THE
FREETHINKER

Founded 1881 — Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIII.—No. 11 — Sunday, March 14, 1943 — Price Threepence

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

(Continued from page 94)

How to Study Christianity

WE began these articles with the aim of making clear the essential character of Christianity. At first glance, and in view of the fact that Christians have never yet agreed on that point, it looked as though the task would not be a very easy one. Actually the difficulty is mainly due to the method of approach. All Christians have based their religion on the Bible, but they have approached it as a "sacred" book, and that word has had a soporific influence. They have really believed first and sought for justification afterwards. To the early Christians the acceptance of the Bible story was easy, because owing to the likeness between the Christian and other religions acceptance meant little more than a "swapping" of superstitions. And once Christianity was established, and in view of the way in which it was established and maintained, the swapping process continued. The Pagan or the Jew became a Christian, but he had, so to speak, a god up his sleeve all the time. Then the Roman Catholic became a Protestant, and merely exchanged one set of absurdities for another set. The Trinitarian became a Unitarian, but he still hung on to God. So the process went on, assisted by the fact that the scientific understanding of all religions and all gods and a knowledge of their origin is of comparatively recent date. Man had to grow above all gods in order to understand any of them. It is a fact, applicable to the whole history of religion, that the man who claims to have found god at the end of his studies believed in him at the beginning of them.

So our aim in what we have already said, and in what is still to be said, is a very simple one. Instead of going to an authorised preacher of Christianity, we went to what the Christian has claimed as the foundation of his creed—the Bible. We went to the Bible with some acquaintance with ancient religious beliefs—not the acquaintance of a scholar in ancient tongues, but one with some acquaintance of what they had to say, and, above all, with a fairly general acquaintance of what anthropologists had to tell us about the beginnings of the gods and of religions. For reasons that all students of anthropology will understand I took little notice of dates. When the books of the Bible were written and where they were written were questions that were irrelevant—as irrelevant as a discussion of where a plant was found in order to determine the variety or species to which it belongs.

Neither did I allow myself to be tempted into a discussion of the relative value of the moral teaching of one religious body against the value of the moral teaching of another body. This question was also irrelevant to the main issue, however interesting it might be. These discussions are, of course, of value in particular circumstances, but it leaves the great issue untouched. Morality is something that belongs to every human group, at least, and its development belongs to sociology, not to religion. What we were looking for was the origin of those essentially religious ideas for which the Bible and Christianity and other religions stand—or stood.

A study in this direction revealed the important fact that grouping religious ideas and understanding them has very little to do with calendar dates. If we had before us exact and unquestionable proof from contemporary documents, written by unquestionable people, if Jesus himself had left a written document that he was the son of God, that he did all the things he is said to have done, with written statements from others that he performed the miracles attributed to him, including the resurrection from the dead, nothing of this would in the slightest degree demonstrate the truth of the New Testament narrative. It is the cultural dates that are alone of importance.

One could get to-day miles of written testimony from people who claim to have cured chronic rheumatism by carrying a potato next their skin, or that a disease had been cured by faith in Jesus, or that the many thousands of Roman Catholic soldiers had been protected from German guns and bombs by the many thousands of holy crosses blessed by Cardinal Hinsley. But that testimony is quite unconvincing. These testimonies are no more than evidence of the cultural state of the people who believe them.

One of the oldest churches in London is thronged once a year by "hard-headed" business men who pray to St. Blaise to be protected against sore throats. These beliefs are quite genuine, and some of those who pray will not have any throat trouble. But the date upon which they prayed, the faith of these people, are quite irrelevant. It is the

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.

cultural state that is of consequence. The visions of a saint are as real to-day as in the Dark Ages, so are the visions of a dipsomaniac.

The lesson taught us by the scientific historian and the anthropologist working together is that the dates and the character of men are of no value as evidence for the supernatural, it is the cultural stage they are in that matters. Modern psychologists explain human actions without calling in a "soul." The devil-possessed man is transformed into an epileptic. We have all the phenomena that are said to have existed when Jesus is believed to have walked the earth, but our understanding is different. We waste time and money in sending missionaries to teach religion to unsophisticated natives. It would be more sensible—from the scientific point of view—to bring these people here to teach our preachers the meaning of their religion.

Having learned that valuable lesson, we passed the information on to others. It is clear that the first explanation man gives of things is wrong. Some amount of truth he is bound to reach. If he does not, he soon disappears. No animal can live that is unable to distinguish food from poison. If it lacks that degree of unconscious discrimination nature simply wipes it off the list. Even plants develop all kinds of protective qualities. This simple truth runs through the whole of nature and supplies the answer to Archbishop Temple, who professes to be unable to understand how man acquires "moral" characteristics if there is not a god. Animal life—this includes humans—never has been and never will be preserved wholly by reason. Feeling always precedes reasoning. And nature gives to all life a fairly generous measure of vitality before wiping it out for making false moves.

Nature is full of traps and deceptions. The sky seems solid and not so very far away. The earth is obviously flat and immovable. Nothing is more certain than that the sun goes round the earth, and it took the Roman Catholic Church until 1822 officially to admit a fact the Greeks had discovered a couple of thousand years earlier. Uncivilised man has no difficulty in finding a spirit inside a locomotive on first making its acquaintance. There is nothing surprising in a child believing miracles occur—mother and father perform them daily. With all of us there is a stage in our lives when fairyland is real and giants fifty feet high are as common as dwarfs who can hide in a thimble.

The Importance of Origins

But in tracing religious origins back to primitive humanity we must not make the mistake of assuming that "Primitives" belong to the past or to uncivilised peoples. We are, in fact, better able to understand existing primitives when we bear constantly in mind the fact that our own social groups are saturated with beliefs that from a cultural point of view belong to the uncivilised past. Primitivism is well represented with us from the throne downward, as instanced by the currency of superstitious practices that carry back to the most primitive forms of human society. Totems and taboos in the shape of charms, lucky stones, the occult quality of numbers, fortune telling, the vogue of mascots, the unlucky quality of "13"—a belief so prevalent that in many of our streets that number is not to be found—all bear evidence how little we have departed—in truth—from the mental outlook of three thousand years ago. Consider the quality of the following that appeared in "The Times" directly after the funeral of George V., when the fine weather on the day of the funeral was widely attributed to supernatural regard for the public procession of the coffin in which was the body of the King:—

> "There must be something more than a mere coincidence in the fact that our uncertain weather has been unusually favourable on State occasions to his late Majesty King George V."

That opinion was shared by large numbers. Why should it not be, when on the coronation of George VI. our Archbishop of Canterbury staged a performance that could have been seen practised on the bank of the Nile three thousand years ago, and incarnated our tribal god in the person of the King? Our days of national prayer for victory in the war is another illustration to the same end. The income of the Roman Church from the sale of magic cords, magic wells, holy stones and blessed candles, with prayers for the dead, countless appeals to saints for help in realising one's desires, prayers for the dead, etc., must be enormous.

But if we are to understand the meaning and significance of religious practices we must get back to that social stage in which all religions have their origin. We must read the Bible, not as a record of God's dealing with man, but of man's dealing with gods. In that respect the Christian has been far more considerate to his God than other people have been to their deities. Non-Christians—in the more primitive stage—have been known to discard their gods for others when their deity has not come up to expectations. The Christian has been more servile. The worse God treats him the harder he prays and the more he bemoans his own unworthiness. He grovels when he ought to revolt.

If the evolutionary story of man be true, then I think we have a scientific answer to the question "Who wrote the Bible?" The correct evolutionary answer is that the Bible was not written by men, but by Man. Life, whether individual or taken as a whole, is a process, it is not a thing. Neither language, nor human habits, nor human institutions were made by one man. It is the Bible that tells you language was made in a moment. It is science that says it began in the cries of animal life, and but for that Shakespeare could never have written "Lear." Ideas are also of a structural growth, they are not special creations. They are built up little by little, and the little becomes larger as man himself assumes a greater stature. A generation may pass without contributing anything to the common stock, or it may add something of a revolutionary character, but our ideas, our opinions, are substantially social products. It is a pessimistic system such as Christianity that asserts man is full of evil. It is not true, he is what life makes him. He is born neither a fool nor a philosopher. But he has a great capacity for developing in either direction.

If a man's reading is wide enough, and his understanding strong enough, he will read the Bible—and other collections of primitive ideas and customs—with interest and profit. And that will enable him to develop and classify the different religions as a naturalist arranges groups of animals and plants. Our robed Bishop will properly fit in with the painted and feathered Medicine Man of some primitive tribe, our prayers for victory in war will go well with the war dance of the Red Indian, which is performed with the same end in view and with similar results. He will find no difficulty in recognising that throughout the

history of religion, all religion moves to decay as man learns to understand and to exercise mastery over natural forces. Belief is everywhere the lifeline of the gods. Without belief they shrink into nothingness.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

THE EMIGRANT PURITANS IN NEW ENGLAND

THE earliest attempts of English emigrants to found colonies on American soil ended in failure. But as the years rolled away and the European Continent became a scene of slaughter during the pitiless Thirty Years' War of Religion (1618-48), a great increase in emigration from our island occurred. In 1618 two impecunious American settlements struggled for a bare subsistence, while 30 years later, more than twelve fairly successful colonies had been established in the Western World.

In the reign of James I. the Puritan movement grew rapidly while, under his son and successor, Charles I., it burst into open rebellion against the ecclesiastical despotism of Laud and his adherents. As a result thousands of dissenters from the Anglican Establishment sought security in a foreign land. The motives of the emigration were, however, not entirely religious, for from 1618 to the opening of the Civil War, England had suffered a severe economic depression. Taxation was heavy and not too generously exacted, for the tax farmers who collected it insisted on a handsome profit. Again, the loss of England's staple industry—the Continental cloth trade—owing to the appalling religious holocaust in Central Europe, helped to fan a smouldering discontent into flame.

To escape from what they denounced as episcopal tyranny, several separatist communions left England. Some settled in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities and, after some years' sojourn in Holland, a Brownist congregation decided in 1617 to seek a more congenial home in the Western hemisphere. Many obstacles, however, had to be overcome before the projected voyage could be undertaken, and not until 1620 was the famous "Mayflower," with her pilgrim passengers, able to set sail from Devonian Plymouth. Their original plan was for settlement in Virginia, but when they landed at Cape Cod they decided to settle in the vicinity and found a colony there which they named Plymouth, after the English port from which they had proceeded.

Along the Maine Coast other settlements proved abortive, but the Plymouth pilgrims became economically independent. They had little to fear from the Indian aborigines, most of whom had perished in a previous epidemic. Nevertheless, the Plymouth colony experienced poverty throughout its separate life. Then, a decade later, the largest group of emigrants that had ever travelled the ocean from England settled on the shores of Massachusetts Bay. The site selected was an earlier fishing station then on the verge of insolvency, and the Puritan pastor in England sent out one of his Dorchester parishioners to prepare the proposed settlement for those about to follow, and by the early autumn of 1629 a colony of some 300 persons was founded.

A charter had been granted by the Crown for the creation of the Company of Massachusetts Bay. The Governor of this group was John Winthrop, who had arrived from England with nearly 1,000 emigrants who had paid their own travelling expenses and were entirely free from any financial obligations to the promoters of the company, who remained resident in England. "Thenceforward," Professor A. P. Newton remarks in his suggestive essay, "The Great Emigration" ("History of the British Empire"; Cambridge, 1929): "With hardly a break until his death in 1649, Winthrop took a leading share in the government of Massachusetts, and to him is attributable in no small degree the success of the colony. Though the form of the government which he founded was one of the main roots from which sprang the main troubles of the American Revolution, Winthrop undeniably deserves to be ranked very high among the builders of the Empire."

The New England colony departed from English precedent when it adopted a written Constitution which the stern Puritans in authority interpreted in strictly sectarian style. These men who plumed themselves on their escape from religious persecution in their native land, promptly seized every opportunity to erect a religious despotism in their new abode. The ministers and magistrates solemnly regarded themselves as divinely commissioned custodians of God's kingdom.

Consequently, although in fiscal and other business matters, concessions were occasionally granted, the Massachusetts administration remained a narrow-minded theocracy.

A Church covenant of a self-perpetuating character was instituted by the oligarchy, and all save the most austere sectarians were excluded. As the colony developed, this system of clerical domination was extended to every new settlement. The frigid methods of Calvin became the model of the New England Puritans, and Anglican Church observances were strictly prohibited and its adherents were summarily expelled. The Puritan pastors and masters not only dictated colonial religion but became supreme in civil life. Despite these disabilities, however, the colony progressed. Professor Newton estimates that "between 1629 and 1640 its population rose from less than 300 to more than 14,000, but not more than one in every five adult males possessed full Church membership or political rights. Religious freedom was non-existent, for the government was infinitely more rigorous in its demands for orthodoxy according to its own interpretation, and as unsparing in its pursuit of the unorthodox by the civil power, than any English government had been."

The dire despotism exercised by the Massachusetts magistrates was resented by some of the most rigid Puritans themselves, and this led to the inception of new settlements. The movement of the emigrants inland, which ultimately led to the Pacific Coast, was thus initiated. The Rev. Thomas Hooker was the outstanding advocate of separation, and he appears to have been far more tolerant than his clerical brethren. Stream-bank settlements—river towns as they were termed—grew apace, and the Massachusetts oligarchs were anxious to extend their authority over them, but Hooker refused to surrender his independence. His expressed opinions have a very modern ring, for he asserted that "the foundation of authority lies in the free consent of the people, and they alone have the power to appoint officers and magistrates and to set bounds and limits to their authority."

The founder of the colony which afterwards became Rhode Island was driven from Massachusetts for his strictures on the strait-laced theocracy. In Boston he was soon at variance with the authorities when he declared that the civil power possessed no right to persecute religious opinions. This intrepid democrat, Roger Williams, sought shelter in Plymouth, but later returned to Salem, where he advocated toleration more persistently than ever. He was tried and sentenced to banishment for his political and theological heresies, and arrangements were made for his deportation to England, but he continued to escape the clutches of his malevolent enemies.

Then, another religious controversy raged in Massachusetts, in which Mrs. Ann Hutchinson was the central figure. The English Governor, Sir Henry Vane, supported her, while her leading adversary was Winthrop. As a sequel, Mrs. Hutchinson was excommunicated and expelled, and the authorities riveted their chains more firmly than before. The recusants having fled, they then founded three new settlements at Providence, Plymouth and Newport respectively. But so threatening was the commotion while it lasted, that the Home Government became alarmed.

A succeeding settlement at New Haven was subjected to a theocratic despotism perhaps worse than that of Massachusetts. In 1637 the Rev. John Davenport, a sour Puritan, accompanied by several well-to-do parishioners, voyaged to America with the avowed intention of establishing a Bible commonwealth. An independent and autocratic Assembly was instituted which openly repudiated every external authority. Even the Common Law of their native land was abrogated, and its place supplied with God's directions to mankind, for all time revealed in the inspired Scriptures. As Dr. Newton intimates:—

"A stringent religious test was established, and the freemen placed the whole power of government in the hands of a body of twelve which was to be self-perpetuating. New Haven was thus ruled by the narrowest of oligarchies." Yet the adjoining settlements were little influenced by this rigid system and retained their democratic ideals, recruited as they very largely were, by those who had fled from the iron despotism of Massachusetts. But, as Newton sagely says: "The process of double selection which weeded out the most determined Nonconformists from many English parishes, and then sifted them again by religious contention into separate settlements, in a very few years produced a divergence in temper between New and Old England that has been of lasting significance."

Lord Baltimore's colony in Maryland stood alone as the only territory under English dominion in which Roman Catholics then enjoyed complete political freedom. Religious toleration in Maryland was chiefly due to the desire of the colony administrators to enlist the services of all settlers who were likely to benefit the community. For some years a Roman Catholic majority composed the Assembly, and later, when a Protestant party predominated, religious liberty was sustained. At one period, however, Jesuit zealots endeavoured to persuade the Catholic authority to introduce repressive measures, but he positively refused to sanction theological interference in Civil affairs. But during the Puritan ascendancy in England, bigoted Nonconformists terminated Maryland's religious toleration, and both Anglicans and Catholics were denied political rights. With the Restoration, however, in 1660, the narrow Puritan party was suppressed, and Maryland returned to its previous comprehensiveness.

T. F. PALMER.

IN BRIEF

"FEW and short were the prayers we said."

When we were young and attended places of worship under compulsion we heartily agreed that prayers should be so, also hymns, psalms, anthema, chants, sermons and services generally.

Fortunately the best are short. A ten-minute sermon can contain more pith and marrow than one which drags out to the "nthly" before reaching a prolonged peroration.

Even the prosy compilers of the Book of Common Prayer once realised this. Abandoning their sonorosity they indited:—

"Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night."

Which is enough.

Not many Psalms equal in loveliness the compact Psalm Twenty-Three.

Those who have to participate in them know what relief it is to have shortened forms of the Marriage and Funeral Orders.

After the fulsome flatteries of the epitaphs on most tombs it is a welcome change to see "Deere Childe" on a little girl's monument in Westminster Abbey, or the simple "Miserrimus" on a slab over the remains of Thomas Morris in Worcester Cathedral.

Curses may be not loud but deep, but also too lengthy. There is something satisfying in a single expletive, as the emphatic "Damn!" or the explosive "Blast!"

If grace is still inflicted upon hungry persons they will appreciate the anecdote of Oliver Cromwell's revenge for a two-hour sermon. Having invited the preacher to dine, he said grace for an hour while the odours of dinner floated about the reverend nostrils.

Wit should always be short. Hence the objection many have to Mark Twain, P. G. Wodehouse and other humorists—that they are long-winded. They achieve their effects by over-elaboration, blowing up a small joke into a balloon of facetiousness.

There is a public taste for brevity, as witness the popularity of proverbs, epigrams, slogans and catch-phrases.

We prefer terseness in our poetry. Ben Jonson warned his successors:—

"In small proportions we just beauties see;
And in short measures life may perfect be."

Omar Khayyam shows what may be packed into a quatrain. Francis Ledwidge illustrates similarly:—

"And wondrous impudently sweet,
Half of him passion, half conceit,
The blackbird whistles down the street,
Like the Piper of Hamelin."

The sonnet is an abiding form of verse, yet how flexible within its limits, as well as pregnant.

Robert Burns was another master of neat utterance. His total output fills only a volume. We do not wish it less, but doubt if it would be better more.

Verbose poets have to submit to the selector and anthologist to make them palatable or rescue them from oblivion.

Old Father Antic the law, with grave humour—or unconscious—honours restraint of verbosity by titling the swollen mass of detail prepared by solicitor for barrister, a Brief.

Even sesquipedalian and turgid Samuel Johnson could recognise the merit of brevity, and practise it.

Asked if he would write the life of a certain poet, he replied, "Sir; his life is contained in this statement: He walked to the tavern; he was carried home."

J. M. Robertson contrasts Conrad's lengthy description of a storm in "Typhoon" with Shakespeare's vivid utterance in "Pericles":—

"The seaman's whistle,
Is as a whisper in the ears of death,
Unheard."

Truly he was a wise and clever man who, asked why he wrote such a long book on a subject, answered, "Because I had no time to write a short one."

An old Welsh Calvinist put it more vulgarly about a perfervid young preacher: "A diarrhœa of words; but I fear constipation of thought."

Yet the long novel persists. Novelists get reputation for greatness when their chief claim is the great number of words in a novel. In practice the three-decker goes down before the fast cruiser or slim sloop.

Ninety per cent. of the annual spate of novels would make tolerable short stories if thought over and written with economy. Preferably short shortstories, about 1,000 words, an ideal length for a story, erring on the long side.

"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

That is a great novel; anyhow, a great love story.

Fables, parables, legends and allegories owe much of their charm to their brevity.

The short story, like many other concise art forms, leaves more to the reader's intelligence and imagination instead of doing it for him.

Fortunately this modern tendency is spreading through many departments. The cumbrous oration has gone; the chatty speech taken its place. Lectures and school lessons are shorter, as are

public dinners and other functions. Short songs are preferred at concerts, and operas shorter than Wagner's listened to with more pleasure. Almost for sure, Elgar was the last composer of oratorio. This jazz age likes its music shorter as well as livelier, as it does its dances.

Modern plays are amazingly short compared to dramas of any previous epoch, as are the speeches and dialogue therein. Rant, bombast, padding are the afflictions of Shakespeare.

The one-act play is an attractive vehicle to write, read, act and see. A programme of one-act plays suggests itself as interesting entertainment. Significant to this is the revue. Old-time musical comedy, like melodrama, has died of length as well as inanity.

The cinema has yet to discover this. When the mania for overspending on a goutily swollen film has passed the short, tightly-packed reel will take its rightful place.

Artists to-day paint smaller pictures, and better ones for it. No longer are there patrons to echo Tony Lumpkin:—

"And then at auctions—money ne'er regard,
Buy pictures like the great, ten pounds a yard."

Telephones and the rising tempo of life have nearly killed the old-style epistle of conventional phrases and stilted paragraphs. All to the good. Friendly letters should be gossipy, others might well be written on a postcard.

Streets and everywhere people resort look neater for short frocks and short hair of women and children. These are brisker and healthier for such curtailment, the physical and mental stimulus being equally potent, as are the short "shorts" of boys.

Perhaps life itself should be short, as urges Ben Jonson in "The Noble Nature":—

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make Man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald and sere:
A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night—
It was the plant and flower of light."

We may sing with Walter Scott:—

"Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,
To all the sensual world proclaim:
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name."

A. R. W.

PIGS' HEAVEN

(With apologies to Rupert Brooke)

Pigs, bran-replete, in depth of May,
Dawdling away their filthy day,
Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,
Each secret piggy hope or fear.
Pigs say they have their muck and stye
But is there something past the sky?
This life cannot be all, they swear,
For how unpleasant if it were.
One may not doubt that somehow Good
Shall come of bran and muck and mud;
And sure the reverent eye must see
A purposeness in piggery.
We darkly feel, on Faith we lean,
The Future is not wholly clean.
Muck into muck; Death eddies near;
Not here the Appointed End, not here,
But somewhere beyond Space and Time
Is muckier muck and slimier slime.
And there, they trust, there grunteth One
Who grunted ere grunts were begun,
Immense, of piggy form and mind,
Swinish, omnipotent and kind,
And under that almighty snout
The littlest pig may splosh about.
O never butcher draws a knife,
Pigs say, in the Eternal Life;
But more than mundane tates are there.
From troughs celestially fair
Super-potatoes drift around
And Paradisal swedes are found
To satisfy their gluttony
Unceasingly, immortally.
And in that Heaven wherein they dine
There'll be no Bloody Death, say swine.

G. H. TAYLOR.

ACID DROPS

THE regulations concerning the armed forces are not so grossly favourable to the army chaplains as they were. The legal right of every man entering the armed forces—and this holds also of women—is to be registered as either belonging to some religion or that they are without any form of religious belief. Occasionally, officers turn their blind eye to the rights of recruits, but civil insistence breaks down that obstacle. It must, of course, be as aggravating to an army chaplain when he sees so many escaping his official influence, but there is always the B.B.C. and the "travelling Padre," the first of which stresses the importance of having some religion, and the latter appears to be running a winning race with Baron Munchausen.

But there now appears to be a new grievance. Some chaplains are complaining that Church Parade is now often "nullified by the attitude of the N.C.O.s" or the parade is evaded by that vague term "the exigencies of the service." The statement is also made that "the man who dares to insist on his right to attend service is only too likely to find himself penalised." Presumably this means when officers will not set aside military needs in order to make room for the church service. These complaints are taken from one of our religious journals, but we have yet to hear from one of these chaplains a protest against members of the forces who find themselves "penalised" by insisting on "No religion" rights and so might be relieved of Church parade and Church service.

Only the other day we received a complaint from a member of the R.A.F. in Canada, who was punished for not taking part in a Church service—even though he was registered "No Religion."

Another padre puts the Navy first in observing religious services. That, so far as our information goes, is correct, for religious service is insisted on in the Navy more than in the Army. There are perhaps more Commander Campbells there—although it appears that he was never in the naval service, save so far as being a paymaster.

The same chaplain puts the Air Force as third on the list of religious observers—that is the lowest, and he attributes this to "the result of their former education." As a larger proportion of men in the R.A.F. have been at secondary, or higher schools than the men in the army, this diagnosis may be true. We are not suggesting for a moment that the R.A.F. men are more intelligent than the men in the Army. It is a case of better education only. No wonder the clergy insist on more religion in the schools. Men like Dr. Temple and Mr. Butler really can judge some situations.

Here is a question we would like to see answered by some responsible Christian, or even by the Brains Trust—if the authorities could be seized with a spasm of honesty. We have for several years been praising without stint the Russians

and the Chinese for their ability, their devotion to their country, their honesty of dealing, their intelligence and their courage. That being the case, we would like Christians to explain what it is these peoples would gain by becoming Christians?

Mr. Robert Donat may be a very capable actor, but it will be just as well if he doesn't take himself quite so seriously off the stage and in presenting his own mental output. He is reported as saying:—

> "When the storm came to France she collapsed. When it came on us we stood firm. Who shall say how much we owe to our Sunday?"

We suggest to Mr. Donat that he should look up the history of the English Sunday, say, in the eighteenth century and half the nineteenth. He might then see what the Christian Sunday really resulted in.

Is it an attempt at humour, or is it exercise in the very old practice of deliberate propagandist lying? We have had sent us from different quarters copies of letters sent to the B.B.C. protesting against the unfair conduct of the B.B.C. Brains Trust. In a number of cases—and we have no reason for believing that there are many we have not made acquaintance with—the acknowledgment takes the form of two or three lines thanking the writer for his "appreciation." We think the B.B.C. should have its letters looked over by an impartial person. Two letters, for example, reach us by the same post. Both letters are complaints against unfairness, both are answered in the impertinent manner described. There does not seem a very great difference between the manner in which Hitler secures the support of his people and that in which the B.B.C. gets the support of the public for its religious and other crusades.

Cardinal Seredi, of Hungary, has delivered a terrible threat to those members of the Axis group who are responsible for carrying out "mass executions." He says they will be buried without participation in the burial rites of the Church. We do not know whether that will make the German leaders shiver in terror, but it is just probable that as they have risked so much to carry out their plans, they will risk even being buried without receiving the blessings of the Church.

There are, moreover, another one or two considerations worth noting. One is that Hitler has more than once declared that he was sent by God to carry out his work, and we are quite certain that his credentials are just as good as those of the Cardinal. We only have the words of interested people in either instance. But suppose the God that men like Hitler believe in is not the same pattern as Seredi's, how is an outsider to act? The world is surely in sufficient muddle as it is without setting us such knotty theological problems to deal with.

Finally, we beg to call this Christian Cardinal's attention to the following from the Bible:—

> And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it (i.e., the city) into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword, but the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, thou shalt take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies . . . of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save nothing alive that breatheth. . . . And He shall deliver them into thine hand and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven; then shall no man be able to stand before thee.

Now that sounds very much like a Hitlerian programme, and one wonders how the Cardinal would answer Hitler if he put in a religious plea in the words of the Bible. But, of course, Christian leaders seldom answer to anyone who does not already believe in gods and devils and other forms of prehistoric foolishness.

"Something that is entirely governed by chance" is a sentence that came to us from the "Brains Trust." But the essence of the word "chance" is that what occurs is not governed by anything or anyone. If we admit inevitable sequence all round, then the definition of chance would be something that occurs, of the cause of which we are entirely ignorant. Our philosophic guides need careful watching. The loose thinking of some of the Brains Trusters is getting notorious.

Bishop Blunt, of Bradford, says that "modern Russia claims to be Atheistic." That is quite wrong. Russia is a country where religion does not receive special privileges, financial or otherwise. It is also true that the Government of Russia makes no profession of Atheism, or even that its sympathies are with the non-religious citizen; but obviously that implies no more than that the State leaves religion outside its scope so long as it does not directly threaten the well-being of the country.

But we agree with the Bishop that it is a challenge to Christianity that "there has been a most astounding uplift of the Russian people. Russia now offers a picture of social improvement without parallel in a period of 25 years." And that gives rise to the inquiry whether Russians are so organically superior to ourselves that they can accomplish without religion what we cannot do without supernatural help? We do not believe this to be the case. And as Russia has set the world an example of what mere *human* nature can accomplish in 25 years, it might be as well if we imitated the Russian Government in this respect. If we did we might get the Beveridge Plan put into operation in, say, something less than a century.

We fancy the "Statist" is mainly a business paper. But it falls into line with many others in repeating in leading articles, etc., the sentiments that have probably been handed in by interested parties. After talking at large about the sense of solidarity (which never existed) in Europe until the Protestant Reformation—which did not reform—the Editor (?) decides "Without protection by armed force organised society would go to pieces." And that is downright nonsense. Organised society was not created by armed force, and it is not and has not been kept in existence by armed force. And, of course, all this nonsense is to help build up the raging campaign of the Churches that we must have more religion. Look at Russia!

And not merely with regard to the war, the question that is facing a great many highly placed people in this country is: "What are we to do with Russia when this war comes to an end?" We have to face the fact the civic regeneration of Russia has been under a government that has deliberately repudiated religion in all its forms.

Ex-Dean Inge says that "organised Churches are, and must be, secular institutions in which the half-educated cater for the half-converted." Well, Dean Inge ought to know; he took part in the game for many years and received a very comfortable salary for doing so. But it does seem an awful way of earning a living—and a pension. But we like the picture of the half-educated catering for the half-converted. If the preacher were better educated he would probably give up his job. And if the audience to which he preaches were not already strongly inclined to believe in the preacher's mumbo-jumboism it would not attend church.

At the annual conference of the London Teachers' Association (February 27) the following amendment was moved by Mr. D. Capper, following a motion urging the need of a new Education Act which will allow a unified system of educational development:—

> "Conference declares that the religious controversy must be settled by the abolition of dual control and the institution of the secular solution, and also by the full absorption of the public schools in the national system."

Time prevented this amendment being taken by the conference, which may have been due to some manœuvring. But it is a matter that should have been settled. Anyway, we congratulate Mr. Capper on his persistence in favour of a complete system of secular education.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. Syers.—Thanks for reminding us apropos of our notes on kindness to animals that much information concerning the relation of kindness to animals, both before and after Christianity, is to be found in Lecky's "History of European Morals." Lecky says very emphatically that "what are called the rights of animals had no place in the ethics of the Church." Why should it have had? The aim of each Christian was to save his own miserable little soul. If he thought this involved some kindness to animals, well and good. If he did not think this, then he said, with Paul, "Doth God take care for oxen?" Christianity was always a poor creed.

"Northfield."—We hope to print "God and the Universe" and "Religion and Sex" so soon as conditions permit.

H. Irving.—You pay us the highest of compliments when you say that our philosophy is ourself, not something reflected. Whether the judgment is deserved of not, it is the only one worth having.

"Tab Can."—Thanks for cuttings.

Freethinker Endowment Trust.—Miss L. F. Brown, 23s.

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.*

SUGAR PLUMS

THE "Christian News Letter" reports that as a result of a "mass observation" census it is found that one person in five has no religious belief. Taking the population at forty-five millions, that would give us nine millions of people without religion. But allowing for the fact that the word "religion" is used to cover morals, the actual number would be much larger. Remembering also that the population covers young children, it would not be unfair on the basis of this "mass observation" result to conclude that the number of males and females in this country who are consciously without religion must amount to something like six or seven millions. The borderline folk would make the number very much larger.

We are giving a liberal allowance to the godites, but taking the figures as given, the impudence of the B.B.C. in converting what is substantially a public institution into an avowed organ for the propagation of Christianity, and the Board of Education setting out to see that a definite and dogmatic religious teaching is provided in the State schools, we can understand the wisdom of the B.B.C. in preventing any real criticism of the Christian religion. But we are a liberty-loving people provided it is the right kind of liberty, and however much we may, as a Christian people, praise the Russians—for their quality as soldiers—we yet thank God that we are still religious.

We have just received from the binders, after some delay, a consignment of two books with which all interested in Freethought should be acquainted. The first is "Bradlaugh and Ingersoll," a full length sketch of these two famous Freethinkers. The book is written by Chapman Cohen, and has portraits and a number of illustrations. It is a work with which all Freethinkers should be acquainted. The number for sale is limited. Price 3s., postage 3d.

The other book delivered by the binders is "Bible Romances," by G. W. Foote. This contains some of the raciest of Foote's writing, with, as usual, the unmistakable indications of wide reading and careful thinking. The volume runs to 224 pages. Price 2s. 6d., postage 3d. A limited number of copies for sale.

The 80th birthday of Arthur Machen was reached on March 8, and a number of prominent men duly gathered together to pay tribute to the octogenarian. But the occasion has caused one of our readers to, unconsciously, do Mr. Machen an injustice which we hasten to remove.

The story begins with the stand made by our men at Mons in the last war, and when it looked as though the army would be totally destroyed. They were not; the tide turned, and Machen, affected by the bravery of the men, wrote a tale of how angels, armed with bows and arrows, led the British troops to victory. This was too good for the Churches in this country. Led by a famous Nonconformist minister and Winnington Ingram, then Bishop of London, a large number of the clergy seized upon the story, and brought forward witnesses galore who had also seen the angels, or knew some who were told by some that there were people who had seen the angels driving back the Germans.

We think we had something to do with the killing of this legend, for we made it a special topic. Then Machen said he never intended the story to be taken as a narrative of fact. That ought to have settled it, but the longevity of Christian lies has always depended on the tenacity of the Christian liar. The parsonage simply declined to let the lie go. A soldier was produced who saw the angels. It is true he had never been out of England, but the eye of faith has good sight, and the angels had a flickering kind of life throughout. We think that story is worth rewriting, and when we can see a clear space will do so. It will help to understand how and why Christianity was not merely born, but why it has lived.

We are rather puzzled why the editor of a journal devoted to education should regret that "almost every day's post brings inquiries from people desirous of studying conditions in countries where the State schools are concerned solely with secular education." Why regret the inquiry? Is he afraid of offending the clergy? Or is it because his own opinions run towards religion? As a schoolmaster he should remember the history of religion and its relation to education. Also that the manœuvres of the clergy, if successful, will mean an inferior type of teachers in the schools and a lower level of education, to say nothing of the manufacture of hypocrites on a wholesale scale.

Some of the questioners are asking for information about New Zealand. That country has had the secular system in control for years, and there is no evidence that the schools have not benefited by keeping the parson outside. The Churches have never ceased to make desperate attempts to get in, but without success. But why mention New Zealand only? Why not mention Russia? Will the editor or anyone else say that education without religion is simply a case of a mountain versus a molehill? Of course there was, before the war, plenty of circumstantial evidence of the deliberate demoralisation of the children by the Soviet. But what now? The younger men and women of Russia have been brought up under the rule of godless government, and the evidence of their character is before the world. Would they have been better if the Russian people had been kept under religious control?

What we should like some clergyman to answer is the plain question whether we Britishers are so much inferior, by nature and intelligence, to the Russians, that while they can show a development in a mere 25 years that has staggered the world, we must have God in the schools to bring us up to scratch? Well, we do not believe that we by nature are inferior to the Russians. On the contrary, we believe that what Russia can do we Britishers can do if we only make up our minds to do it and keep the clergy in their proper place. It is about time the people of this country made it quite plain that we are not inferior to Russia—at least not by nature, whatever we may become by training.

RICHARD CARLILE

(1790—1843)

II.

DURING the whole of the time Carlile was in prison he continued to publish, not only the heretical works which caused his imprisonment, but also various journals in which he was able to put forward his views on all sorts of subjects. He always wanted to write, and he was so full of ideas that as soon as one of his journals seemed to drop in public favour, he was ready with another, and still another. Exactly how many he produced may never be known unless a thorough investigation by an enthusiastic bibliographer of all the contemporary journals would bring a final result. For some years (1819-26) he produced "The Republican" and, at the same time, "The Deist," "The Moralist" and "The Newgate Monthly Magazine."

It was in this last that John Clarke's "Critical Review of Jesus" first appeared. Later, it was published in book form and two editions called for. I have always wondered why it is now forgotten; perhaps its very bitterness prevented it enjoying favour even with advanced Freethinkers.

All these publications appear to have come to an end by 1827, when Carlile found himself without a journal. But his meeting with Robert Taylor brought about the appearance of "The Lion," in which both Taylor and Carlile contributed some of their most characteristic work.

It was in 1828 that the "Devil's Chaplain," as Taylor was called, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for "blasphemy"—not, by the way, as Mr. G. D. H. Cole in his pamphlet on Carlile says, to *four* years' imprisonment. Mr. Cole is also in error when he claims that the "Syntagma" and the "Diegesis" expound Taylor's "astronomico-theological views." The "Syntagma" is a reply to Dr. J. Pye Smith's attack on the "Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society," written by Taylor, and deals very fully with the *literary* side of Christian origins. This is continued in greater detail in the "Diegesis." There is almost nothing about the astro-myth theory in either of the two books. On the other hand, the reader will find this theory fully dealt with in the "Devil's Pulpit"—which book, however, contains a few inconsistencies due, no doubt, to the fact that it probably never received careful revision at the hands of its author.

On Taylor's release, he and Carlile went touring the country on an "infidel mission," many of the incidents of which form some of their most entertaining contributions to "The Lion." Taylor had a keen eye for detail, and his descriptions of some of our provincial towns and cities of over 100 years ago are full of interest. What dreadful places they must have been to live in—at least, for the poorer classes!

On their return, they rented the Rotunda (in Blackfriars Road), a building which had been at one time a theatre and later a literary institute. Here their activities made it at once both notorious and famous. It became the centre of infidel propaganda with Robert Taylor as its high priest. Here he delivered the discourses reprinted later as the "Devil's Pulpit."

Their popularity frightened the authorities, who sent spies to take down anything which savoured of blasphemy—with, of course, the obvious result. Taylor was again indicted and given two years—without being allowed to write, as was the case during his former imprisonment. It is needless to say that the average magistrate of to-day would laugh if asked to commit anybody for "blasphemy" on the strength of citations from Taylor's Rotunda discourses.

Carlile declares of himself that he was a "little staggered" when convicted of blasphemy. He retorted to the Judge, Mr. Justice Bailey, that "Jesus himself was convicted and put to death on a charge of blasphemy," and the Judge at once denied it. Carlile adds that "one would have imagined he knew the contents of the New Testament better"—but that was just a little too optimistic. Some of the most loud-mouthed Christians one meets seem to know very little of the New Testament when challenged.

In the meantime, Carlile continued to run foul of the authorities. A new journal, "The Prompter," succeeded "The Lion," and Carlile took upon himself the defence of the agricultural labourer, whose standard of living was being repeatedly cut down, low as it was in the first place. The poor men, driven to desperation, often revolted, committed some acts of violence, and were savagely suppressed by the Government. Carlile took up their cause and was, in consequence, charged with aiding and abetting acts of violence against the law. The jury at first disagreed, but they eventually brought in a verdict of guilty, and Carlile was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, a fine of £200 and a demand for £1,000 security for a period of ten years—and to be kept in prison after the two years unless both the fine and security were paid. This was in 1831, when Taylor also had to do his own two years. A point to note is that it was not the Tories who prosecuted Carlile but the Whigs; and he spent 32 months in the Comptor of the City of London.

In 1834 Carlile was again imprisoned for refusing to pay the Church rates assessed upon his house in Fleet Street. His goods were seized and, in revenge, he had placed two effigies in the windows—one of a Bishop and the other of a distraining officer. Needless to add that this caused such a crowd that he was charged as a nuisance and sentenced to pay 40s. to the King and give sureties in £200 for his good behaviour for three years. This he found quite impossible to find, and so had to go again to prison, where he stayed only four months. He was then released unconditionally after vain attempts to get him to compromise. But nothing daunted lion-hearted Carlile. He was the rock upon which the attempt to suppress free speech and publication was wrecked—an astonishing triumph for a humble tinman. And in the midst of our own war for "freedom" the dauntless courage of this one man, defying the whole might of authority, has reverberated down the century. It could not be dismissed any more than the courage of that other great Freethinker, Thomas Paine, could be dismissed 34 years ago.

Thus, after serving more than nine years in prison, Carlile was no longer molested; but it is obvious that the long confinement must have played havoc with his general health.

Meanwhile, Carlile parted from his wife and attached himself to one of his admirers, Eliza Sharples. It is but just to say that he made every provision for Mrs. Carlile and the children; but though she was ready to help him in his great fight against authority, there had been little love between them for many years, and he turned to "Isis" (as Eliza was to call herself) for the happiness hitherto denied him. This association gave his pleasant Christian contemporaries grounds for joy, for nothing in his life was more prominently attacked and charged against him. His daughter by Isis, Theophila, subsequently wrote a biography of her famous father.

One other point. Carlile was liberally helped by many admirers. They subscribed often more than £10 per week for him while in gaol and, says Holyoake, "his profits over the counter for long periods were over £50 per week." He was helped also by Julian Hibbert, the generous-hearted and enthusiastic Freethinker to the extent of at least £1,000. (Holyoake mentions the amount but omits the name of the donor.) But Carlile found it difficult to keep money, and in his last years "the vicissitudes and anxieties of fallen fortunes" were, alas, his lot. The demands on him were very great.

The extraordinary variety of his literary activities must form the subject of a final article.

H. CUTNER.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE NEWS?

Evil news rides post, whilst good news baits.—MILTON.

IN a certain military unit in the "Great War," news of importance was always scarce. Sometimes, and when least expected, a comrade would rush into the quarters occupied by his section and, with a tense and eager expression, would burst out: "Boys, have you heard the news?" Then the atmosphere would become expectantly silent. Following a dramatic pause, the wag would say: "The old squire has been foully murdered," adding brightly, "but the villagers are after him" (the murderer).

Loud cheers would be heard and then laughter, but always it seemed there was some disappointment because no news of peace had been really forthcoming, or even rumoured, and a few wistful expressions could be discerned for some time afterwards. The soldiers had been caught napping again. A cruel joke? Perhaps, but the war had lasted a long time and men had become callous.

At home everyone had to be content with news—of progress or otherwise—almost entirely from the newspapers. The reports appearing in the Press were supported, augmented, exaggerated or denied by soldiers home from the front on leave, or by the man who had a relative in one of the Ministries. Rumour was rushing around everywhere, and there was plenty of excitement when the troops, headed by a band, marched to the station, or when a hospital train full of wounded arrived. Casualty lists appeared in the papers almost daily. Wounded soldiers were, alas, a common sight.

When news was very scarce one read of atrocity stories in the Press, accompanied with hymns of hate, and there were miracles to be heard—from the lips of soldiers—of angels appearing on the field of battle and other wonderful stories. At times news of great naval and military battles came through. These drab, official reports became—in the hands of the Press—colourful and verbose. Such optimistic and exciting narratives helped to maintain the morale of the people during those times when the "blond beast"—as the German was called—was making great efforts to force a decision in his favour.

In those days the Press was mighty indeed. It was skilled in the art of propaganda, to which the enemy paid tribute in after years. But, from a paucity of news we now have a plethora of news. We are buried in an avalanche of words and yet we are still able to breathe. Hollywood, having exhausted the power of the adjective in the employ of the "trailer," has nothing more to teach us in this respect. The mind now reels in contemplating the accumulation of a colossal weight of armament and an armada of ships which makes the Great Armada of Spain look like rowing-boats. The number of aeroplanes in operation and the bomb-carrying capacity reach astronomical figures. In fact, the science of astronomy, with its calculations of stupendous speeds, distances and weights of astral bodies, pales into insignificance when compared with the figures of the war potentials of the belligerents.

From midnight to noon and from noon to midnight a spate of words gushes forth from the wireless transmitters throughout the world, and is fast approaching deluge force. Who will build an Ark to save us? To be effective all news must be impressive, and to be impressive we have now reached the stage when any report which does not involve millions of something or other is hardly news at all. In short, the adjectives of Hollywood have become the invectives of counter-propaganda supported by the might of mathematics. The climax has long been reached. Figures are no longer impressive and the words accompanying them have no longer any meaning. Unlike the drug addict, who must increase the dose to obtain relief, the propagandist, by continually adding noughts to his figures, no longer excites wonder and admiration. And so, to relieve the monotony must resort to action of some kind or other.

In war time we rejoice to hear of good news because this implies bad news for the enemy. On the contrary, what is for us bad news is good news for the enemy. The chief aim of the propagandist is to conceal or minimise bad news and to magnify the good news. These terms have no relation to humanity as a whole, and are contradictory when applied to "individual" nations, for what is "good" for one is "bad" for another, and there can be no progress when such unharmonious conditions prevail. John Morley was right when he said that "War ostracises, demoralises and brutalises reason."

Have you heard the news? The answer is invariably a tale of killing and destruction. With the prolongation of hostilities and the frequent broadcasting of the results of military and naval operations——

"All pity (is) choked with custom of fell deeds," and the tendency for many people is to become indifferent and callous to death and destruction.

Of recent years events in some countries have been so terrible:

> "And dreadful objects so familiar
> That mothers shall but smile when they behold
> Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war."

Doubtless Madame Roland had witnessed similar spectacles when she exclaimed:—

> "O liberty, liberty, how many crime are committed
> in thy name"

Man attempts to rival the forces of Nature, for, throughout the world, the earth, sea and air tremble and vibrate at the detonations fired by his hand. Man creates weapons which destroy man. He is no longer his brother's keeper, but his slayer. Violence begets violence and the noise of battle rises to a shrill crescendo. War, although an out-of-date method of struggle, is completely up to date with its engines of destruction. Science is harnessed to the war machine, and when victory is won there will be news of how much science has contributed to the final result.

Man can never tire of news of *life*, for that is something real and tangible. But what of continual news of death? Reactions to this ultimately tend to a feeling of indifference followed by callousness, and then? Sometimes the carnage is so frightful that a feeling of revulsion sets in, and then perhaps there is news of peace. Man, having fallen into the abyss, dragging the innocent with him, finds he has descended to barbarism which so appals him that he struggles to free himself from the dire clutch of Nemesis which, as he had thought, was held out to save him, whereas it would throttle him instead.

Man must make up his mind. He has the choice of Mutual Aid or Mutual Destruction. Until he renounces the latter how can he consider himself as being superior to the savage? Man may flaunt his egoism when he says: "I know what I want," but so do the beasts of the field.

The world is very sick. There are many cures to be had. But does the doctor take his own physic? The present doctor is Mars. His treatment spells death—to millions. He will have to take his own medicine one day, and then the world will rejoice to hear the news that this hoary old rascal has had his day, and is dying, and no longer shall his eye "threaten and command," and we shall echo Shakespeare's words:—

> "Now is the winter of our discontent
> Made glorious summer——
> And all the clouds that lower'd upon our house
> In the deep bosom of the ocean buried."

That will be news indeed. Meanwhile, the voice of Truth is difficult to hear above the deluge of words.

Have you any news of her of late?

S. GORDON HOGG.

VOLTAIRE AND THE LISBON EARTHQUAKE

IN his biography of Voltaire—notorised because of an attempt at suppression by the Roman Catholic Church—Alfred Noyes avowedly sets out to show "that the real Voltaire was very different from the traditional portrait, and that his beliefs were nearer to Christianity than was usually supposed," and "rationalistic" and "atheistic" writers are accused of taking extracts from the great Frenchman's works without regard to their context, and using them as proof of Voltaire's heresy.

Now I am prepared to concede that this *has* occurred; one naturally looks for sceptical passages in the writings of a man who was so persecuted by Church and State for his opinions, and no doubt, sometimes, fervour has got the better of a complete impartiality. But Mr. Noyes is at least as likely to fall into this trap as anybody. Indeed, I believe that a reading of his book will show that he has undoubtedly done so.

In passing, I can only give one illustration of how Mr. Noyes, on several occasions, quite unwarrantably assumes that Voltaire was not expressing serious opinions. This in spite of the fact that non-Christian writers are attacked for saying that the "Sage of Ferney" sometimes spoke with "his tongue in his cheek"!

The excerpt is taken from the description of a visit to Ferney in the recently discovered Boswell papers. Boswell remarks to Voltaire that he expected to see a great but very bad man, and that he has found otherwise. The "Philosophical Dictionary," however, troubles the Scotsman, and he instances the article on the soul. Voltaire replies: "That is a good article," and in response to Boswell's question if immortality is not a pleasing imagination—"Is it not more noble?"—Voltaire says:—

> "Yes. You have a noble desire to be King of Europe. I wish it, and I ask your protection. But it is not probable." . . . "But before we say this soul will exist, let us know what it is. I know not the cause. I cannot judge. I cannot be a juryman. . . . We are ignorant Beings. We are the Puppets of Providence. I am a poor Punch."

Boswell then asks: "Would you have no public worship?" The Frenchman answers: "Yes. With all my heart. Let us meet four times a year, in a grand Temple, with music, and thank God for all his gifts. There is one sun. There is one God. Let us have one religion. Then all mankind will be brothers."

Commenting on this conversation of Voltaire's, Mr. Noyes says: "It is pretty clear that his impishness was having full play with the solemn little Scot," that it is "a useful illustration of his refusal to be serious," and of "the way in which bad reasoning will provoke him to take the opposite side, even if he agrees with the reasoner."

There is only one way of disputing such quite illegitimate remarks and that is by a plain denial that there is any evidence here of the "impishness" which Mr. Noyes is so fond of ascribing to Voltaire whenever he says anything heretical. Indeed, Boswell describes the conversation as truly singular and *solemn*, and he ought to know! Obviously the same attitude could be adopted with regard to everything that Voltaire wrote and nobody would get anywhere. In such cases discussion is useless.

Mr. Noyes, however, emphatically asserts that Voltaire was perfectly serious and sober in at least one of his works, namely, the "Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake." Here "his real self shines out and the jesting is forgotten and the impishness laid aside." I thoroughly agree with Mr. Noyes that here, at any rate, Voltaire "was in earnest about his argument." We are, therefore, on solid ground at last.

Mr. Noyes takes this opportunity of attacking Lord Morley's thesis with regard to the poem, that Voltaire, unlike Pascal, could find no solution of the enigma which faced him. "He can find no answer, and confesses his belief that no answer is to be found by human effort."

Mr. Noyes considers that Lord Morley could not have read the poem to its conclusion, or that he must have taken "his fragmentary quotations from somebody else" without verifying them. Whether this was the case or not, I do not know, but I cannot agree with Mr. Noyes that the "climax and crown of the whole poem" substantially alters the sentiments expressed. Let anyone refer to the poem itself and think if it is not Voltaire's "fiery expression of a humanity so racked by the horrors that he violently attacks the more complacent Deism of the time," in the words of Mr. Joseph McCabe, whose translation I use. It begins:—

> "Unhappy mortals! Dark and mourning earth!
> Affrighted gathering of human kind!
> Eternal lingering of useless pain!
> Come, ye philosophers, who cry, 'All's well,'
> And contemplate this ruin of a world."

And the following cannot be considered except as an arraignment of the benevolence of God:—

> "Will ye reply: 'You do but illustrate
> The iron laws that chain the will of God'?
> Say ye, o'er that yet quivering mass of flesh:
> 'God is avenged: the wage of sin is death'?
> What crime, what sin, had those young hearts conceived
> That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother's breast?
> Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice
> Than London, Paris or sunlit Madrid?" . . .
> "Are ye so sure the great eternal cause,
> That knows all things, and for itself creates,
> Could not have placed us in this dreary clime
> Without volcanoes seething 'neath our feet?"

He wishes that the earthquake had occurred in desert wastes, and asks the significant, unanswerable question:—

> "Why suffer we, then, under one so just?"

—and he makes this terrible criticism of Christianity:—

> "A God came down to lift our stricken race:
> He visited the earth, and changed it not!"

The tone of the whole poem bears out Lord Morley's contention, and though Voltaire does not, of course, completely reject his belief in a god, he even comes near to this on some occasions. The finish, which Mr. Noyes considers to be Voltaire's "superbly humble answer to his own questionings"—in no way alters the general reasoning and is almost as melancholy as the rest. Here it is:—

> "A caliph once, when his last hour had come,
> This prayer addressed to him he reverenced:
> 'To thee, sole and all-powerful king, I bear
> What thou dost lack in thy immensity—
> Evil and ignorance, distress and sin.'
> He might have added one thing further—hope."

Mr. Noyes' argument rests solely upon this conclusion and particularly on the word "hope," which, incidentally, he renders with a capital letter, though there is none in the original French. He very significantly admits that the faith at which Voltaire arrives "may be a minimum, stripped to the very core." "But it is perfectly clear," he says.

Personally, I cannot see any clarity of belief—doubts and fears seem there to the end in this strong and sincere criticism of Providence by a man of 60. No Freethinker of any standing has ever claimed that Voltaire was an Atheist; he believed in a God all his life, but it was not the Christian god, and in this superb outpouring of humanism at a great catastrophe it is significant that his doubts are strongest. Quite true, Mr. Noyes, Voltaire *was* perfectly sincere when he wrote his "Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake."

C. McCALL.

THE PRESIDENT'S LAUNDRY

IT was a relay of a variety programme originally broadcast in U.S.A. at the time when Eleanor Roosevelt was visiting Britain. The comedian bantered about some imaginary concerted effort by high Washington officials—"all except the President: he was on the 'phone to England all day, trying to find out what had happened to his laundry." And a storm of transatlantic delight erupted through the loudspeaker.

What is interesting about this story is that if it were re-worded to delete the clues to its setting, anyone would promptly identify it as American simply because in no other country is it considered proper to make public jokes about the head of the State. Which is deplorable. Whereas the American President is looked upon as a man, most of his foreign peers figure as tribal gods. Whereas Mr. Roosevelt is acknowledged to be as subject to domestic troubles as Mr. Babbitt, the kings and presidents and premiers elsewhere are tacitly assumed to be less trammelled by laundry difficulties than Venus de Milo. Of course there are degrees: between the Mikado at the theocratic end of the scale and Mr. Roosevelt at the anthropocratic end, a rough gradation could be made of the other national leaders. We could honestly place Mr. Churchill fairly near the saner end, but we would have to remember that the titular, in contrast to the executive, head of our country could not be so honoured. The sacrosanctity of the British Monarchy to-day is really extraordinary; and in its present form it's not very old, having probably established itself during the reign of George V.; in the time of Edward VII—and Edward was a popular man—there was still a republican faction in England. Republicanism can no longer be seriously discussed. We have become mentally lazy. True, it is not a subject of major importance and no doubt there is a formidable pack of arguments for a constitutional hereditary monarchy, but after all there are some arguments against it, and any healthy society should tolerate, and indeed, welcome, expression of them. As far as my knowledge goes, there is no discouraging legislation (I am reminded of the story about the phrenetic Hyde Park orator who exhorted the crowd to proceed with him there and then to set fire to Buckingham Palace, whereupon the solemn policeman intervened with: "Them as is going to burn down the Palace three paces to the left; them as is not, three paces to the right"), but it is invidiously true that social taboo is stronger than the law.

If England is incurably monarchic, U.S.A. is at least as ardently republican. Yet the latter country has a small Royalist movement—the candidate being Mr. Roosevelt, although it is not claimed that that gentleman approved his nomination! It is very right that these critics of the existing constitution should be vocal. Their counterparts in all the other countries should be, too. (They do exist everywhere, and always will exist in any human society.) One never knows, they may be sowing the seeds of a better order—and even if they're not, they serve the useful purpose of nettling the existing order into defending and justifying itself.

But to return to the popular treatment of the great ones of the earth. The conception of a hallowed human being is terribly wrong. The odour of sanctity is essentially a mephitic odour, equally injurious to object and subject. Einstein, himself a victim of hero-worship, has protested that "It strikes me as unfair, and even in bad taste, to select a few of them (i.e. gifted people) for boundless admiration, attributing superhuman powers of mind and character to them." History is cluttered with examples of the corrupting effect of boundless admiration, for hero-worship is akin to deification, and to deify is, *ipso facto*, to dehumanise. For "inner" security (if I can risk a word tinged with mysticism) great men and, furthermore, institutions and philosophies and the powerful abstractions that direct our lives, need the human touch—not in the narrow, sentimental sense of that expression, but something wider and more realistic, purged of romanticism; something, in short, approaching the "earthiness" of the Chinese outlook on life. In particular we must accustom ourselves to the occasional open laugh at anybody and anything. I sometimes think that the Victorians were a little more human than ourselves in this matter: W. S. Gilbert could put a chorus of British peers into a comic opera:—

"Bow, bow, ye lower middle classes!
Bow, bow, ye tradesmen, bow ye masses!"

they sang, and who could say whether the Second or Third Estate laughed the louder? Still, they didn't laugh at their religion; it took Chesterton to do that, and we respect him for it—if counsel for God is sanctimonious, the holder of the opposing brief has a far easier time than if counsel starts off by pointing out that his client is quite willing to be laughed at.

No definition of man is full that does not take humour into account, for by his ability to laugh at himself and all creation, man is at his most noble. The humourlessness of fanaticism skews it out of the true human perspective. The solemnity of State worship is achieved only by a process of conditional dehumanisation. A great test of value is, "Can this survive being made fun of?" Humorous imitations of "L'Allegro" remain—humorous imitations that leave the original unsullied, but humorous imitations of "The Wreck of the Hesperus" are recognised as parodies that deflate the original at once. And how significant it is that dictators invariably veto political cartoons featuring themselves and their cronies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I submit that the question of the President's laundry is vital to democracy!

N. T. GRIDGEMAN.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting Held February 28, 1943

In the absence of the President, owing to a chill, Mr. H. R. Clifton took the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Ebury, Bailey, Griffiths, Miss Woolstone, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted; the financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Glasgow, Bradford, North Staffordshire Branches, and to the Parent Society.

Correspondence between an air cadet, the Air Ministry and the N.S.S. over a matter of enforced church attendance was detailed and the action taken endorsed. Progress in arrangements for future lectures was reported. Communications from various sources were dealt with and instructions given. Matters concerning the Annual Conference and questions for discussion were noted.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for March 28th and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI,
General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—Outdoor

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

LONDON—Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11-0, Prof. G. W. Keeton, M.A., LL.D.—"Some Makers of Modern England—(6) Gladstone and the Liberal Tradition."

COUNTRY—Indoor

Bradford Branch N.S.S. Meetings every Sunday at Laycock's Café, Kirkgate, 6-30.

Burnley (Co-operative Men's Guild), Sunday, 6-30, Mr. N. Charlton—"Christian Science."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Denistoun, Glasgow), Sunday, 3-0, Mr. T. L. Smith—"Russia."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate), Sunday, 3-0, Mr. U. K. Krishna Menon—"An Indian Speaks on India."

Rossendale Branch (2, Oldfellow's Terrace, Scoutbottom), Sunday, 2-30, Mr. J. Clayton—"The Tyranny of Words."

Printed and Published by the Pioneer Press (G. W. Foote and Company Limited), 2 & 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London E.C.4.