaps see at a glance what purpose, in the universal structure the human race had fulfilled—a purpose by no means divine, yet absolutely inevitable.

On the other hand, as this race seems to be more fluid than its predecessors or those still existing that have existed far longer, it might have flowed down the channel of Time too swiftly to leave any permanent traces or influences. When our thoughts are directed in this way, to the mutability of all things, and to the lastingness of nothing, the strongest consolation we have is not in the repetition of useless prayers, but in ourselves as individuals. For we, in ourselves and to ourselves, are each the equal and the thinking complement of the universe around us; and with faith in ourselves, thoughtfulness towards others and courage against those that call themselves our enemies, who knows to what heights, as individuals, we may in our lifetime attain?

GEO. IVOR DEAS.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### HERESY HUNTING

SIR.—For sheer, downright, intolerant impudence, with a flavour of Nazism, commend to us the Wharfedale Union Joint Hospital Board. At a recent session of the Brains Trust, Commander Campbell made some remarks about inoculation which suggested that he had little confidence in the method. It would be gratuitous even to point out that Campbell has a perfect right to his own views on the question; and it would be snivelling hypocrisy to suggest that he should not speak as he feels. There is quite enough prohibited matter in the Brains Trust without suggesting that there should be more. But evidently the Wharfedale Hospital Board thinks otherwise, for this all-wise, all-knowing, and all-impertinent body actually passed a resolution to protest to the Ministry of Health against Campbell being permitted to make such statements on the wireless. Who are these people that dare to suggest that medical science is so perfect as to be beyond criticism or doubt? Heresy hunting is as old as the hills, of course; but it is to be hoped that the practice, with the decay of religion, is not being shifted from the realm of theology into the realm of science. We trust the Ministry of Health gave the protest the reply that it deserved; and we advise the members of the Hospital Board to breathe deeply the sweet air of bonny Wharfedale in the hope that their intellects may be freshened by the free English breezes that blow there.

Yours, etc.

F. J. CORINA.