

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

More About Christian Beginnings

WE are attempting in these articles to give an intelligent answer to the question "What is Christianity?" As Christianity is based on the Bible, to the Bible we went, and we took the famous first verse of the Gospel of St. John as a starting point. The lesson we derived from this was, not that we were dealing with a display of wisdom, but that the verse brings us into touch with that stage of primitive culture, well known to anthropologists, that primitive thinking counts words as things. We dealt with but two words of this verse—"God" and "Word." That left us with another key word, "Beginning." That is a word in common use, but the sense attaching to it will not fall into line with the Bible. For with us poor humans, whenever we speak of a "beginning" of anything we are merely marking a stage in a process. We may talk of the beginning of a chair, but the material of the chair existed as wood or iron or some other thing. Our beginning is, as we have said, never more than a stage in an apparently unending process.

But St. John's "beginning" is absolute. His meaning is that at some time there existed nothing but God, or the "Word," and both of these were one. God was always there, and he was alone. God only knows how or why he was there. Further, it looks as though God could not know he was there, for it is a commonplace of psychology that all states of consciousness are relative. That is, we can only think of things in terms of their relation to other things—darkness against light, hot against cold, large against small, and so forth. "Me" implies a not-me; we know things for what they are only because they are similar to other things. Likeness and unlikeness are involved in every act of consciousness. Even a newly-born baby takes some time to develop a sense of its own existence. The starting point of philosophy is probably the recognition by a baby of other things through the sense of touch. Moreover, we must remember that "recognition" is re-cognition. It is the placing of an experience along with previous experiences of a similar kind.

Hence a theological difficulty. If God always was, and there was nothing else before he set about creating, then he would not have known he was. "In the beginning" he would have been as great a mystery to himself as he has been to his worshippers. If he was there he would not have known it. He had no past to remember, no present to face, no future on which to speculate. A present cannot exist without a past and prospective future. There are great disadvantages in not knowing that one *is*, disadvantages that can only be equalled by not being aware that one is *not*. So, if St. John is right, we must picture God as being there in the beginning, but not knowing that he was there. Oh, the emptiness of it! No wonder the first verse of the Gospel of St. John is called "sublime"—theologically sublime.

Some Knotty Questions

What we have said sounds rather nightmarish, but it is not our fault. We are applying common sense to the most bepraised passage in the New Testament. For the same reason we must follow this Christian story further. God one day—no, that will not do. Days did not exist until God had set about his work of creation, and therefore we must not say that "one day" God set about creating things, or, as it may be said, thought about "going places." Neither can we honestly evade this difficulty by using the phrase "Once upon a time." For time also implies the passage of events, and events cannot precede time, they provide the condition for "time." We cannot have time hopping about in this loose manner. True we are told that with God a thousand years is but as a day, but that will not help us out of this dilemma. We cannot bring God upon the stage as a mere event. That would be an insult to his omnipresence.

We are, apparently, up against a dead end. Every path seems blocked. Almost we are impelled to follow the course pursued by professional theologians, proclaim the whole thing an insoluble mystery, and let it go at that. For if there is any body of men who can bring us within sight of the invisible, to feel that we are in touch with the impalpable, or understand the inscrutable, it is surely these accredited ministers of God.

So we take a jump and say that God, in his inscrutable wisdom, commenced doing things. He made *the* world, our world, he also made many other worlds—so many that he actually forgot a great many of them. God made the world. Here again we are up against another difficulty. We are really not surprised that the great Christian saints devoted their time to praising God and gave up all attempts to understand him. But in this attempt to clarify the Christian creed we cannot pass this statement without comment. "Made" has to do with pre-existing things or materials. We take something that is and try to fashion it nearer the heart's desire. But before God set about

making things, the only material that existed was "nothing." And we must not forget that "nothing" is no-thing. These double-barrelled words are very confusing to most people.

Of course we might short-circuit this difficulty and just say something came into existence. But that would be an evasion, not an explanation. "Came" is also a process in time, and our difficulty of picturing something "coming" before anything existed, remains. Whether we are making a world or a mud-pie, "made" and "coming" imply a process, a process implies time, and we are at present at a stage where no-thing existed.

Can we, with any sense of understanding, use the word "create"? It is a favourite word with theologians and is used by all of us. But when we speak of a creative writer, or painter, or musician, "create" has a different sense than it has in the mouth of a theologian. Writers, painters, musicians, equally with bricklayers, are dependent upon existing material. The change-over from nothing to something remains unthinkable. One may grant that an unbelievable god is only living up to his character when he does impossible things. It may also be argued that it needs neither faith nor miracle to enforce the reasonable. We show our trust in God when we accept the non-understandable as a proof of the existence of the inconceivable.

It seems then that Christianity cannot avoid basing itself on "Nothing." It is the only material that could have been on hand when God set about creating. Historic Christianity is with us in saying that, as we have already shown. Moreover, evidence of the god-head of Jesus Christ was manifested when on a certain occasion he fed a hungry multitude with a handful of fishes and a few loaves of bread, and had more food left after the banquet than he had when the feast commenced. There must have been a rare amount of nothing served up on that occasion.

The Importance of "Nothing"

Look at the evidence there is in favour of "Nothing" being the material from which God made the world, and so gave existence a start. The "Westminster Confession of Faith," published in the seventeenth century, says in the clearest manner that

"It pleased God for the manifestation of his power, wisdom and goodness in the beginning to create out of nothing the world and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all was very good."

That "and all was very good" is impressive. It challenges infidelity to disprove that the best quality "nothing" was selected. There was no beating about the bush with these old theologians. The Irishman's definition of "Nothing" as a footless stocking without a leg seems to meet the situation as no English definition would.

These old theologians may have held stubbornly to their glaring absurdities, but at least they were honest enough to exhibit them boldly. The great Tertulian said, quite reasonably, that "had there been some pre-existing matter out of which the world was made, the Bible would have mentioned it." We think that reasonable, for the Christian God was never backward in stating his claims or insisting that his greatness should be advertised as much as possible. In this respect not even an American magnate advertising

a new film could be more demonstrative. St. Augustine—about the first man of real ability the Church could claim—said that even though there were some material out of which the world was made, that first material must have been made from nothing. Councils of the Church generally held to the creation of the world from nothing. Martin Luther said that the whole creation was instantaneous. Creation from nothing is the set creed of the Roman Catholic Church, and in a graduated "Catholic Catechism of Christian Doctrine" dated 1922 and now on sale there is the plain statement that "God made Heaven and earth, and all things out of nothing." Finally, the Rev. J. Stratham, writer of articles for the Hastings "Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics," says categorically: "Most of the Fathers, the scholastics and the Protestant theologians believed that the world was created out of nothing in six days, some six thousand years ago." Clearly the nothings have it.

Incidentally, it would be ungracious not to acknowledge the shrewdness displayed by the founders of Christianity in their plumping for "nothing" as the material from which all things were made. First, it set an example for preachers of sermons that has survived all the changes through which the Christian religion has passed. "Nothing" still remains the chief material out of which the followers of He who created the universe manufacture their sermons.

But there are more important considerations that indicate the wisdom of God in making the world out of nothing. Its advantages are enormous. There is no other material that is so elastic in its nature as "Nothing." It has no reactions of its own, and so offers no difficulty in the handling. It is unlimited in quantity and is the cheapest of all raw materials. In usage it will last for ever. Age cannot wither it nor custom limit its usability. It is probably because Eve was a woman that she did not inaugurate the first female dress with a few yards of "Nothing." Its value in times of war simply defies appreciation. With it the difficulties of our leaders would be almost at an end. U-boats would be useless.

It is after the transformation of nothing into something that trouble begins. Every artist, every builder, every worker in any branch of life has to face the difficulty of bending his existing material to his will. For God, when he selected nothing out of which to create varied something, endowed them with specific qualities. Hence the difficulty of every worker in every branch of work. The perfect picture, the perfect piece of music, the perfect book, the perfect job in any direction is not seen because of the intractability of the materials which each person has to handle. We may grant the artist is right when he says "I must have something to work on," but what if he could have, as God had in the dawn of creation. "Nothing" to work with? What feats could he not then have accomplished! "Nothing" would place the impossible within our grasp. There is nothing that demonstrates more the supreme wisdom of the Christian God than that he took "Nothing" out of which to make the world. It also supplies material for volumes of theology which would never have appeared if "Nothing" had not received the patronage of God Almighty.

(To be continued.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

PROGRESS AND CONVENTION

THE upheavals of the war period have spelt the end of definite theological patterns as exercising control over life. The last war hit them very hard indeed; the present war seems likely to finish them altogether. In spite of the fervid efforts of the Bishops and the B.B.C., it is unlikely that they will rise up again. Thinking men no longer determine their thoughts under headings of sacramental grace or of incarnation; the general culture of the times has become secularised and has taken refuge in a constructive humanism. Social reconstruction in the post-war years must take notice of this fact and interpret accordingly.

Yet, in spite of the collapse of orthodox theological creeds, the ghost of Mrs. Grundy lives on and makes certain definite demands upon society. The blame for the alarming increase in venereal disease may, in part, be laid at her doors. An amusing work, "Mrs. Grundy in Scotland," by Willa Muir, analyses the situation. Mrs. Grundy at least believed in her strange attitude to life; it was a vital matter that "hush-hush" should prevail and that the serious problems of living should not be discussed openly in an atmosphere of scientific impartiality. Orthodox religious dogma provided the sanction for this point of view; from it arose the Evangelical onslaught against the theatre or the novel. The characteristic mark of Grundyism was a dislike of the material world, of enjoyment or of pleasure. In matters of sex, an impure silence reigned; the intellect had to be subordinated to a set creed. In social application, man was dominated by things as they are, for Mrs. Grundy was always a social reactionary. Willa Muir points out that Mrs. Grundy has now grown old and tired; she is no longer as active as she was. But she has a cousin, Mrs. MacGrundy, who carries on her work. The cousin does not believe in the dogmas, but she accepts the social pattern. Mrs. Grundy at least had a faith in her strait views; Mrs. MacGrundy only treats them as conventions, but urges that they must be applied with all the old-time rigour.

In the form of a parable, Willa Muir put his finger upon a serious spot in modern sociology. English theological morals have broken down so far as rational sanctions are concerned; an intellectual revolution has spread over into the realm of ethics. Few people outside certain narrow and restricted circles are willing to accept the old views. But even though the authority of Divine standards of approval and disapproval is set aside tacitly, the conventions are allowed to remain and to guide public policy. As a result, society is constricted. It is forced into the hypocrisy of allowing certain conventions to pass unchallenged or to permit small groups who still accept orthodox views to dragoon the activities and pleasures of the population as a whole. Hence, books are banned against the general desire of the reading public. The Sunday opening of cinemas and theatres is refused in some districts in order to satisfy the sabbatarian prejudices of a minority. Even if modern science has pulverised the intellectual background of Grundyism, the old applications of the dogmas still dominate in the practical scene.

It is admitted very generally that the post-war years will be a period of social reconstruction going to the roots of modern evils. This attempt is praiseworthy, but it will fail if it is restricted to economic matters. The real need is for a reconstruction which goes to the roots of culture and introduces a radical reform of living by abolishing both Mrs. Grundy and the even less praiseworthy Mrs. MacGrundy. The Churches would still be at liberty to preach their particular views of life, but it must be made clear to Bishops and other obscurantists that they have no moral right to attempt the general dragooning of society in the light of their wishes. The time is ripe for the assertion of a humanistic and rationalistic ethic which seeks to promote human happiness in terms of a scientific culture.

The fundamental position that must be realised is that the private life of a human being is his own business and should be immune from interference; the State only has a right to interfere when he so conducts himself that he interferes with the liberties of other people. This assertion, maintained long ago by J. S. Mill, cuts at the roots of Grundyism; Mrs. Grundy was emphatic in her belief that the individual is born in sin and that his private life was therefore an orgy of discreditable conduct. The concern of the State is with social life; it has therefore a right to demand that nobody shall so conduct himself that he becomes a nuisance or liability to his neighbours. The position must be buttressed by the frank recognition that sin, in the old-fashioned sense of the term, is a mere superstition. Good or bad conduct does not depend upon any supernatural sanction or disapproval. Ethical judgement must be delivered in the light of its social or anti-social results. Once again, the making clear of this humanistic basis of morality overthrows the work of Mrs. Grundy; it also cuts away the ground from Mrs. MacGrundy. It cannot be urged that her stereotype, even though lacking ultimate sanction, is of social value. The results she has obtained in the realm of sexology suggest a different picture! It is not a social good that statistics of venereal disease should have increased by 70 per cent. since the outbreak of war and that this appalling menace should be, in large measure, the outcome of a refusal to treat the subject objectively and scientifically.

If social reconstruction is to lead to progress within society, it must be through the recovery of liberty by the overthrowing of dead conventions. Freedom of speech, thought and conscience must be allowed to lead on to greater liberties. The Blasphemy Acts should have been repealed long ago. Once it was admitted that the theological background of society had broken down, laws protecting the Christian religion from criticism became a mere anachronism. The liberty of the Press must be recovered by the amending of the laws of libel and slander; at the moment, they protect the rich whilst refusing justice to those unable to face the prohibitive cost of legal fees. Serious comment should be permitted upon any subject of public interest without running any risks from an outraged conventionalism. The banning from public gaze of scholarly books is a mere piece of folly. In the same manner, the Sabbatarian laws should go the way of all flesh; it is iniquitous that a small section of opinion can prevent large numbers from spending their Sundays how they desire. In matters of religion, complete equality should exist before the law; in questions of government, free political comment should be the rule. These ends will only be achieved through the secularising of education and through its development as a means of objective instruction.

Questions arising from sex and its relations to society also assume importance in terms of human liberty. It is clearly a matter for State interference that the ordinary citizen should be protected from annoyance, such as the keeping of a brothel by a neighbour or the accosting by prostitutes as he walks up the road. At the same time, there are matters now illegal which raise questions of the rights of the individual in an extreme degree. The sexual pervert is clapped into gaol; it is obvious that he cannot be allowed to corrupt minors, but it is not so clear what crime has been committed when the abnormal behaviour is between adults. In France, for example, Oscar Wilde would have been free from any criminal prosecution, and it is not certain that any good was done to the morals of either Wilde or society generally by throwing him into gaol. The extent to which the psychological basis of perversion has come to be recognised should provide further food for thought. The laws affecting the subject need drastic revision; perversion may be an unhealthy mental state, but its treatment must be in terms of science rather than the retribution to be paid to an

(Continued on page 59.)

ACID DROPS

THE humbugging talk over Sunday plays continues, and Dr. Temple supplies doses of religious slush. He says "Sunday provides the one opportunity for actors to enjoy some family life." But if a man has a day off, that is the day on which he can, and will if he pleases, have family life. And if he wishes to go out with his family he should have places of interest and amusement open. Sabbatarianism restricts the pleasures of family life—it certainly does not increase them. And when British Sabbatarianism was in full blast it was, for the family, the most miserable day in the week.

But it must be noted that it is *Sunday* with which the Archbishop is concerned. He is not asking for the one-day-a-week holiday being secured; he has no vital interest in that. It is Sunday, the fetish day, the day on which all the Christian Churches are concerned, that demands his attention. And in this he is not merely running true to his own interests, but he is running true to the Christian tradition. The Church did not secure for the working men and women of this country a shortening of the hours of labour, but they did insist that their fetish day must be secured. It was without the help of the Churches that the shortening of the weekly hours of labour were secured. To-day all industries have one-and-a-half days per week, and some have two days. Does the Archbishop wish us to believe that the British workman is so weak and so foolish that these rest days will be destroyed unless they are protected by a fence of sheer superstition? We do not think that British working men are so foolish and so weak as to need the protecting arms of the British clergy.

We note the graciousness of the Archbishop of Canterbury with regard to the question of Sunday plays. He says he has no objection to Sunday performances for troops provided the concession is entirely free from commercial interests. The graciousness of disposition is equalled only by its impudence. The Archbishop is paid for his work on Sundays, and he accepts the payment without demur. We should like to know why men should not be paid for Sunday work? Policemen are paid, railway servants are paid, parsons are paid, and the earth continues to travel round the sun without creating a cosmic disturbance. Why should actors be the only ones who may not receive pay on Sunday? We agree with Mr. Sylvaine, of the Garrick Theatre, who suggests that there should be no collections made on Sundays. Modern religion and humbug seem inseparable.

It should always be remembered that this outcry against overworking the poor actors is only another exhibition of that dishonesty and hypocrisy that seems inseparable to contemporary religion. Sunday laws were not based on considerations of the welfare of actors or other labourers. The motive underlying Sunday legislation was purely religious, and was the output of a peculiar outburst of religious intolerance. Sunday entertainments were banned not because of the labour involved, but simply because God said that the Sabbath was to be observed—religiously observed. One need not go far back to find religious organisations issuing publications relating the terrifying manner in which God punished those who did not keep the Sabbath. Only when this superstition ceased did Christians try to bolster up their ignorant fetish by discovering a secular reason for a "sacred" day. The original reason was religious, and so far the bigots may have been honest about it. The present reason is sheer humbug, and the clergy know it.

Some help from Father Rosevear, of Sheffield. "To be a Christian is to believe in Christ"—but what are we to believe? All the quarrelsome sects believe in him and fight each other. But the explanation follows. It means "to share Christ's sufferings and poverty." How can one share another person's poverty? If they get rid of what they have got, how does that share the other fellow's poverty? And as Jesus Christ was in Father Rosevear's opinion, God, how can an ordinary person share Christ's sufferings? Theoretically, Christ was crucified, but he knew all along that there would be an immediate resur-

rection and he would return to heaven at once. On the New Testament theological showing the whole thing was a farce, a mere play. And it is quite possible that the religious portion of the story is just a sample of the old religious mystery plays of which there were so many all over the eastern world.

Mgr. Ronald Knox is preparing a new translation of the New Testament from the Vulgate—the Latin version said to have been written by St. Jerome. He is aiming at the impossible task of preventing the New Testament lingo ever becoming archaic. But if a language is a living one, then it must become archaic, for an archaism is the product of change, of development, of the alteration in forms of thought. Translate the Bible in the form of current language and it loses its power over the unaltered mind. Dead thoughts can only be properly expressed in a dead tongue, and even when the dead tongue may be transformed into common every-day language it will lose a deal of its sacred character. Take the following:—

John Smith was engaged to Mary Brown, but just before the date of the marriage arrived John found she was about to become a mother. Smith was at first inclined to break off the match, but after passing a restless night, with strange dreams, he forgave Mary and the two were married.

It is plain that this would raise nothing but a laugh if a "Holy Ghost" were introduced as an explanation of Mary's condition.

Cardinal Hinsley's "Sword of the Spirit" has developed a Roman Catholic proposal of the Beveridge nature—with trimmings. There is to be a General Council of Industry, Factory Committees, Partnerships, a just and living wage, etc. But where is the need for the "Sword of the Spirit" for this? We know the "Sword of the Spirit," and we know Cardinal Hinsley, and the aim here is two-fold. One to get credit for a great interest in the welfare of the people, the other to present whatever useful organisation is set up as a consequence of the activity of the Roman Church. But if these things are good why drag the Church in? What is there of real testable value that cannot be contained in or by other measures? Strange that after so many centuries of power the Roman Church should only just now discover a method—and then only by apeing others.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has initiated a series of lunch-hour sermons on "The National Balance Sheet—a Christian Audit." We feel very strongly that in the interests of truth and justice there should be two auditors, one of them a Freethinker.

History seems to repeat itself with the B.B.C., as in other instances. Those who remember the early days of the B.B.C., when it was turning itself into a kind of bodyguard for superstition, there was a time when the lack of interests by Christian subscribers was very noticeable. The pretence that the people wish for religious performances to be put on the air was wearing thin. So the B.B.C. made it quite plain that if these religious services and sermons were not better supported, or endorsed, they might be dropped altogether. But the clergy were beginning to see possibilities. They could be as foolish as they pleased where no reply was permitted. So an S.O.S. was sent round asking the clergy to induce letters of praise and thankfulness to be sent. The letters duly came, and the religious tomfoolery went on gaily.

Now there seems to be another move in the same direction. The new religious Brains Trust—the Anvil—is made up of a small number of clergymen and one or two lay characters. The Roman Catholics are pleased because no real controversy is permitted, and so no doubt is thrown on Christianity. But the Catholic representative on the Trust complains that very few letters from Catholics are arriving, and he has issued an appeal through the Roman Catholic papers for more letters to show how deeply interested the people are in the "Anvil." He wants Roman Catholics to "give a better account of themselves" by these communications. So the priests will round up their flocks—did not Jesus call them "my sheep"—and the increase of letters will be presented as the spontaneous gratitude of people all over the country for the concentrated stupidities of the B.B.C. boosting of religion.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- G. IVOR DEAS and J. DARKER.—Thanks. Will appear as early as possible.
- S. B. WHITEFIELD.—Thanks for list of questions put to the Brains Trust. They will be useful, but are not likely to be discussed in public. It is next to useless for men who take part in the Brains Trust farce to merely protest to the public and continue to take public money and lend themselves to the imposture. A much stronger and more efficient protest would be to have nothing to do with it until fair dealing has been adopted. The Anvil is not quite so dishonest as the original Brains Trust, but your pertinent questions are not likely to receive publicity.
- A. HANSON.—It is well to let the Brains Trust have reasonable questions sent, even though they are not dealt with. Up to date, the questions are mainly so much "bluff." We have a quantity of duplicates sent us, but where they touch on "dangerous" matters they never see daylight. The "Anvil" is avowedly religious, and one must expect what one gets. What is needed is for men of integrity to drop association with both "Trusts" until they are honestly conducted.
- M. L. RUPP.—We share your pleasure in reading the article named and hope to have more from the same pen.
- G. WILLIAMS.—We have not read the book you name.
- R. KEAN.—We are pleased to hear from a new reader. "The Freethinker" has its hands full in following a particular plan. It is the only paper of its kind in this country, and next to the evil of not doing enough is the folly of attempting too much.
- F. WARBURTON.—Thanks for account of your son's experience. It is a pity that obstacles should be placed in the way of being honest.
- R. HEAP.—The book you inquire about is Dictionary of Sects, Heresies and Ecclesiastical Parties. Published 1874, by Rivington, London.
- A. M. HATTIE.—Sorry, but we do not know the present address of the party named.
- A. D. CORRICK.—Next week.

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

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SUGAR PLUMS

FREETHINKERS will have heard with pleasure the broadcast from the B.B.C. on Charles Bradlaugh. We should have liked to have had, say, a 30 minutes' sketch of Bradlaugh's career which would have included his activities as the leader of the fighting Freethought Movement, but that would have been expecting too much; and as real freedom of thought and expression is not recognised by the B.B.C., except to be endured when it cannot be suppressed, we have to put up with what is given. The speaker was Bradlaugh's grandson, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, and in the circumstances he did all that could be done, and we congratulate him on the doing. The form of the talk was

also against him. It took the shape of an interlocutor asking questions and Mr. Bonner giving answers—both, of course, arranged beforehand. Within the prescribed limits Mr. Bonner was able to make it known that he was dealing with a very great Freethinker, and that was something. Bradlaugh was made known to a new generation, and many may wish for more about the subject of the talk. Mr. Bonner did his part in an excellent manner.

The subject was really Bradlaugh's fight for his seat in the House of Commons, and that involved a depiction of one of the most disgraceful scenes that ever occurred in the House of Commons, and it was born of Tory malignancy and religious hatred. Bradlaugh had committed some unforgivable sins. He had written a terrible impeachment of the House of Brunswick, he had attacked the scandal of perpetual pensions, and above all he had led the fight against the established religion. Naturally, the B.B.C., after having yielded to a talk about Bradlaugh, did not wish to bring these things to the front. The question and answer practically confined the talk to the parliamentary sketch, but Mr. Bonner did manage to get in Bradlaugh's work for Malthusianism, and also India and other reform movements. For that we must all be thankful. Again we congratulate him both in the way his remarks were couched and delivered and also his manner. It was a good job done well under not the best circumstances.

Now we suggest to the B.B.C. that there is nothing that would prove of greater interest and value to the general public—in spite of Mr. Harold Nicolson's statement and the B.B.C.'s confirmation of it, that the general public is largely composed of nitwits, and so must not hear opinions that are new or with which they would disagree—more than a course of lectures on some of the unorthodox reformers of the past century and a half. It would prove of tremendous interest to the younger generation. We suggest the course might begin with Paine and run through Robert Owen, Carlyle, Hetherington, Place and Holyoake. There are many more who might have justice done them, but the B.B.C. would do something to retrieve its past if it commenced with this half-dozen.

The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. announces what promises to be a very interesting lantern lecture in the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow, this afternoon (February 7). Mr. J. S. Clarke will speak on "The Childhood of Animals," illustrating with lantern slides at 3 p.m. The local branch deserves the support of all Freethinkers in the area, and this occasion offers an excellent opportunity for inviting the attendance of orthodox friends.

In the "Glasgow Evening News" Commander Campbell, of the B.B.C. Brains Trust, tells the world why he thinks the Trust should not bother about serious questions. Suppose, he asks, 'we were permitted to discuss 'Is there a God?' In that case, representatives of every denomination would apply for a seat.' Why? Representatives of other forms of opinion do not apply for seats, although many could do with the 21 guineas. Surely God would be safe with the chairman, whose duty it appears to be to see that "dangerous" subjects are not discussed. Evidently the Commander thinks that God will be none the better for the discussion.

But there is, he says, another class, "listeners whose mentality is not strong, and who might be influenced by certain views." What of them? Someone must stand up and protect them from having their weak minds lacerated. Who is to do it? Huxley obviously will not. The visitors chiefly aim at being agreeable. Joad always wishes to impress his audience with the knowledge he would have if he only understood what he was talking about. The wandering padre has his time taken up in playing to the weak-minded in the Army. Who will cater for the weak-minded? With rare self-sacrifice Commander Campbell says, "I will," and he does, and probably feels the better when he draws his pay. The foolish must be catered for. The Commander has made the position quite clear.

MRS. HENSHAW AND A DEAD HORSE

"YOU Secularists are all right, but you will persist in flogging a dead horse!"

How many times—how many weary times—have we listened to that cliché, spoken, as a rule, by people who have outgrown much of the "bogy-man" phase of religion, but who know so little about the practical side of the religious business?

Possibly we are flogging a dead horse, so far as religion is concerned ideologically, for few people seem to use religion in the sense of a creed. They are at least growing more practical, if not more intellectual. But the trouble is that the man who rode the horse before it died, or at least before it collapsed to the ground, is far from being dead.

Still mounted in the saddle, he keeps up the pretence that his horse is not dead, nor dying; but that at any moment we might expect to see it revive and display remarkable new vigour. Perhaps this is natural enough, because parsons, being believers in resurrection and refusing to accept the biological fact of termination of individual existences, must always hope against hope for the resurrection of their dying creed.

So, sitting in the saddle of the expiring gee-gee of Jesus, the parsonic driver will use any method, from sweet words to the whip, to make it appear that the steed which is his creed is a very live horse. And if the horse won't kick—well, the parson will.

Mrs. Henshaw must know that by now; and so must the intelligent section of the citizens of Bradford. Which brings me to my tale!

Just over a year ago the Bradford City Council decided to secure a report on juvenile delinquency. They were supported in this bright idea by all those parsons who were foolish enough to hope that such a report would point out, beyond question or challenge, that ridiculous assumption of theirs that juvenile offenders are produced by lack of religion, or insufficient religion. A report, under the auspices of the Council, condemning irreligion and demanding more religion for the young, was just the thing the parsons wanted; for they, like other traders, have to boost their stock-in-trade if they are to continue in business.

The Education Committee were instructed to get the report; very wisely, the sub-committee appointed for the task decided it was a job for a specialist, as it would involve much research and personal contact with the little devils who cause the trouble. So Mrs. E. M. Henshaw was given the job, that lady being a child-psychologist who has a very high reputation for her work with children.

A year went by, and evidently Mrs. Henshaw was busy with her investigations. Probably the City Councillors had forgotten all about the matter. But toward the close of 1942 Mrs. Henshaw published her report. She might have dropped a high explosive bomb, judging by the consternation that followed among religious interests in the city—for Mrs. Henshaw had made history in the annals of juvenile crime investigation by issuing a report that really reported what she had found, and not what some people wished her to find.

There is not space here to go into the full details of the report. It is sufficient to say that it was presented in an extremely capable and scientific fashion, altogether apart from the question of religion. But, however capable, however fair, however accurate, the report committed the unforgivable crime of not pandering to religious interests. Mrs. Henshaw had actually minimised the supposed influence of religion—and nothing else mattered to the religionists.

Then Mrs. Henshaw, and other people, discovered just how dead the religious horse really is. The soul-saving saboteurs got to work at once in an effort to discredit the report, to prevent its reaching the City Council, if possible, and at all costs to prevent its adoption. Its ears irritated by the following remarks

of Mrs. Henshaw, the horse reared up and kicked viciously and spitefully, determined to scare those City-Father fellows out of their wits before they could even decide whether or not they agreed with Mrs. Henshaw.

"It will be seen from the figures that the proportion of delinquent children coming from non-provided schools is substantially higher than that from provided schools," the report continues. "The statement, therefore, so frequently and vehemently expressed, that lack of religious training is a contributory factor in the causation of delinquency, is unsupported by these figures. . . . It would seem then that before any generalisation can be made on the relation between religious training and delinquency, very much more detailed research on the actual effects of religious training on individual children is required.

"There has in the past been some confusion between the terms 'religious training' and 'character training.' These two are not synonymous."

The impudence of the woman! Downright heresy! She must be shown her place! But, unlike Joan of Arc, Mrs. Henshaw could not be burned at the stake for felling the un-Christian truth. So a panzer attack of Christian truth-lovers was organised, and Mrs. Henshaw fasted the sour fruits of religious persecution and wire-pulling. Being as courageous as she is honest, however, Mrs. Henshaw stuck to her guns. She was, fortunately, favoured by a "good Press," and she hit back at her critics in a telling interview, making the point that "it would be unscientific to suppress the facts just because they give rise to criticism." In answer to the religious moralists, she declared:—

"I think that children get fundamental ethical teaching in school, quite apart from religious teaching, in their contacts with real people as distinct from a superimposed dogma, religious or otherwise."

But the sabotage gang, understanding nothing about honesty of conviction, suspended judgment and scientific inquiry, but being thoroughly versed in the art of dirty work for "the greater glory," brought about a technical situation which succeeded in virtually killing the report, a situation in which, officially, no report existed for the Council to consider. The dead horse in full gallop! This left everybody in a ridiculous position. The report "was," yet it "wasn't." And everybody knew why; but not one Councillor had the courage to challenge the sabotaging religious racketeers; not one Councillor had the guts to demand that the sham should be ended, that Mrs. Henshaw's valuable work on this important social question be considered, for the sake of the children, the parents and the future of our whole social well-being.

That dead horse sure can kick!

But Mrs. Henshaw's work is not to be erased so easily by these crooks of Christ, these jugglers in Jesus, these maudlin moralists, and these cowardly Councillors. Her findings are "on the record" for all serious-minded social workers and educationists. In the spirit of true science she has thrown overboard the old and the discredited ideas in favour of ideas that are supported by facts.

To the idea that more religion is needed to make better behaved children, Mrs. Henshaw administered the knock-out blow by producing figures which showed that Church schools have a substantially higher rate of delinquents than State schools. The rate of delinquency in State schools is 6.6 per thousand; in Church of England schools, 7.5 per thousand; and in Roman Catholic schools, 15.3 per thousand. This means, in its net effect, that almost twice as many young offenders reach the juvenile courts from the Church schools out of every thousand of all schoolchildren.

How does this fact square with the claims now being made most vociferously by the Churches that an atmosphere of religion improves education? How does it square with the efforts being made to obtain more religion in our schools?

It is generally admitted that religion is a rather neglected factor in State schools—religionists themselves agree on this. Yet the very schools in which there is least religion turn out a better type of youth, and presumably (a logical assumption) better material for adult citizenship. Powerful though Mrs. Henshaw's religious enemies have proved to be, they must surely reel under this hammer-blow of facts and figures, and the thanks of all Secularists are due to Mrs. Henshaw for providing scientific testimony to an attitude we have long supported and worked for. Educationists, teachers, politicians, and particularly Mr. Butler, please take note.

F. J. CORINA.

IN MEMORIAM

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

(February 3, 1891)

In snowy, wintry weather,
'Mid sighing pines and heather,
They buried him deep.

Torch-bearer in the night,
Giant, worn down by spite,
In peace let him sleep!

There, where rhododendrons bloom,
Broken-hearted, they found him room,
Room for his rest.

He who answered every call,
Gave to them unstinting all,
Lies on earth's breast.

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

PROGRESS AND CONVENTION—(Continued from page 55)

outraged Deity! Again, the laws affecting abortion call for revision. It is not clear that the individual woman desiring to be aborted should be prevented by an absolute prohibition framed in a theological age and now maintained by the dictates of Mrs. MacGrundy. Abortion is one of the most common of crimes; it frequently leads to death through the failings of the unskilled practitioner. Conducted by a specialist, it is a comparatively simple operation. Together with the whole subject of contraception, the subject calls for a new exploration in terms of progress and liberty. The Churches will object, but their objection is irrelevant. In a State permitting a scientific treatment of these matters, nobody is going to demand that Roman Catholics, for example, should be aborted if they do not desire it! In the same way, the whole subject of marriage, contraception and divorce must be judged by the modern State in the light of scientific investigation. There is no excuse for permitting theological hangovers from a dead past to prejudice and befog the issue.

Social progress should be maintained in the post-war years, over a limited field, the Beveridge Report shows a promising beginning. But it can only be safeguarded by a free society which seeks to evolve a culture capable of safeguarding the rights of individual liberty and of instructing the free man in the lessons of a scientific universe. In no other way can a humanism arise which will see human happiness and well-being as the end to be achieved within the social order. Mrs. MacGrundy is a quaint though dangerous survival from another age and, as such, obtains episcopal approval. It is time that she was abolished as a social dictator and that liberality and rationality filled the void left by her departure.

"JULIAN."

CONAN DOYLE'S RELIGIOUS DISBELIEFS—I.

I THINK it would be safe to say that only a very small proportion of the myriads of admirers of A. Conan Doyle are aware of his long-held religious views.

These are expressed at length in an early-published work, "The Stark Munro Letters."

For a long time before his death, twelve years ago, Doyle was widely identified in the popular mind with spiritualism. In "The Stark Munro Letters" he is clearly revealed as a Deist. Quite consistently, of course, could he have been a Deist, side by side with his belief in spiritualism.

The interesting fact that remains—a fact, I consider, very much to his credit—is his utter repudiation in "The Stark Munro Letters" of the Bible as an inspired work.

Most convincingly does he expose the stupidities and brutalities of the Scriptures.

"The Stark Munro Letters"—16 of them in all—purport to be written by J. Stark Munro, a young doctor in England, presumably Doyle himself, to a former fellow-student, Herbert Swanborough, who has gone to America.

In practically every letter the subject of religion is introduced. There is a life-story, narrated in Doyle's simple, superb style, running through the letters. But the primary purpose of them, it is clear, was the enunciation of his views respecting the Bible, together with the Churches and other mediums through which the alleged Word of God is expounded.

Some extracts may well be given.

"Yesterday," writes Doyle, in one of the earliest of the letters, "was my birthday, and I was two-and-twenty years of age. For two-and-twenty years I have swung around the sun, and in all seriousness, without a touch of levity, and from the bottom of my soul, I assure you that I have at the present moment the very vaguest idea as to whence I have come, whither I am going, or what I am here for.

"It is not from want of inquiry, or indifference.

"I have mastered the principles of several religions.

"They have all shocked me by the violence which I should have to do to my reason to accept the dogmas of any one of them.

(Continued on next page.)

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, Mr. JOSEPH McCABE—"Richard Carlile's Centenary."

COUNTRY—INDOOR.

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

Glasgow Secular Society (Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow): Sunday, 3-0, Lantern Lecture, "The Childhood of Animals." Speaker, Mr. JOHN S. CLARKE.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate): Sunday, 3-0, Mr. CHARLES ASBLEIGH—"A Journalist in the Soviet Union."

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

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place): Sunday, 3-0, (if fine), Mr. J. V. SHORTT—"Sunday Cinemas."

"Their ethics are usually excellent. So are the ethics of the common law of England. But the scheme of creation upon which those ethics are built!

"Well, it really is to me the most astonishing thing that I have seen in my short earthly pilgrimage that so many able men—deep philosophers, astute lawyers and clear-headed men of the world—should accept such an explanation of the facts of life.

"In the face of their apparent concurrence, my own poor little opinion would not dare to do more than lurk at the back of my soul, were it not that I take courage when I reflect that the equally eminent lawyers and philosophers of Rome and Greece were all agreed that Jupiter had numerous wives, and was fond of a glass of good wine.

"Can't I hear your grave voice saying, 'Have faith!'

"Your conscience allows you to. Well, mine won't allow me. I see so clearly that faith is not a virtue but a vice. It is a goat which has been herded with the sheep. If a man deliberately shut his physical eyes and refused to use them, you would be as quick as anyone in seeing that it was immoral and a treason to Nature.

"And yet you would counsel a man to shut that far more precious gift, the reason, and to refuse to use it in the most intimate question of life."

In his next letter, purporting to reply to a question raised by Swanborough, Doyle—throughout, it will be noted, I am substituting Doyle for Stark Munro—the beloved creator of Sherlock Holmes goes on to say:—

"But how do I know what is truth, you ask? I don't. But I know particularly well what isn't; and surely that is something to have gained.

"It isn't true that the great central Mind that planned all things is capable of jealousy or of revenge, or of cruelty or of injustice.

"These are human attributes; and the book which ascribes them to the Infinite must be human also.

"It isn't true that the laws of Nature have been capriciously disturbed; that snakes have talked; that women have been turned to salt; that rods have brought water out of rocks.

"You must in honesty confess that, if these things were presented to us when we were adults for the first time, we should smile at them.

"It isn't true that the Fountain of all common sense should punish a race for a venial offence committed by a person long since dead, and then should add to the crass injustice by heaping the whole retribution upon a single innocent scapegoat.

"Can you not see all the want of justice and logic, to say nothing of the want of mercy, involved in such a conception?"

"Can you not see it, Bertie?"

"How can you blind yourself to it?"

"Take your eyes away from the details for a moment, and look at this root idea of the predominant faith. Is the general conception of it consistent with infinite wisdom and mercy? If not, what becomes of the dogmas, the sacraments, the whole scheme which is founded upon this sandbank?"

"Courage, my friend!"

"At the right moment all will be laid aside, as the man whose strength increases lays down the crutch which has been a good friend to him in his weakness. But his changes won't be over then. His hobble will become a walk, and his walk a run.

"There is no finality—can be none since the question concerns the Infinite.

"All this, which appears too advanced to you to-day, will seem reactionary and conservative a thousand years hence."

Other aspects of religion as seen by Doyle—to be continued next week—include the hypocrisy of "the representatives of a creed which, as they themselves expound it, is based upon humility, poverty and self-denial."

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

JESUS AND SOCRATES

Few great men have existed of whose history we have so unsatisfactory a knowledge as we have of that Jesus. How much more clear and distinct, beyond all comparison, is the figure of Socrates, which is 400 years older. It is true, indeed, that of the history of Socrates' youth and education we likewise know but little; but we know accurately what he was in his mature years, what he attempted and what he effected. The figures of his disciples and friends stand out before us with historic clearness; with regard to the causes and course of his condemnation and the facts of his death we are perfectly informed.—D. F. STRAUSS.

CORRESPONDENCE

AN APPRECIATION

SIR,—Maybe you will justify my writing in support of the statement in a recent issue of our paper that "Those who have back numbers of 'The Freethinker' over a period of years must often be surprised how much interesting matter lies embodied therein."

I have a considerable number of old copies which always pass the acid test of re-reading by me and always produce amazement in others to whom I first introduce the current "Freethinker" and then pass over some old copies.

As a "Freethinker" reader I started in 1923 at the age of 20 years, and some years after, when I found work as a train conductor, I made the acquaintance of an old driver who had read "The Freethinker" since 1888. This converted Catholic had proudly kept his copies all those years and then saw in me a fit person on whom to bestow them. That compliment I have always sought to deserve by endeavouring to rescue others from the thralls of religion, and this I do by means of "The Freethinker," past and present copies. Of all the things I have done in my life none gives me greater satisfaction or fills me with such pride as my association with "The Freethinker" and the now large numbers of readers I have given great pleasure to by introducing "The Freethinker" to them.

I hope you will excuse this lengthy letter, which is written not to let you know that I am one of the Freethought Army so much as to express my appreciation of your huge efforts on behalf of human liberty and life, efforts which have inspired humble workers like myself to give all the assistance possible in the fierce fight against the oldest form of Fascism—viz., religion.—Yours, etc.,

WILLIAM J. MEALOR.

OBITUARY

The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. has suffered the loss of quite a number of its older members of late years, and we have now to record the death of John Dodds, a Freethinker and Socialist for many years. Reared in the intense religious atmosphere which surrounds a Roman Catholic family, he entered when young the Bishop Eton Monastery near Liverpool, and remained there for some time, but not long enough to smother the doubts and questionings of a young and active mind.

He joined the Shotts Branch of the N.S.S. when he came to Scotland and took an active part in the Society's work. Stone-throwing and ostracism was the lot of the handful of Freethinkers in Shotts, a place where Roman Catholicism dominated; but courage and determination carried him through. In his notebook there was a quotation which marked the man: "So far as a man thinks, he is free."

His remains were cremated in Glasgow and a Secular Service was conducted by R. M. Hamilton.

Our sympathy goes out to his family, who carry on the Secular tradition.

R. M. H.