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CONTENTS

Views and Opinions—The Editor ...	41
The Standard Biography of Bernard Shaw—T. F. Palmer ...	43
The Immoral Atonement—C. G. L. Du Cann ...	44
Acid Drops ...	45
To Correspondents ...	47
Sugar Plums ...	47
John the Baptist—H. Cutner ...	48
It's That Man Again—Lloyd Cole... ..	49
New Year Wish—John Darker ...	50
National Secular Society Executive Meeting ...	51
Obituary	51
Sunday Lecture Notices, Etc.	51

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and the Word

WE commenced these jottings in response to a request that we would give a plain definition of Christianity. We could, of course, have replied "The religion of Christians," but that would only have evoked the retort "What is the religion of Christians?" To that the only reply would be "Christians are not agreed upon what is Christianity." A similar retort would have met any one of the many definitions of Christianity that exists. To answer "Belief in Jesus Christ" would have been a play upon words, since it is what one believes *about* Jesus Christ that is important. So we decided that the only way to tackle this question is to hold up the mirror to Christians and let them realise what historic Christianity involves. For God—so runs the story—has given mankind a schedule of his work and of his commands in the Old and the New Testament. "They comprise," to quote *ex-Archbishop Lang*, "the oracles of God." It is these books on which Christianity builds, and we will try our impious hands on presenting the essence of that teaching to all who are interested. Our exposition will be scanty, a mere outline, but the Christian Church is an historic fact, and we must try and get some inkling of its essential teaching. The reader must fill up the gaps for himself. We aim at a mere commentary, not an exhaustive exposition.

We begin, not with Genesis, but with the first verse of the first chapter of "The Gospel According to St. John." Here it is.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God."

There is no passage in the New Testament that has excited such continuous admiration as this one. It has been called "stupendous," "sublime," "unapproachable in its

This series of notes is in reply to a question: "What is Christianity?" There are so many forms of Christianity we declined the task of answering. But Christianity is an historic religion based upon the Bible. The clergy are crying: "Back to the Bible." We take them at their word, and give the essentials of Christianity as presented in the Bible.

grandeur," etc. Certainly no one can go farther back than does St. John. He does not waste time in saying how he got back to the beginning. He was wise in his generation. We must also concede that he defies demonstrative contradiction. He is terse, simple and explicit. A child can repeat what he says; a philosopher can do no more. It is the kind of eloquence over which a congregation of worshippers lose themselves in admiration and a parson builds up the reputation of being a great spiritual force. So long as a man can keep that text before him he is proof against unbelief. Nothing can weaken the authority of such a text. It may be read from the beginning to the end, from the end to the beginning, or one may start in the middle and read up and down at the same time. The spiritual quality of this text remains unaffected.

Two things are mentioned in it. One is "God," the other is the "Word." They are both critical terms. What is their spiritual significance? After all, words are words, and they should have what the new science of "Semantics" call "referents," that is, they should mean something. We agree that if this were an observed rule of speech politicians would lose their jobs and parsons their power; but we are dealing with truth, not with consequences.

Living Words

Let us, then, commence with "God." What has a religious person in mind when that word is used? Earlier generations of Christians would have been prompt with their reply. They would describe God, and he would be just a copy of a human being. God might be greater than man, wiser or more powerful, but he was in essence a man. The God of Christian history was always a magnified man, and when Christians talked of meeting God they meant some recognisable being, not a mere abstraction. Honestly, that is the only kind of a God that any man can think about. In repudiating that kind of a God the modern Christian is really committing suicide to save himself being slaughtered. The attributes which religious folk give God are human attributes, or the language used is meaningless.

Let us look elsewhere. "God," says a recent and reliable dictionary, "is an Aryan word." But an Aryan word must be part of an Aryan language, and that was created about a century ago for linguistic purposes, and with it an Aryan race who used this assumed language. Both the language and the people are now discarded, although the terms still flourish in the House of Commons and other popular centres. But we may fairly ask the believer whether when he speaks of the goodness and power of God, or when he prays to God, has he not in his mind what we mean when we use these terms in connection with human beings? If he has not, what meaning can we attach to what he says? He can mean no more than what we have in mind when we speak of *angry* clouds, *laughing* sunshine, or the *threat* of thunder.

Actually, we get multitudes of people talking about God helping us, listening to us, looking down on us, pleased or angry with us, just as though we were talking of the local tax collector. The truth is that the advance of culture has left us without any known "referent" for "God." We should not know a God if we met one. We should not know what to do with him if we found one. He would be as much out of place in civilised society as wigwams would be in Piccadilly. In any case, anything we could do *with* God we can do without him. The only people who appear to feel they are in touch with God are professional preachers who, if they do not live *with* God, could not live without him. The man who says with honesty that he knows God is what anthropologists call a "savage" or a "primitive."

As we cannot get anywhere with "God," let us try another word of our text. What are we to understand by the "Word"? A dictionary defines a word as the simplest element of speech, representing an idea, or a single sound serving as the name of an object. None of these appear to cover what St. John had in mind. But he does associate it with "Power." He also identifies it with God, but as no one knows just what God is like, it is of no use to say the two terms are interchangeable. We simply cannot retain our sanity and argue that A. resembles B., for we don't know what B. is like.

We recall an acquaintance who was fond of asking people, after some little chatter on scientific matters, whether they believed in the theory that Ploshkas revolve round Bliffs. It was astonishing to note the number of people who, rather than confess ignorance, would put on an air of wisdom and plead that they had not paid special attention to that aspect of the matter, or that they believed the statement was questioned by many scientific men. Anything seemed to be preferable to confessing ignorance of the nature of Ploshkas and Bliffs. On that level, St. John's outburst appears to have gained great praise.

But instead of standing in a kind of trance before a Biblical passage and counting unintelligent eulogies as profound religious thinking, we will see what sense can be knocked into this word-cum-god complex. St. John plainly means that the "word" is an instrument of power. He says that "the Word was made flesh," and that God and the Word are one. Luke relates that when Jesus cast devils out of a man the bystanders were astonished and asked by what "Word" does he do these things? St. John also gives the information that "the Word was made flesh and lives with us." In the Book of Revelations a fearsome creature comes on the scene who is called the "Word." In other instances in the Old and New Testament we have the same record of a "Word" that is remarkably active. Apart from the Christian mythology, the Babylonian mythology contains a "Word" that also does things. Other mythologies offer the same evidence.

It is not, therefore, in Christian circles that we may look for explanation of this wonder-working "Word." It appears in many other religious systems, and has its beginnings in the most primitive state of human society. We have been saying for many years that, bearing in mind the state of culture in Rome and Greece, Christianity comes—religiously—as a retrogression to a lower type. Not the priest but the anthropologist must be our teacher, and to understand this magic-working "Word," we suggest the reading of the third volume, last chapter, of Frazer's

"Golden Bough," a very useful small book by Edward Clodd, "The Magic of Names," and the "Religions of Primitive Peoples," by D. G. Brinton. Those interested will find many other clues as they pursue their study. But the last one to understand religion is a priest.

What we have to understand is a stage of human life where words are things and have "power" in their own right. Says Frazer: "Primitive man regards his name as a vital portion of himself, and takes care of it accordingly." In various parts of South-Eastern Europe even to-day children are given two names, a real one that is kept secret and one for use that is made public. It may be noted that the Jews never disclosed the real name of their God, neither did the Mohammedans. And many strict Jews all over the world believe that a few Hebrew words nailed over the doorpost will keep evil spirits at bay. There is also a rabbinical belief that every letter of the "sacred language, Hebrew" has a magical power. Lenormant says that "the primitive idea concerning the ritual formulæ was assimilation with God brought about by the use of his name." This power is illustrated when one of the Egyptian Gods says:—

"Were my name spoken on the banks of a river, it would be consumed. Were it uttered on earth, fire would burst from the ground."

Frazer says that "In Egypt the magician's main aim consists in obtaining from the gods a revelation of their sacred names." "In that great home of magic, Chaldea," says Clodd, "qualities ascribed to magic knots, amulets, drugs, yielded to the power of God's name. Before that everything in heaven and earth and the underworld bowed, while it enthralled the gods themselves." The ritual of the Christian Churches is full of instruction for the right use of sacred words and names. Prayers have to be said in a certain way with a certain intonation. The rituals of the Churches pay great attention to the use of important words, not for purposes of correct speech, but because they would lose much of their strength and importance if they were pronounced carelessly.

If we turn from the Churches to the now harmless world of fairyland, we find in those beliefs that have become transformed into children's tales the same lesson we find in adults of a primitive type. Fairies and Demons and Giants must be approached in an orthodox way. "Fee-fo-fi-fum" will call the giant, "Fi-fum-fo-fee" would work no wonders. Modern folk-lore is made up of survivals in a sophisticated age of real beliefs belonging to a more primitive one.

So it would seem that St. John's "In the beginning was the Word" has more in it than meets the parsonic or pious eye. A word of power is no foolish thing to the primitive mind; it is a matter of the greatest importance. It may rouse a storm, cause an earthquake, set going a disease, or, on the other hand, provide man with many things of value. The first chapter of St. John has a meaning, but that meaning is as unknown to the pious Christians of to-day as it was to St. John—if he ever lived. Professor Postgate, as cited by the authors of "The Meaning of Meaning," put the matter in a nutshell when he said that this power of words "is the simple conception of the savage." Poor St. John! And he probably thought he was giving the world a very valuable piece of information.

We think we may close this aspect of our subject with the following from Sir James Frazer:—

"If the reader has had the patience to follow a long and perhaps tedious examination of the superstitions attaching to names, he will probably agree that the mystery in which the names of royal personages are so often shrouded is not isolated phenomena, but merely the particular application of a general law of primitive thought, which includes within its scope folk and gods as well as kings and priests."

(To be continued.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE STANDARD BIOGRAPHY OF BERNARD SHAW

WITH his "Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality" (Collins, 1942; 21s.), Hesketh Pearson has presented the reading public with a realistic biography of the celebrated Fabian. In the letterpress of this work, which is eminently entertaining from the first line to the last, Shaw is presented with all his allurements as well as the defects of his qualities, while his more conventional characteristics are not concealed. His long and active career is crowded with incident, and most of the protagonists of advanced movements appear in its pages. The Press, the drama and music also play a prominent part in Shaw's erratic experiences, while his views on men, women and things, if not always convincing, certainly provide amusement and stimulate thought.

Born in Dublin in 1856, in shabby-genteel surroundings, Shaw shook the dust of his native island from his feet at an early age, determined to make his name and fame in England, whose inhabitants he has never tired of holding up to ridicule, presumably for their ultimate advantage and improvement. Although, according to his own account, of a naturally shy disposition, Shaw's audacities were destined to shock a humourless Victorian public and, in times of stress, Shaw's moral courage stood in striking contrast to the compromising conduct of many who shared his unpopular opinions.

Shaw's early experiences in London were not very encouraging, and he lingered long before his literary efforts were crowned with the slightest commercial success. Even when his "copy" was at last accepted, his pecuniary rewards were distinctly meagre. In those penurious days, from 1876 to 1885, his clothes were so tattered that he was unpresentable in daylight, and Shaw himself is quoted as saying: "I remember once buying a book entitled 'How to Live on Sixpence a Day,' a point on which at that time circumstances compelled me to be pressing. I carried out its instructions faithfully for a whole afternoon; and if ever I were to have an official biography issued, I shall certainly have it stated therein, in illustration of my fortitude and self-denial, that I lived for some time on sixpence a day." In poverty and distress, with a practically seatless pair of trousers, broken boots and a tall hat so dilapidated at the brim that it had to be worn with the back to the front, his appearance must have been decidedly unprepossessing. Shaw's recreations were almost limited to "visits to the National Gallery (on free days) and Hampton Court. Like Samuel Butler, he made a second home of the reading room in the British Museum." It is hard to imagine G. B. S., even in his present plutocratic circumstances, in a top hat, so long regarded as a conclusive sign of respectability.

Henry George's campaign in favour of Land Nationalisation and the Single Tax led to Shaw's reading Marx's "Kapital" in a French translation, Aveling and Moore's rendering into English

being made at a later date. This study converted him to the Socialist creed he has since retained, although he subsequently rejected his mentor's theory of value and has no faith in dialectical materialism. It seems strange that the man who could now fill the largest halls in England was at that time quite content to address an audience of a score, or even less. The writer himself remembers the tiny gathering that listened to him in Regent's Park in the nineties of last century, and a little later, when G. B. S. was addressing about a dozen in a room in Kentish Town. At least on two occasions his open-air ministrations nearly led to his arrest when the police used the pretext of obstruction for the purpose of silencing Secularist and Socialist speakers.

As Shaw contends that all conceptions, Catholic or Protestant, are immaculate, he has no scruples whatever concerning a frank avowal of his own experiences in sexual intercourse. His various adventures are plainly portrayed by his biographer and, quaint as some of them were, there is little to moan over after all. Shaw conducted a long and distinctly animated correspondence with Ellen Terry for years before they became personally acquainted. Later, Shaw was anxious to enlist the services of Mrs. Patrick Campbell as the heroine of one of his plays, but she required a lot of coaxing, and their interviews nearly led to the dramatist's capitulation to her charms. In any case, Miss Terry accused him of having fallen in love with "Mrs. Pat Cat." He was also very much smitten by the attractive graces of Annie Besant, but their relations, while they lasted, appear to have been purely Platonic. Whatever they were, the nature of the intimacy was probably confined to themselves, and they were fully entitled to let the world surmise.

As a dramatic critic Shaw was so obsessed with the, to him, overpowering genius of Ibsen that he clearly failed to render justice to contemporary and even Elizabethan playwrights. The masterpieces of Shakespeare himself were persistently depreciated. Indeed, were one to forget the fact that Shaw's apparent idolatry of Bunyan is traceable to the circumstance that, like himself, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress" deemed himself endowed with a spiritual mission, the utter imbecility of such Shavianisms as follow might be dismissed with unmitigated contempt. "'Though with great difficulty [writes Bunyan] I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it.' The heart vibrates like a bell [avers Shaw] to such an utterance as this: to turn from it to 'Out, out, brief candle' and 'The rest is silence' and 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of; and our little life is rounded with a sleep' is to turn from life, strength and resolution, morning air and eternal youth to the terrors of a drunken nightmare."

In commenting on this tirade, Pearson pointedly observes, Shakespeare did not need to convey all the delectable sensations enumerated by Shaw "when Macbeth was on his last legs, Hamlet was dying and Prospero was about to retire from the world and lead a meditative life. . . . When by the way Shakespeare wished to sound the heroic note, he did not resort to the moral babble and pietistic twaddle of Bunyan. He put into the mouth of the average man a simple remark which told ordinary people what they had to do and what made it worth doing:—

"Men must endure
Their going hence ever as their coming hither.
Ripeness is all."

As a member of the St. Pancras Vestry, Shaw created consternation among the Bumbles of that now abolished body. He recommended the erection of ladies' lavatories in order to furnish women with the facilities afforded men in performing the functions of Nature. This sensible suggestion, since carried out, then so shocked the susceptibilities of a prominent vestryman

that he expressed "his horror," says Shaw, "at my venturing to speak in public on so disgusting a subject." And his biographer might have mentioned that, not only did Shaw scandalise his colleagues in the Vestry; he also made this particular proposal the main feature of his election address.

We are told that: "The borough of St. Pancras then had a population of about 250,000, but it did not contain a single bookshop." Unless Pearson means a Public Library, this statement needs correction, for there were several well-known bookshops in leading thoroughfares, while one in Parkway, then Park Street, Camden Town, was established more than half a century since, and still survives.

Shakespeare, Shaw asserts, was the victim of social convention, otherwise "he would probably have become one of the ablest men of his time instead of being merely its ablest playwright." His biographer dismisses this inept Shavism with the remark that "all men are liable to lapse into imbecility; and since Homer sometimes nodded, Shaw must be excused for having occasionally drivelled."

One might infer from Pearson's vivid description of the trouble in Trafalgar Square in November, 1887, that the frustrated demonstration was the work of the Socialists. It is true that the leading Socialists were there and that Cunninghame Graham and John Burns were arrested, but unless my memory sadly betrays me, the gathering was organised by the Metropolitan Radical Federation. Neither Bradlaugh nor Foote was present, as they were lecturing in the Provinces, although Mrs. Besant, then a Secularist, was much in evidence. Foote was the principal speaker at the demonstration in Hyde Park on the following Sunday, and it may be recalled that when the authorities prohibited the meeting in the Square, Bradlaugh, who was unable to forego his engagements on November 13, offered to lead the demonstration of protest if it were postponed until the 20th. This offer, however, Foote assures us in his "Reminiscences of Charles Bradlaugh," was declined.

Pearson was curious concerning the shady conduct of Edward Aveling where women and money were involved, and asked Shaw whether he had ever encountered a similar instance. His answer was characteristic, for he replied that "he had been on equally pleasant terms with three others, two clergymen and a retired colonel, all of whom combined a pleasing absence of aggressive vices with a total lack of conscience in money matters and sexual relations."

Shaw's estimate of the mental liberty existing in De Valera's Erin is thus expressed: "In my native Ireland, now nominally a Free State, one of my books is on the index; and I have no doubt all the rest will follow as soon as the clerical censorship discovers their existence." This seems to show that those who said *Homo Rule* would mean *Rome Rule* were not such damned fools after all.

Hesketh Pearson once questioned Shaw concerning the alleged Catholic piety of the composer, Elgar. Did he find him deeply devout? "Good heavens, no!" said Shaw. "He avoided the subject with a deliberate reticence which convinced me that he was a 19th century unbeliever, though he wouldn't have admitted it and wouldn't have liked to be told so. As he was the musical hero of the three Protestant Cathedrals of Worcester, Gloucester and Hereford, and really belonged to Worcester in his soul, the world did not think of him as an R.C. All his emotion went into his music."

Almost every one of the 418 pages of this brilliant biography is replete with incident and entertainment, while the very fine photographs of Socialist celebrities such as Morris, Hyndman, the Webbs and Shaw himself, add to the volume's value. Still, Pearson's suggestion that our age may come to be known as that of Shaw, seems precarious. At least, in the realm of science, our epoch appears far more likely to become the

age of Einstein, just as we speak of the age of Newton, Darwin or Copernicus. Moreover, in the republic of letters, surely such artistic triumphs as Hardy's "Dynasts" and the "Queen of Cornwall" completely eclipse, as works of art, anything that Shaw has written, for even his greatest achievements are devoted to the task of inculcating the Shavian philosophy.

T. F. PALMER.

THE IMMORAL ATONEMENT

ALL Christianity, whether Roman, Anglican, Greek or other, rests upon what is called the doctrine of the Atonement. No Christian sect, however small and challenging to the greater Churches, has ever dispensed with this teaching. It is the fundamental theory behind all forms of the Christian religion.

Put briefly, it amounts to this: The first Man, specially created by God out of dust in his own likeness, offended his Maker by some form of disobedience (the Fall) by which he brought death upon himself. But God so loved man that instead of exacting the utmost dread penalty of everlasting death, he gave his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the form of a man that this loved Son might die temporarily, and by that temporary death pay the forfeit of everlasting death which the rest of mankind had incurred, and suffer instead only a temporary death.

St. John stated the teaching in a familiar text: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ that whoso believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Trained in this teaching from childhood, one's mind does not revolt at it. One accepts it. But seriously considered by a detached, impartial and critical mind, it is obviously wicked and horrible in the highest degree. Adult non-Christians see this readily. To the mind familiarised with the tale from childhood, it all seems natural and right.

Analyse the morality of such a story! It is the creator God of the story, not the creature-man, who is, clearly, in the wrong. This God made a fallible creature—God's blunder—and inflicted the penalty due for that blunder not upon himself, the guilty party, but upon the victim. This is not justice. It is further victimising the victim instead of compensating him.

What frightful disobedience did the First Man commit to bring such a vengeful penalty upon himself and his innocent descendants? In the Book of Genesis in the Christian Bible, a childish tale is told of the man eating fruit forbidden by God. (The trifling indulgence of a God-given appetite.) Such a small fault might be justly met by a few words of rebuke, such as a modern father gives his boy for apple-stealing. The penalty, however, was labour for men, child-travail for women, death for both, according to the Christian tale—which ignores the fact that the rich may escape the curse of sweat and spinster-women the pain of child-bearing. Modern clergy, like the late Bishop Gore, a leader in the Church of England, declared that the fruit-story was mere poetic symbolism for a graver Fall of Man from goodness and grace. "Man's first disobedience," up-to-date clergymen do not, and cannot, indicate more precisely.

Unfortunately for the whole story, modern science has made discoveries which prove pretty conclusively that man evolved from the animals, and was the exact reverse of being specially created. Further, instead of man once being perfectly good and "falling" from that state, it is clear that man's story is one of ascent, not descent. There is no scrap of evidence for a Fall. There is abundant evidence of a Rise.

But continuing our analysis of the morality of the Atonement: it is clear that no innocent person can justly pay the penalty for a guilty person. A vicarious sacrifice is contrary to justice. Yet this unjust practice the Christian God commits. He "gives" his Son, like those awful middle-aged English business men of

the 1914-18 war, who boasted of having "given" a son for the cause, until such crude falsifications became criticised by those who found it a disgusting lie. So Jesus, by his death, is to buy us off. Can anything be more immoral? What human justice would accept such a wicked substitution?

However, in the doctrine, Jesus does not pay our full penalty of "perishing everlastingly." He dies for three days only. He is fortunate indeed, if a few weeks of suffering and three days' death, equals the everlasting death of the countless myriads of mankind who have ever existed or whoever will exist to the end of Time. A very good bargain indeed driven by the Christian God with himself!

Is it not a strange and repulsive story? Tell it not of a God and his Son, but of an ordinary man and his son, and what would be said of it? If it were newly-invented to-day and came fresh to us, it would not stand the remotest chance of acceptance in a civilised community.

But the story comes from the childhood of the race—the remission of sins through bloodshed has its origin in savagery, as Sir James Frazer said. Its essential implications of a revengeful scoundrel of a father demanding a Shylock's pound of flesh from a foolish son, lest he should destroy the countless progeny of his own creation, escape us. Only the critical few can break the mental habits forged in childhood, and look at the story with a judicial gaze, free from engendered prejudice.

To look at the doctrine clearly and impartially, however, is surely to reject it with scorn and indignation and horror. If a God of the kind predicated by the Christian faith exists—loving and Almighty—this doctrine insults both his loving kindness and his power. In a word, it is crude and shocking blasphemy from the religious standpoint.

Yet this story of dei-cide or god-death is sacrifice for the salvation of mankind only—the wretched animals who never sinned are not worth saving, it appears, but are to die for non-disobedience while man dies for disobedience—is not peculiar to Christianity. The Christian faith took it from far older religions. To this day in India the Brahmanical doctrine is that in daily sacrifice by the priest, the body of the god is broken anew for the salvation of the world. In ancient times, Mexican and a dozen other religions told a similar god-scapegoat tale.

Why is it that this strange teaching of blood-payment does not revolt the ordinary English man or woman of to-day? Habit from childhood, as we have seen, partly explains why. But there is another reason. The tale is not merely repellent. Ignore the villainy attributed to the Father-God and concentrate on the Son-God's sacrifice. There is sublimity here, as always when one life is voluntarily sacrificed for another or others. It is upon the sublimity of the sacrificed One that much modern thought dwells.

But granting this feature—what is to be said of those folk who voluntarily accept the sacrifice of Jesus for themselves? They ought to be ashamed of themselves to accept such a vicarious sacrifice. What! shall I allow, when I have done wrong, that an innocent human being or even animal, shall pay my penalty? Not unless I am a cad. "Saved by the precious blood of the Lamb" is the voice of a coward and cad.

For my own part, in common decency, I cannot allow myself to be saved by the blood of Jesus unless George, my white rabbit, is also redeemed from eternal death. What sin his ancestor in the Garden of Eden committed I don't know, but the worst offence George has ever done was when, in my garden, he affectionately nibbled through the bottoms of my trousers. Otherwise his body and soul are spotless, comparing more than favourably with those of mankind. . . . There is also Minnie, the house-cat. True she is an impenitent thief, but it was to a thief that Jesus said: "Thou shalt be with me, in Paradise."

Minnie, that engaging little beast with an affection for me, must also be saved. There is also a visiting Robin-redbreast, a woodpecker and a few breakfast-time sparrows, and I must remind Jesus of what he said about sparrows. . . . I fear my personal salvation means a regular Noah's Ark. . . . And you? . . . Are you prepared to be saved while the baby of the woman next door but one is burned in hell for ever and ever? I think not.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

ACID DROPS

MR. GODFREY TEARLE, the actor, has recanted his attitude with regard to Sunday plays. He explains that he has been living out of the world for some time, in a remote village in Cornwall, and has discovered "a point of view of which I was considerably unaware." This discovery was "the Christian conscience," which "exists for many people as a first principle and a guiding rule of life." And because of this discovery, that a number of people in a remote part of Cornwall do not want plays on Sunday, Mr. Tearle concludes that others should not have Sunday plays either.

The ingenuity of it is staggering. Was Mr. Tearle so ignorant of life that he did not know there were bodies of Christians who for a guiding rule take the most fantastic absurdities? We can hardly believe that to be the case. Travelling actors are not quite so simple as that. Besides, there are Christians in this country who do not believe in calling in a doctor, still the law drops on them if the sick person in their charge dies. And there are British citizens who do not believe in using Friday in any other way than a religious one, and Jewish citizens who take the same view with regard to Saturday. Each has first principles and guiding rule. And if Christians are to be humoured to the extent of compelling others to bow to their fetishes why not others? All our leaders are bawling out that we are a democracy—for the "duration," at least—and if we are to even pretend to believe in the equality of man, we cannot really take on as our guide a remote Cornish village, even when enforced by a plea from a retired actor.

Mr. Tearle plays an apparently stronger card when he asks what is to happen if an actor says "my conscience will not allow me to act on Sunday"? Candidly, we do not think that many actors would feel that way, and in any case it is only the problem which confronts many people when certain contingencies conflict with their principles. It is a situation that has always existed, and it is likely to continue, whatever be the form taken by the social State. But the keeping of Sunday as a "sacred" day is not a social issue; it is a religious one. No one wishes to interfere with the convictions of Mr. Tearle or his friends, but in the situation Mr. Tearle pictures the only reply, and the proper reply, is "the profession you would wish to follow conflicts with your private convictions concerning this or that, the choice before you is to obey your conscience or ignore it." There are always opportunities to exert a petty tyranny on some people because others do not believe as they do. Mr. Tearle has retired from the stage; it is rather a pity that he should stain a well-earned reputation by falling a victim to so undependable and historically dangerous a thing as the Christian conscience, and in the interest of the most foolish of Christian superstitions.

The "Times" appears to have little sense of fair play, or even truth where the interests of the Churches are concerned. In a leading article (January 13) it opens its attack by remarking that "the force behind the agitation for Sunday opening is primarily commercial." If that were true, would it be more commercial than the action of the Churches, which is animated by the fear that the attractions of the theatre will keep the clients of the clergy away from their places of business? But the statement is not true; it is not only a lie, but a wilful lie. The whole movement for Sunday games and entertainments is historically based upon the desire to provide for young men and women opportunities for clean, healthy enjoyment and recreation.

The Church did not object to the opening of public houses on Sunday, it merely demanded that they should not be open during Church hours. Anyone who cares to look up the facts concerning the life of the people during the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth will be able to judge what a vile libel the "Times" is giving currency.

The "Times" is plainly counting on the ignorance of one half of its supporters and the self-interest of the other half, or it would reflect that the cry against the opening of theatres on Sunday is the same cry, raised by the same class of people, that was raised against the opening of museums, libraries, playing grounds, art galleries on Sunday, etc. Even Sunday trains were fought against until the shareholders recognised that they were shutting out a source of income. It can hardly be that the "Times" leader-writer is ignorant enough as not to know this to be the case. That is why we say the statement is a deliberate lie. How great a lie we may show by an appeal to facts as soon as our war-time space permits.

As for the fear of this alleged selfishness that the claim for Sunday freedom is "primarily economic," one may well ask is it more economical than that of the clergy who oppose it? The plea that Sunday theatricals would lead to a seven-day week, that could be easily guarded by making it illegal for any wage-earner—whether the wage be small or large—working more than a given number of hours per week. That is already done in trades unions, why not in other directions? But the attack is not honest, therefore the possibility of a reasonable adjustment of labour—whether it be on or off the stage—is not in question. Really, it looks as though we can, when we like, give a lead to Goebbels.

It will be remembered that some time ago the Archbishop of Canterbury said in reply to the question whether the statement that property of which the Church, through the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, was being used for immoral purposes, that the ground rents—in Paddington—used to be in the hands of the Church, but are not now. The Estates Commissioners have now issued a statement that greater care is now being taken, which hardly bears out the Archbishop's statement. But the question of ground rents from which the Church benefits cannot be put off in this way, nor can the inquiry be restricted to Paddington. The Church—that is, the State on behalf of the Church—is one of the greatest landowners in the country. And when the bishops and archbishops have done with all their cant about the desire for a new world, it must always be understood that the new world they wish for, and will fight for, is one in which the wealth and the power of the Church will remain untouched.

Rev. Cresswell Webb, in the "Daily Mirror," says that all the different churches must forget their separateness and pull together. They must forget "My Church, Your Church and his Church. Let it be our Church." It reminds us of "We must hang together or we shall be hung separately." Any Church will do so long as it is a Church. And this after centuries of wildest fighting for "My Church, Your Church and his Church"!

The "Yorkshire Post" the other day contained a curious advertisement among its church notices. The sermon announced was "Man's Wisdom and God's Foolishness," and while we should be the last to deny that the alleged god of the Churches does often act foolishly, his representatives should not be in such a hurry to advertise it. But it is certainly the case that a terrific amount of human energy is expended on trying to correct god's blunders.

Apropos of what has just been said, we recall the case of a Lancashire showman who exhibited a number of human and animal deformities and advertised them as "god's blunders." And if there be a god who created them, the expression was strikingly correct.

In a letter to the "New Statesman" the Secretary of the National Education Association, Mr. W. J. Rowland, very neatly pricks the bubble that the Roman Church in this country has blown in connection with State education. The Roman Church claim is that it must keep control over "its own schools" while having them kept going at the expense of the State. And it prattles about the intolerable injustice of forcing Roman Catholics to pay, as citizens, towards the expense of the national schools while having also to maintain their own.

What are the facts? They are set forth by Mr. Rowland as follows. He says:—

"Roman Catholic education in the elementary schools is wholly paid for out of public funds except for the use of school buildings on five days of the week. Against this small contribution of about 4 or 5 per cent. of the total cost there is to be placed the ownership and control of these premises out of school hours, plus the periodical re-decoration of them at public expense—not a bad bargain, which is shared by the Church of England schools.

"It must be remembered that Roman Catholics have perfect freedom to bring up their children in their own way, but they have no right to look to the State to undertake the responsibilities either of the parent or of the church.

"Quite apart from democratic theories, there is a very practical objection to the multiplication of sectional schools with their wasteful overlapping in regard to buildings, equipment and teaching staffs. Why should the State be called on to hold out financial inducements to maintain and extend a wasteful system?"

Perhaps the only answer to the "Why" of Mr. Rowland is that first, none of the Churches dare trust children to the impact of modern thought, if they wish them to grow up believers in any of the established form of religion. Prejudices must be created and wrong views of life inculcated if the Churches are to live. And secondly, the best chance the Churches have had of regaining some of the ground lost in 1870, is to rush a measure through Parliament before the existing Government goes out of office. It is dastardly to take advantage of the war in this manner, but the leaders of religion have never been remarkable for their sense of fair play when it threatened to injure their position and destroy some of their privileges. And it is evidently in their judgment a matter of "Now or Never."

A Conservative government is in power, and the Roman Catholic vote is a solid one. The Roman Church claims, as a first principle to control education, and the Church vote is very docile. So far as education is concerned, the Roman Catholic who interferes with education in a way that threatens the power of the Church is committing a very real "sin."

At the recent Oxford Conference of the Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools a resolution was passed that in any post-war reorganisation involving religious education, denominational or doctrinal religious instruction should be prohibited in all schools wholly or partly financed out of public funds, and that provision of religious instruction and observance should remain optional. We congratulate the Conference on its resistance to the Archbishops-cum-Government plan for re-establishing the clergy in our national schools. The manoeuvre is the more contemptible as this party-cum-sectarian move is being made under cover of the war.

We notice that the Bishop of Monmouth has been found not guilty of personal ill-will in depriving the late Rev. E. L. Macnaughton of his living. Apparently the parson in question had caused the door of his church to be locked against a visitation by the Archdeacon of Monmouth. We cannot help wondering what would happen to a parson who, suddenly becoming intellectually honest, began to tell the truth from his pulpit. No doubt he would be deprived of his living, as of course, he should be. The Church is the place for the teaching of Christian nonsense, and not for the propagation of scientific and philosophical truth.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

B. TAYLOR.—Pleased to know you are so interested in "The Freethinker." We hope that interest will continue. We happen to be dealing with the question you ask from another correspondent. Please take that to cover your question also.

A. LEESON.—Put the matter another way. If the "knowledge" of God is important to the deity he ought to take care that everyone has good evidence for his existence. After all, if we should suffer for not knowing God, he would just cease to exist if no one paid any attention to him. All the gods that are "have-beens" have died for want of believers.

E. TRASK.—We are much indebted to people like yourself for devising ways of bringing "The Freethinker" to the notice of those who might never otherwise give it their attention.

A. CLUNAS.—Sorry, but we have no pamphlet in print at the moment dealing with the subject you name.

W. H. BLORE.—We appreciate the trouble taken by friends in sending cuttings from the Press. But it must be understood that with our restricted space we can print but a small collection. But very many that are not printed in our "Acid Drop" Section are still of use. Thanks for your appreciation of this paper.

"THE FREETHINKER" ENDOWMENT FUND.—A. H. DEACON, 10s.

A. GEORGE.—War Damage Fund. £10.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

OUR readers will be interested to learn that a B.B.C. talk on Charles Bradlaugh "to commemorate a fight for freedom by a great Victorian Radical," will be broadcast on Saturday, January 30, at 10-35 p.m. The speaker will be the grandson of Bradlaugh, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner.

The attack on the Brains Trust, a matter on which we led the way, is being participated in by one person or paper after another. Joad and Huxley have joined in the attack, but will they carry it the length of no longer helping to perpetuate this fraud on the general public? That is really the test. Of course, Campbell prefers clowning, but that is no more than a case of like to like. The director is up to his eyes in the task of seeing that little which is of any real value ever comes to the front, so that it is no use expecting help from that quarter. Political parties do not seem inclined to interfere, as probably each looks to one day using this instrument for the control of opinion. We have given evidence in these columns of the deliberate lying of some of the officials, and of the stupid defence offered by one of its governors, Mr. Harold Nicolson. The rule seems to be that the people can be fooled, they seem to be pleased when they are fooled, therefore let us keep on fooling them.

After continuous exposure for many years of the fakes and tricks of the B.B.C. in the interests of established religion, and a continuous exposure of the humbug of the "Brains Trust," we are pleased to see that some of our newspapermen are joining in the exposure. Here, for example, is a passage from some notes by A. J. Cummings in the "News Chronicle," a paper which has always—as the "Daily Chronicle" and as the "News Chronicle"—done what it could to boost religion. Mr. Cummings says, of the Brains Trust questions:—

"Most of the posers, trivial or serious . . . could be more precisely and competently answered by reference to any well-edited encyclopædia."

That is true, and it is a truth put almost in language that we have been using for a long while. The thing begins with a lie and a fraud when it pretends that the questions are just picked without selection. Questions on tabooed subjects, raised week after week, are cast aside. That in itself is proof that we are dealing with organised deception. The chairman of the proceedings has said many times how surprised he is at the knowledge possessed by the members of the Trust. Our surprise often is, when these people deal with general subjects, at the poverty of their understanding. But, in any case, it is a sad reflection that so many men and women of standing can lend themselves to the practices of the Brains Trust. Their course should be a refusal to participate in this weekly deception. Merely to say you would have the area of questioning broadened, etc., means nothing and will end nowhere. After all, one can purchase publicity too dearly. We do not like to think that the liberal payment has anything to do with it.

A new reader of "The Freethinker" asks, if he lives in this world without any belief in a God, why may he not live in another world in the same set of circumstances? We agree that theoretically the belief in a continued existence after death is separate from that of belief in God. But the answer to the question is that life is a question of a relation to a given environment, and if what we know as human life exists in some other world, then if the environment is not, broadly, identical with our environment here, then continued existence would not be possible. It is really the consideration of this which makes all belief in a continued existence, as human beings, in another world nonsensical.

We have often expressed a wish that the "reformers" of to-day—particularly the rank and file—were better acquainted with the names and the work of those who have done so much to keep the torch of liberty flaming. Among these stands the name of Richard Carlile, who did so much for freedom of thought, and who fought so hard for the creation of a real democracy. We therefore gladly give publicity to the fact that a meeting will be held in the Central Grand Hall, Glasgow, on Sunday, February 7, to mark the centenary of the death of one of England's greatest fighters. Mr. Guy Aldred will be the principal speaker to the theme "the Path to Freedom." There will be questions, discussion and a silver collection. Britain probably owes more to Carlile than to any other single man for the existence of a free Press—or, perhaps, one ought to say for a Press that would not have been as free as it is had Carlile never lived.

"The Rationalist," Melbourne, reprints, with acknowledgment, our article "Paine the Pioneer." In the same issue there is a fine article contributed by Bertrand Russell. Two items in a really good number. Publishing office: Queen Street, Melbourne. Price fourpence.

Mr. H. Cutner addresses the Leicester Secular Society, Humberstone Gate, to-day (January 31), at 3 p.m., his subject being "The Jesus Problem." This should prove both attractive and provocative, and we hope will draw a good audience.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

III.

THE interesting point to note in Mr. H. J. Schonfield's "The Lost Book of the Nativity of John" is that while he contends that the story of the wondrous birth of John must have been more or less inspired by similar stories in Jewish literature—say those of Isaac, Moses, Samson or Samuel—he does not pause to ask himself where *their* stories came from.

Stories of the "wonder-child," however, had been current in pagan lands long before the Old Testament was finally compiled. Osiris, Horus, Krishna, Apollo, Atys and many others, and even Plato, were all reputed to be either miraculously conceived or virgin-born, and a number of them also managed to escape death at the hands of some evil king.

In fact, there can be no doubt now that when John M. Robertson, Professor Drews, W. B. Smith and Edouard Dujardin, among others, claimed that there had been long before Christianity the worship of a God Jesus they were absolutely right. It is quite beside the point if any particular god so worshipped was actually not called Jesus. The name does not matter, it is the whole conception—the wondrous babe escaping death by a miracle, the star or stars which guide the Magi or Wise Men to the place of birth, their adoration, the earthly life full of good works, the call to righteousness, the Messiahship, the death of the God to save mankind, and the prophecy of his return to life to lead the faithful to Paradise—all these and more can be found in some way in the ancient religions.

The great Frenchman Dupuis pointed this out when he said that "the idea of a God who came down on earth to save mankind is neither new nor peculiar to Christians." But before Dupuis, St. Augustine—and he knew—said: "The same thing which is now called the Christian Religion existed among the Ancients. They have begun to call Christian the true religion which existed before." And in a work like that of Mr. Schonfield we get the modern proof that Dupuis and St. Augustine were right. He has demonstrated for all who can think that some time before the history of Jesus came to be written, almost all his attributes as a Messiah had been taken from the story of the Messiah John the Baptist, and that the Church had deliberately effaced all records as far as it was able of this fact.

John the Baptist—in spite of Josephus—is as much a literary creation as Jesus. The reader will find an interesting explanation of the myth in Robert Taylor's "Devil's Pulpit." May I, however, point out that when reading or consulting this work we must remember that it consists of discourses mainly delivered at the old Rotunda in Blackfriars Road over 110 years ago. Taylor was not just reading out a scholarly work which the majority of his audience may not have quite understood. He tried to make his lecture entertaining, and for this he perhaps felt compelled to be more or less facetious and even sometimes to play the buffoon, a fact which he himself recognised and to which he repeatedly called attention. Nowadays this facetiousness may seem out of place and to spoil his case, but his audience may have thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Every age has its standard of taste, and what passed for wit 110 years ago may jar on a modern student seriously bent on discovering truths.

Taylor's "John the Baptist" discourse is a little masterpiece of his own style—including his jibe at the way in which parsons are wont to "Gobble, Gobble, Gobble!" "How facile it is to be eloquent," he cried, "where sound will do instead of sense."

He pointed out that the indefiniteness of, "In those days came John the Baptist," was just like saying, "There were giants in those days," or witches, ghosts or hobgoblins; or just as we begin a fairy story, "Once upon a time." And he takes exception to the word "came," which is not the true translation of the Greek. It should be "became present." I looked this

up in my facsimile copy of the Sinaiticus Codex, which has, in addition, the literal English translation under each Greek word. The translation given is "is-beside-becoming"—thus thoroughly justifying Taylor. He claims it is an "astronomical" word, "he made his appearance."

John was, as Isaiah said, "the Voice." Says Taylor:—

"Yes, he was the voice—*Vox et proeterea nihil*—a voice, and nothing but a voice. So now the mystery begins to clear up a bit. As Jesus is expressly called the Word, and John *the Voice*, the devil's in't if the voice and the word are not first cousins all the world over. . . . And sure, sirs, it will never do for Christians to accuse me of levity and sarcasm for speaking of a voice without a body, where their whole system is founded upon so very near a relation to the Voice without a body, as is their Divine Logos, *the Word*, without a meaning. . . . And thus through both our Old and New Testaments you will find that God who is often enough spoken of as the invisible God, is never once spoken of as an Inaudible God. He cannot be seen, but he can always be heard. He has no body, parts or passions, only he has the lungs of Stentor himself. He doth send forth his voice; yea, and that, a mighty voice."

Taylor has surpassed even Chesterton here in Chesterton's own "original" style.

In passing, it should be pointed out that he explains the whole story of John, including his "beheading," on purely astronomical grounds—"John the Baptist is beheaded on August 29, because at the fourteenth hour and a-half of that day the bright Star of Aquarius rises in the calendar of Ptolemy, while the rest of his body is below; and as the direct adversary of Aquarius is Leo, whom I have shown to be none other than King Herod, so King Herod, every August 30, at half after two in the morning, usually repeats the operation of cutting off John the Baptist's head."

The well-known verse, "He must increase, but I must decrease," really means that from June 24, when John was "born," the days grow shorter, while from December 25, when Jesus was "born," the days grow longer. And one could go on in this way, but space forbids.

There is, however, one other point. In a recent correspondence in these columns dealing with the "Second Advent," one of the disputants had no difficulty whatever in proving that, if an unfulfilled prophecy put into the mouth of Jesus proves that he must have lived, so an unfulfilled prophecy put into the mouth of Jehovah proves that *he* must have lived also. I have always looked upon this "proof" of the existence of an "obscure" Jesus one of the silliest I know of, of course, in building up a literary life of a Messiah, a "biographer" was obliged to put in the hall-marks of such a personage, one of them being his declaration that he would come again. The fact that he did not, never disconcerts a true believer. You have a proof of this in the case of Johanna Southcott who, in spite of the fact that her dropsy was looked upon as a Messianic pregnancy, still has numerous followers. And the late "Judge" Rutherford promised "millions now living will never die"—though everybody does die at some time; yet Rutherford still has thousands of faithful believers.

Taylor deals with "the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great brightness," and "this generation shall not pass away until all these things be done." He says: "But done, these things never were, nor could have been in any other than that astronomical sense, in which they are done every year of our lives. Which sense they who reject, will find that they have as great miracles to work to save their Saviour, as ever their Saviour wrought to save them."

And, for some Freethinkers, Robert Taylor still speaks in vain.

H. CUTNER.

IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN

NEVER in all my life have I read such poor stuff put forward by a man purporting to be a thinker, as that contributed by C. E. M. Joad in a recent issue of "Tit Bits."

Joad sets out to give his reasons for turning religious after for many years being a confirmed agnostic.

He first of all sets down the arguments which formed the backbone of his agnosticism, in the following words:—

"The doubts which made me a convinced agnostic centred upon the problem of pain and evil; I did not see how this world could have been created by an omnipotent and benevolent God. For how, if it was so created, was one to explain pain and evil? Either God could remove them and did not, in which case he was not benevolent, or he wanted to and could not, in which case he was certainly not omnipotent.

"I knew, of course, that God was accounted not responsible for pain and evil, which were generally laid to the account of man. God, we were told, gave man the precious gift of free-will. . . . This seemed to me a poor "getaway." God, we were told; is omniscient; therefore he must have known how man would use his free-will; must, then, have known he would use it to do evil and cause pain. . . . And what account, anyway, was one to give of the pain of the animals before man appeared on the scene? . . . Moreover, I could not see that Christianity had made the world a better place. . . ."

Then Joad goes on to say:—

"I have set out these grounds for my agnosticism because I want to make it plain that I do not even now see any answer to them."

Is that so? We gather, therefore, that all that follows in the article by Joad will be an evasion of the only possible conclusion to be drawn from such statements of the riddle of the Universe. Joad admits that these objections of Freethinkers to the idea of the existence of God are as far as he can see without answer. As of course they are.

To a man, therefore, who depends upon reason for a guide through life's problems there is nothing further to be said. But let us follow Joad.

Joad states that as man may differ in his taste or distaste for music, so also one man may find something in religion that another man cannot find. So far, so good. But it may, of course, be said that the mere fact of a man finding some pleasure in a certain practice provides no proof of the truth of the propositions he may urge as a result of his satisfaction. One man likes drinking sour milk. Another man hates it above everything. But sour milk is neither "good" nor "bad" because of this. Such words have no meaning whatever. Nothing is good or evil (or bad), but thinking makes it so.

One man likes golf. Another would rather fish. One man derives satisfaction from a battle of arms. Another is a poet. Some find great satisfaction in sexual illegitimacy. And so on.

"Mystics," Joad says, "make direct contact with God." Now this is priceless! Joad states that there are arguments against the existence of God that he can find no answer to, and yet he talks of direct contact with such a being. He supports this by saying that prayer to God will bring divine help to overcome evil, and that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Now I do not believe that there has ever been such a thing as an answer to prayer. But I do believe that prayer can have a psychological effect upon the person praying. A man who continually prays to be holy has a good chance of becoming so, not because of any answer to prayer, but because of the effect of his prayers (or contemplation) upon himself.

Joad speaks of the evil in himself. But what is evil? Evil in his heart is Joad's complaint apparently. But the whole thing is absurd. There is a lot of good in men as we understand it.

But what is good? One man will say it is good to fight for a country at war. Another will say it is evil to fight at any time. Who is right? Good and evil exist only in the mind, and by force of tradition.

Taking our own understanding of good and evil, however, there is more evil in the actions of God in the Old Testament than anywhere in the Universe. God's heart must be of all hearts the most wicked. This forerunner of Hitler, who ordered the slaughter of whole races of people, men, women and children. How can God give Joad assistance to overcome evil when he himself is guilty of almost every barbarity imaginable?

Joad says he decided to act as if religion were true. From a false premise, of course, it has to be granted that anything can be proven.

Joad, nearing the end of his article and rapidly exhausting my patience, says:—

". . . are we not admonished in the Gospels of the importance of approaching God as little children might do?"

Good heavens! What next will the man say? Surely the head of a Department of Philosophy and Psychology is not going to recommend to a credulous public the practice of setting aside the faculties of reason to give religious mythology a chance to claim a greater allegiance than at present?

It is quite obvious that Joad has carried out the gospel precept himself. Apart from quite a good summary of the position of most Freethinkers, it is hard to believe that any other but a child would write such an article as Joad has written.

What Joad wishes us to believe is that despite the fact that all intellectual reasoning on the subject leads to at least the agnostic position, yet by becoming like infants again we can discover that there is something in religion; and that something in purely emotional.

Heaven help the coming students of psychology and philosophy in this country if this sample of Joad's religious tendencies is any key to the type of thing they are going to be taught.

LLOYD COLE.

DANCING AND THE METHODISTS

The year after Wesley's death, the Methodist preachers ordered that any parents who allowed their children to learn dancing should be expelled from the Methodist Society, and this monstrous absurdity was defended in a formal dissertation by Dr. Adam Clarke [see Southey's "Doctor," edit. Warter, p. 501]. Little facts like this should be preserved; they show what priests would do if they had the power.

BUCKLE.

RELIGIOUS ADVISERS TO M.O.I.

In case Mr. Whitfield, the writer of an interesting letter in the January 17 number, and other readers are not aware of the fact, I would like to state that about two years ago (more or less) four men were added to the staff of the Ministry of Information. Their names and salaries were:—

H. Martin, parson, £600 to £800 per year; R. Hope, schoolmaster, £600 to £800 per year; W. D. Newton, Board of Universe (Catholic), £600 to £800 per year; R. R. Williams, parson, £550 per year.

We can guess their qualifications for the job.

It might be well for Lord Kindersley, of the Savings Club, to note that 100 patriotic working men strongly object to save 10s. a week hard-earned money, £2,600 at the end of a year, to have it thrown down the drain. Though usually dumb, the worker is not daft.

E. WATSON.

NEW YEAR WISH

A FRIEND, who shall be nameless, inspired this article. Several of us were talking over dinner when G. joined us, carrying some rare and beautifully bound books. We "kidded" G. about his devotion to the literature of other days. Was this not escapism? Could 20th century man afford to luxuriate in the pleasant pastures of 18th century prose? The sirens wailed as if to endorse our plea for concentration upon the problems of the present. G. smiled. "Can you," he remarked deliberately, "tell me of a single weekly or monthly magazine published anywhere in the world, which really merits the attention of an intelligent person?"

We considered for a moment whilst G. waited attentively for our suggestions. Possessing a deadly wit and a comprehensive knowledge of British, American and French journalism, G.'s contempt for many popular intellectual journals was obvious from his expression. We suggested the better-known English and American papers, of varying political complexions. G. was not impressed. Polished sarcasm, barbed wit and faint praise were directed at our choices. Intellectually worthy papers continually offended against literary good taste. Well-written journals discussed nothing of importance. Highly specialised mediums needed a wider vision of the world as a whole. When G. left us, bearing his first editions away in triumph, we were able to imagine the kind of journal G. looked for from his negative reactions to current journalism. I am combining some of the ideas thrown out during the discussion with G. with some arbitrary notions of my own. I hope that "Freethinker" readers will dissect, criticise, amend or commend my New Year wish.

Mr. Archibald Robertson, writing in "The Freethinker" (December 27, 1942), defines the task of Freethinkers as follows: "To promote a scientific attitude to the problems of the world and to fight everything which stands in the way of such an attitude." Many Freethinkers, Mr. Robertson points out, lose sight of this target and waste their energies, and precious paper, in fruitless arguments with fellow rationalists as to the historicity of Jesus, or any one of a thousand theological conundrums. There is such a vast amount of political superstition and wrong thinking in the world, most of which is more harmful to mankind than the relatively innocuous mumbo-jumbo of organised religion, that to ignore the modern myths in favour of ancient controversies, putting verbal battles with churchmen before an effective attack on bad leadership and mass stupidity, is to sabotage the cause of Freethought.

Bradlaugh, Foote and our worthy Editor have made intellectual mincemeat of theologians and churchmen. They have greatly weakened the social influence of the Church. Religion survives, but it cannot hope to prolong its dotage indefinitely. May it not be that the Church is now "conditioned" to the violent intellectual attack of Atheists and is open to attack from another quarter? Should not Freethought be directed against such modern myths as racialism, national sovereignty, newspaper astrology (editorial and astronomical) and the permanent inferiority of coloured peoples? Could the Church survive in a truly rational world?

As Mr. Robertson puts it: "Against the myth of the Churches we set up the scientific approach to the world—an approach determined, not by revelation, but by experiment, and making no pretence to anything but a progressive approximation to truth. It is an attitude which learns by mistakes and treats its theories, not as dogmas demanding belief, but as tools to be tried out in the service of man. To promote that attitude and to secure its public recognition as the basis of our civilisation is task enough for Freethinkers."

It certainly is. The credulous peoples of the world are without exception in the hands of skilful and adept but irresponsible leaders. Some national rulers are well-meaning people. A majority are ambitious adventurers, more concerned with their Machiavellian exploits in to-morrow's history books than with the welfare of their own or other peoples. None of the statesmen whose faces and voices intrude into our lives, whether we are German, Russian, Chinese, American or British, would be in his present exalted and semi-deified position if the peoples of the world were capable of objectively appraising the merits of political leaders. The British people, despite Mr. Priestley's faith in their good sense and discrimination, and his contempt for those who talk of "masses," are pathetically easy to deceive. The population as a whole and any cross-section that is persuaded into a public meeting can be swayed by competent oratory without difficulty.

This is not to say that a demagogue could reverse popular opinion concerning, shall we say, the character of the German people, when Government agencies have taken care to exclude all mention of "good Germans" from the newspapers. But marked Government bias in questions of this kind can very easily be fanned into an uncompromising and unqualified hatred of a nation or a minority. There would be more cause for optimism if those who have commenced to think and act politically were capable of rational analysis and proof against popular demagoguery. The truth is that almost any plausible resolution can be foisted upon a meeting and carried unanimously if the resolution is moved by a well-known personality.

I have been present at a national conference of a Socialist political organisation which met, among other things, to adopt a constitution. The constitution, which had been most carefully drawn up by the leaders of the movement, was read to the conference—of educated middle-class people—and accepted with acclamation within a few minutes. Within two months the constitution had proved unworkable and one of those characteristic dog fights beloved of British "progressives" was under way. Another national conference had to be called to redraft the constitution before peace was restored.

Words in common use such as "socialism" or "democracy" have no accepted meaning, judging by the conflicting interpretations which "experts" of equal eminence put upon them. Despite the billions of words written about Russia since 1918 it is possible to assemble a selection of the writings of authorities, some of whom assert that Russia is democratic, whilst others deny it vehemently—producing, to me, unassailable arguments. The same authorities will be at variance as to whether Russia is Socialist. Can one wonder at the ignorance of mass man—sorry, people!—when our mentors so readily agree to differ. As well ask members of diverse religions what is God's will at the present juncture of civilisation!

It is time I drew the moral and described a weapon to combat ignorance and credulity. The weapon I envisage can be constructed and used by Freethinkers—if they have the courage and the will to do so. Young Freethinkers may provide the dynamic which will forge this weapon. The youthful qualities of older and more experienced minds will be at their call if they do not spurn the advice of maturity. What is this weapon?

I believe that "The Freethinker," so ably edited by those stalwarts of Freethought, G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen, has a mission to accomplish. I believe this journal with its traditions and its loyal and widespread readership can be expanded into a world-famous journal of heterodoxy. I believe that it can become the best known and most quoted journal of radicalism in the world. I believe this New Year wish could be realised before 1950 to the infinite advantage of mankind.

I know that Freethought has won its battle with religion. "Mopping up" operations can wait. Freethought must engage and vanquish modern superstitions and myths if civilisation, and with it the soil that breeds Freethinkers, is not to be submerged. The world was never in more need of searching and pitiless criticism—and all the constructive wisdom of mankind. Institutions, habits of thought and action, ideologies, frontiers, loyalties, morals—these, and many such, are in the melting pot. Freethought must hasten the demise of the bogus, the shoddy and the false. Freethought must make the constantly developing conclusions of science available to mankind in readily understandable language and demonstrations. The *status quo* can never be venerated by Freethinkers because a better life and more perfect institutions will always be possible.

When—I purposely do not add "and if"—"The Freethinker" has been remodelled and expanded so that its platform is used by all exponents of heterodoxy whose philosophy is forward looking—is, for example, world-minded as opposed to narrowly nationalist—it would be in keeping with my ambitious conception if the journal were published simultaneously in five continents (technically a "bread and butter" operation). It would be edited from each centre in turn, though its contents would be of world interest. Can one doubt that "The Freethinker" would become "the gadfly of civilisation" attacking this abuse, exposing that fallacy, and fertilising so much of the nascent goodwill of mankind? Would it not be most salutary if Chinese philosophy mingled with European thought, if American culture mixed with Russian, if Indian aspirations reached the consciousness of Englishmen? Could there conceivably be so much mutual hatred, so much intolerance, so much bombastic certainty, so much petty-mindedness, if we looked into a mirror of humanity every week and "saw ourselves as others see us"?

Now that science has made it possible for the voice and the writing of a man to be heard or read across the world in a moment, can Freethinkers, of all people, sit down and do nothing to employ this gift from the Gods? Are they not bound by their creed to employ all the resources of science in their ceaseless fight against ignorance and credulity? The latest scientific research is used with alacrity if it provides yet another lash to flay the mercilessly beaten horse of Christian orthodoxy. Yet the material inventions of science are less readily exercised. The world encyclopædia of Mr. H. G. Wells could be compiled and maintained without difficulty by fewer men than man a battleship. The hopes, beliefs and manners of mankind can be made known to all peoples in a decade.

I shall close this article by quoting Chapman Cohen's Christmas message to "Freethinker" readers. It provides a perfect theme for my New Year wish.

"... the cry, 'You can't alter human nature' is not true. You can alter it for better or worse, and the older we get, the wiser we are, the more rapidly we can effect a change. Human nature is the most plastic material we know. We can make it what we will; we can mould it as we will. And if this is a source of danger, it is also a source of boundless hope and an incitement to fresh endeavours."

Are we going to leave "plastic human nature" to the Hitlers of to-day and to-morrow? Dare we shirk our duty any longer? Does not Chapman Cohen deserve a living memorial to his magnificent spade work, which alone has made the World Freethinker possible? What do you think of my New Year Wish?

JOHN DARKER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held January 17, 1943

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

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Bryant, Seibert, Ebury, Horowitz, Griffiths and the Secretary.

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

Correspondence with the Director-General of the Home Guard and the War Office concerning Freethinkers in the armed forces was dealt with and decisions made. The receipt of a legacy of £714 from the estate of Walter Payne (deceased) was announced. Lecture reports and future arrangements were received from Bradford, Glasgow, South London, Messrs. Brighton and Clayton. A suggestion that the 1943 Conference follow similar lines as last year was adopted.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Sunday, February 28, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

NEW SECULAR SCHOOL opening January 15th for girls from 8 years onwards. Usual school subjects with art, eurhythmic, drama; French and German; shorthand-typing; First Aid; home management, cooking; dress-making; riding, farming, gardening. There are still vacancies. Apply: Kathleen Tacchi, Long's, North Curry, Taunton. Phone: North Curry 207.

OBITUARY

ALFRED GEORGE MILLS

We regret to announce the death of Alfred George Mills, of Widley, Portsmouth, which took place peacefully during sleep in his 73rd year after a brief illness. For many years he was a member of the N.S.S., and although of a quiet disposition, he was keenly interested in the Society and its work. To his widow and four children we offer sympathy and appreciation for carrying out his wish for cremation and a Secular Service. The cremation took place on January 15 at the Crematorium in South Stoneham Cemetery, Southampton, when a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S. R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON—OUTDOOR.

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11-0, JOHN KATZ, B.A.—"Catastrophe and Its Consequences for Religion."

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, a Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. H. CUTNER—"The Jesus Problem."

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