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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and the Witches

WE cannot charge the Christian religion with inventing witches and wizards. They were common with primitive peoples long before the Bible and the Bible God were heard of. Even to-day among what we rather loosely call "civilised communities" the belief in witches has its adherents. It may be found in many parts of Britain, and it crops up even in the centres of large towns and cities. Those who really wish to understand religion, particularly the Christian variety, must bear constantly in mind Tylor's dictum that "the thoughts and principles of modern Christianity are attached to intellectual clues that run back through far pre-Christian ages to the very origin of human worship, perhaps even to human existence." It is these clues to the inner significance of Christianity that defenders of the faith dread most. One may find Christians ready enough to discuss the age of documents, the significance of the alleged sayings of Jesus and so forth. They help to distract attention from more fundamental aspects of religion. So far as an understanding of religion in general and Christianity in particular goes, these discussions do not in the least touch the vastly larger body of believers. What the leaders of the Churches dread is the discovery by the common Christian that the key to an understanding of their religion lies with the savage.

Here is what the Bible—the "Oracles of God," as an ex-Archbishop called it—has to say about witches and wizards:—

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." (Exodus xxii. 18.)

"A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus xviii. 27.)

There it is—short, sharp and precise. It is as realistic as anything in the Bible; and its after-effects were as

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.

dammable as "Thou shalt have no other God before me." There is no room for metaphor; nor any possibility of honest misunderstanding. The belief in the activity of evil spirits was emphasised by Jesus Christ, endorsed by all the Christian Churches until recent times. The greatest of Christian organisations, the Roman Catholic Church, still holds to the activity of evil spirits. The text we are dealing with is, in its consequences, one of the most damnable things that the brains of man has ever conceived.

But we will be fair—even with the Bible God who has been so unfair to his followers. Jahveh did not originate witchcraft any more than he originated the virgin birth or the ten commandments. There has never been found a tribe of primitive folk who did not believe in the existence of good and evil spirits, in witches and wizards. All travellers agree that the belief in evil spirits is one of the greatest evils that hang over early life. The reality of witchcraft, and the duty of man to eradicate it by torture and by burning witches and wizards, was held by great Christian leaders until the end of the 18th century; and the belief is not extinct in "Christian England." It was the civil law—not the ecclesiastical law—that finally abolished punishment for witchcraft; and it was medical science that finally proved to the world the nature of all diseases so firmly accepted as due to devils by the Jesus Christ of the New Testament. Finally, it must be borne in mind that in the civilised world of Greek and Roman culture the belief in witchcraft was rapidly decaying. It was left for the Christian Church to revive it and accentuate its evil character a hundredfold. In the end the law of God had to give way to the law of man—and the world was the better for it.

It is a favourite method of Christian advocacy to base the claim for the humanising influence of their creed by placing the developments of contemporary culture side by side with the worst aspects of pre-Christian life. The method is obviously unfair, but it serves the purpose of a clergy that throughout its whole history has never shown any great concern over the methods employed so long as it promised to achieve the desired end. Quite obviously, the scientific plan would be to take the ancient Greek and Roman civilisation, allow for nearly two thousand years difference in time, weigh up the tendencies existing in the pre-Christian world, and then ask whether the advance made is more than one might reasonably expect. The result would be a crushing indictment of Christian influence.

The belief in good and evil spirits is a heritage from the lower stratum of human history, but it had weakened considerably with the cultural development of the ancient world. The best Greek writers openly derided the belief in them; and in imperial Rome it was said that two priests could not meet each other without a smile. Our modern priesthoods appear to have better control of their facial

muscles. The Old and New Testaments are saturated with the belief in good and evil spirits. The early Christian leaders never indicate the slightest doubt in their existence; spiritual agencies are everywhere and were responsible for almost everything. Five centuries before the date given for the impossible birth of the god Jesus, Hippocrates was laying it down as a scientific fact that every disease had a natural cause. Five hundred years later the New Testament God was equally certain that epilepsy and all other diseases were due to an evil spirit taking possession of a human being's body and laid down rules for casting out the disease demons, so setting back the understanding of the cause and cure of disease for over a thousand years.

In this direction the influence of the Christian Church was wholly and irretrievably bad. It offered not a single redeeming feature. It was not a frame of mind that was created and nourished by the ignorant. It was forced upon all by the Church, with penalties in this world and the next for those who did not accept the teaching. The number of evil spirits in contact with mankind was incalculable, but one of the early Jewish Rabbis said that each man had 10,000 demons on his right hand and 1,000 on his left. They might be found in a fountain and swallowed by a person drinking; they revelled in lonely places, in and about graves or concealed in plants. Jesus, it will be remembered, brought a number of evil spirits out of a man after bargaining with them that they should inhabit a number of pigs. The pigs, it should be noted, were not his property. Jesus also cast out seven devils from Mary Magdalene.

Christians of the highest authority among the early teachers of Christianity endorsed the superstition. Tertullian explained that demons were the offspring of fallen angels. St. Jerome said the air was filled with demons. The belief was backed by the first man of genius the Church captured—Augustine. And much later St. Thomas Aquinas solemnly declared that disease and tempests were the direct work of evil spirits.

We shall deal more fully with Christian demonology when we come to the New Testament. But it was necessary to touch upon the general subject of demonism in order to understand the significance and consequences of "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

The Witch Hammer

It is probable that the influence of Mohammedan culture from the 9th to the 13th century, with the revival of interest in the science and philosophy of ancient Rome and Greece, contributed to the development of what is known now as the "witch mania," but which should always be written and thought of as the "Christian witch mania," for, so far as Europe was concerned, the witch mania—which lasted for over two centuries—was in origin wholly Christian. But even when the truth must be stated in fact, our historians appear to do all they can to conceal essential truths where religion is concerned. But the beginning of the mania—growing out of the Bible—is usually dated from the issue of a "Bull" in 1484 by Pope Innocent VIII. This famous—or infamous—document runs:—

"It has come to our ears that very many persons of both sexes, deviating from the Catholic Faith, abuse themselves with demons, Incubus and Succubus, and by incantations, charms and conjurations and

other wicked superstitions, by criminal acts and offences, have caused the offspring of women and of the lower animals, the fruits of the earth, the grape and the product of various plants, men and women and other animals of different kinds, vineyards, meadows, pastures, land, corn and other vegetables of the earth to perish, be oppressed and utterly destroyed; that they torture men and women with cruel pains and torments, internal as well as external; that they hinder the proper intercourse of the sexes and the propagation of the human species. Moreover, they are in the habit of denying the very faith itself. We therefore provide by opportune remedies, according as it falls to our office, by our apostolic authority, by the tenor of these presents, do appoint and decree that they be convicted, imprisoned, punished and mulcted according to offences."

This was the celebrated "Witch Hammer." It, of course, carried no authority so far as Protestants were concerned, but that did not prevent them applauding the activity of Roman Catholics and emulating them in their own activities. There are things on which both Romanists and Protestants agree heartily, but it is nearly always something of which decent men and women should be ashamed. When they agree in other matters it is mainly because conditions compel them to hang together to avoid the dangers of being hanged separately.

The Inquisition had, as H. C. Lea has pointed out, accustomed the public mind to the use of torture to all those accused of offences against the Church; and from an early date in Christian history it had been used in connection with religious offences. As far back as 358, an edict of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, laid it down that no dignity of birth or station should protect men accused of sorcery. Lea ("Superstition and Force") says:—

"How universal it (torture) became is evident from a canon of the Council of Merida, in 606, declaring that priests when sick sometimes accused the slaves of their churches of bewitching them. . . . It was therefore natural that all such crimes should be regarded as peculiarly subjecting all suspected of them to the last extremity of torture, and its use in the trials of witches and sorcerers came to be regarded as indispensable."

The Protestants did not take their orders from the Papacy, but they welcomed the example set. So far as the Papacy was concerned, the charge of sorcery was easy to prove and helped in the persecution of all heretics; and with regard to the Protestants it helped in its operations to make every individual a warrior of God. But officially the great witch hunt set in with the Bull of Pope Innocent. Whether the persecutors were Protestants or Catholics, the procedure was substantially the same. If the crops failed or the milk turned sour sorcery was at work. If a great preacher suffered from recurrent headache it was because of the activities of the devil. Martin Luther had no doubt of this in his own case. And if anyone happened to come along and remove the pain, his doing so was as likely as not due to the fact that he was an emissary of Satan because all the prayers of the priest had failed. Epidemics were unquestionably due to satanic origin.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be continued)

CRITICISM

For I am nothing if not critical.—OTHELLO.

But spite of all the criticising elves,
Those who would make us feel—must feel themselves.

—CHARLES CHURCHILL.

CRITICISM is an art and is understood to imply the estimating of the quality of literature and the fine arts. To be skilled in criticism one must be able to give adequate reasons for expressing an opinion on any subject. Reader, have you ever watched the sightseers at a portrait gallery or similar exhibition? Haven't you reflected that these living pictures were, very often, more interesting than the pictures of "still" and other kinds of life? Perhaps the same reflection was made about you! Also, you may have wondered what the painted celebrities would have said about the sightseers had they come to life!

An honest critic is worth twenty yes men. Yes, the honest critic endeavours to anticipate and interpret the feelings and reactions of the public without fear or favour. Sometimes his views and reviews are not printed, because his reflections do not reflect the policy of the paper or periodical concerned. The editor of the FREETHINKER has, on more than one occasion, offered space to those people who have been challenged or criticised because of utterances or publications of opinions of public interest. Rarely, if at all, have such people availed themselves of the opportunity to reply. They have been "reduced to silence" as was Thrasymachus by Socrates.

Most editors are adept in giving their readers just the information and opinions that are necessary. The quantity and quality of the daily, weekly, or monthly dose is the result of long experience in journalism and, in addition to being most effective, returns a good dividend.

The impact of new or revolutionary ideas likely to prove incompatible with ruling conditions are rigidly excluded from all sections of the press. The editors know their public very well in peace time. In war time they are intimate and, in a subtle way, convey the impression that it is the public who is running the newspapers. But if you are an anarchist or an Atheist, or perhaps a pacifist, and seek to air some critical views, then you will soon discover that you are, indeed, beating the air! No "respectable" journal will give you the publicity you so ardently seek. Once the seed of doubt gets a lodgment then criticism invariably follows. But you won't get the editor to plant all the seeds you send to him. Certainly not those likely to be watered by the tears (of rage or pity) of his readers.

You see, it all depends upon what you are criticising. George Eliot said "Until we know what has been, or will be, the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts, which constitutes a man's critical actions, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character." A kindly, benevolent attitude to adopt certainly. On the other hand, Beaconsfield had no scruples about criticising the critics. "You know who the critics are?" he asked. "They are the men who have failed in literature and art." But Dryden was content to say that "criticism, as first instituted by Aristotle, meant a standard of judging well." And nowadays to many people criticism means simply judging people by personal standards of what is right and wrong, which is a very convenient method to those who are not resident in glass houses! And, most of us will echo the opinion of Burke, who, at a certain period in our history exclaimed, "Our circumstances are indeed critical." The Church echoes this sentiment, too.

Criticism of the Church is often met with the question "What will you put in its place?" This query seems to imply "what you never have you never miss," a phrase of potted philosophy handy for home consumption and very comforting in these days of shortage and absence of various commodities. Originally the

phrase was intended as a solace for the poor and needy, for is it not written "the poor ye shall have always with you"? Now, the Church and religion are synonymous terms. If you dispense with the one the other goes also. Psychologists do not say that religion is one of our primary inherited wants or needs. But some people retain a regard for religion which is a relic of childhood's hopes and fears. If you must have a modicum of mythology, what will you put in place of the Church? The answer is—Shops. Yes, shops. Every denomination will have its shop in the business quarter of the town, and will, of course, conduct its business in the same way as other trades and professions. For example:—

THE CALVINIST SHOP.

You want the best Service. We have it.

Sermons a Speciality.

No connection with the Salvationists next door.

Families in want waited upon weekly.

Religion is now put in its proper sphere, and, as a trade, will quickly succumb under a healthy and sensible competition, for its commodities will be a drag (or a drug) on the market. The demand for religious noxious nostrums and other calamitous concoctions will soon cease. The demand for the refreshing fruits of Freethought will mean a happy, healthy people.

A few old, decrepit religious shops may continue to eke out a precarious existence, supported by a mere handful of customers. But as they open the shop door,

"They will hear a bell

Tolling a knell"

for vendee and vendor.

S. GORDON HOGG.

ACID DROPS

THE Archbishop of York has come to the conclusion that one of the reasons why the man-in-the-street seems to be running away from Christianity is that he does not understand the faith. We agree that there is a lack of understanding among the people concerning the nature of Christian teachings. But that operates in favour of the Churches, not against them. And it is precisely for this reason that we are, in a series of articles, doing what we can to make plain to Christians, and others, just what is Christian teaching. Yet we would wager that Dr. Garbett will not advise his people to read these articles.

"All who call themselves Christians," says our Minister of Education, "believe that the old faith should be made vivid to our boys and girls." There is some truth in that statement, but how when "our boys and girls" grow up and discover there has been palmed on them a gigantic fraud, and often in a form that their parents do not believe? If Mr. Butler would make himself acquainted with boys and girls of about 16, and the opinion they have of their parents in this connection, he might be less jubilant in teaching children a form of religion that even their parents are doubtful about. But perhaps Mr. Butler does not care. He is just the Minister of Education, playing the political game, and "boys and girls" are merely pawns in the game.

We are pleased to note that feeling appears to be growing—perhaps we ought to say courage appears to be growing—against the policy of the B.B.C. The "News Chronicle" of April 2 has a contemptuous half-column against what it calls the "half-ideas" broadcast "to suit the middle brow or half-wit" which "avoids over-stimulating" its listeners. It accuses the B.B.C. of a "lack of intellectual guts." We fancy it is rather worse than that. It is often a deliberate attempt to prevent a plain attack on outworn ideas and obstructive institutions. The B.B.C. might well be called an incarnation of the old Roman maxim: "Give the people bread and the circus." But the bread is stale and the circus is very old-fashioned. We are pleased to

see the rise of feeling against the conversion of what might be useful instruments of instruction into a mausoleum of outworn ideas, and a champion of effete institutions. But its lessons on how to grow cabbages are quite sound.

We see it stated by one of our leading newspapers that the different Government Ministries have 1,166 journalists in their service at a cost to the nation of £460,400 annually. This army naturally obeys orders, and it explains why all our Ministers are marvels of ability and devotion to the country's welfare. The Ministers speak through their journalists. So the information concerning our Ministers is really first-hand. And if they do not know how wise and effective they are, who should? Certainly not those who pay the pipers.

The recent debate in the House of Commons on the policy of the B.B.C. may be taken, in spite of the majority vote, as an indication of very widespread dissatisfaction. It is true that the vote was 134 against three in favour of the present conduct of the B.B.C., but against this there must be borne in mind the fact that the B.B.C. is partly controlled by the Government, and of the 134 probably more than half were in some sort of Government job or had a desire for one. We may lay it down as indisputable that no Government which controls the expression of news or advocacy of ideas will ever act with complete fairness. This fatal drag on real freedom is not peculiar to one Government; it is the common feature of all. Certainly the B.B.C. is a fine example of how not to do it—that is, if one wishes to get a balanced judgment based on sound information. Mr. Churchill, not so very long ago, denied that the B.B.C. has any representative quality. That holds good to-day.

"It does not matter." Lord Palmerston is credited with saying to his Cabinet, "what kind of damned lie we tell so long as we all tell the same lie." Ever since the blitzing of Coventry we have had loud praise from the clergy of the *Christian* fortitude and courage shown by the people of the city in times of great disaster. Now the Rev. G. W. Clitheroe (Vicar) discovers that masses of the people have not been brought up in the principles and traditions of the Christian faith, with the result of "a godless generation which here in Coventry is as marked as anywhere in England. Atheism is now prevalent in the country, and cells of Atheistic Communists are at work among us." So the people who bore the destruction of their city were not made up of Christians. They were largely composed of Atheists, and they had not even been brought up "in the principles and traditions of the Christian faith." There ought to be a centre in which Christians are taught all to tell the *same* lie where religion is concerned.

Mr. Butler, Minister of Education, says it is his "most cherished aim to secure a firm basis of sound and sincere religious teaching and worship in our schools." If that ponderous sentiment means teaching children what unbiased scientific teaching has to say about the origins of religions we would consider him well fitted for his post. But what he really aims at is giving children heavy and continuous doses of established religious teaching, while carefully keeping out of the schools all that is known concerning the origins of religious ideas. They are to be taught the agreed doctrines of certain Churches, and prevented from ever hearing the truth about religion.

There are many poor ways of getting a living, but surely that of drugging the mind of a child in the interests of organised Christian superstition is the most contemptible way of achieving it.

The Rev. R. W. Jones, Vicar of Denton, says it is time the Church put its house in order. But what is the good of putting a completely dilapidated building in order? Better pull it down and get a new building—with different occupants.

The Bishop of Southwell has made a notable contribution to our post-war rebuilding. He has decided that what we need is a theology. Prodigious! The Christian Churches have been in power for many, many centuries, and now we learn that the

world needs theology. It reminds us of a retort that Ruskin gave to a clergyman who said that no one but the Church would help the poor and the unfortunate. Ruskin replied that this was the worst indictment of Christianity he had heard. After so many centuries, and the Church had done its educational work so badly that it had not yet trained a generation that would regard the claims on society of the unfortunate and the poor. No one ever replied to that comment.

Quoting from the official Roman Catholic paper, published in Rome, the "Universe" says that "Christians know that although man may abandon God, God will not abandon man." The conditions are not equal. We know that man can exist without God, but no God has ever been heard of who can exist without worshippers. Large numbers of altars to gods exist in the world, but the gods have gone, and not even their names remain.

Mr. Hammen Swaffer says that when he wrote denouncing the bestial and ignorant champions of "anti-Semitism" he received a deluge of abuse, and many said he was a Jew. The abuse doesn't matter, and it might have been something worse than being mistaken for a Jew. He might have been taken for a Christian—a real one.

The "Catholic Herald" has a special section which answers questions. One of its readers asks whether "the divine generation of the son does not involve some dependence and inferiority?" The "Herald" replies that "the comparison with a human father and son is misleading. The Father did not generate the Son by an act of freewill. From eternity, and by the necessary constitution of the Godhead, the Father and the Son existed, each possessing the divine nature in its fullness. . . . 'Son' is the adequate expression of the whole divine thought. Hence there could never be another, and hence there could never be but one 'Holy Ghost.'"

Now if the questioner is not satisfied his condition must be hopeless. God is a father with only one son and no wife. He is the son of God because Jesus and God both came into existence together, and that kind of thing cannot happen more than once. We do not quite see this. If one son could be born in this way, why not another? And why is not the "Holy Ghost" a son or a daughter? That would at least give equality to each of this divine tangle. And why was Jesus called a son? Why not a friend? Or just God number two or, if they both came into existence together, why may they not stand in the same relation to each other? And—sudden thought—how do we know that we have got this tangle right side up? It seems possible that Jesus might turn out to be God the Father and not God the Son. And, finally, are there any other members of the family whose birth has not been registered? In all humility, we pray the "Catholic Herald" to help our understanding. Unaided, we must give it up.

The Bishop of Chelmsford thinks that the "typical" (blessed word) Victorian Sunday had its solemn, grave and dignified side. We agree in its being solemn and grave (like), but we fail to see the dignity. Of course, there are many who think dignity is made up with stiffness, gravity and a "touch-me-not" attitude, and who would never dream of being quite easy and talking friendly, say, to a dustman. But we doubt very much whether the stiff, unnatural attitude of the Sabbatarian, when under the eyes of the public, was at all dignified. The odds are that he was either a fool or a humbug, or perhaps a dash of both.

Someone, very dear to us, was once gently chided by one who was in the position of temporary guardian for walking in a very friendly manner with a "common" person in the street. "I am surprised to see you friendly with her" was the gentle rebuke. "Well, Miss —," was the reply, "I think she would walk with you if you asked her." We won't offer a prize for the one who picks out where real dignity lay. It would be too easy.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

R. S. STANDEAST: Very pleased to hear from you, and to have what is good news concerning yourself. We are well, but could do with leisure—which may mean only opportunities to do other things.

T. WILLIAMSON:—We do intend reprinting the series of articles on Christianity, but there is the paper difficulty—which gets more acute to overcome. And there would be enlargements. There are obvious opportunities for elaborations in many directions.

FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—R. A. Sproull, 15s.

F. KENYON.—Thanks for obtaining a new reader and for your keen interest.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—Gnr. G. Edwards, £1.

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SUGAR PLUMS

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will be held in London on Whit-Sunday, June 13, at Reggiori's Restaurant, 1 and 3, Euston Road, W.C. 1. Only members of the Society are entitled to be present. Fuller details will be given in our next issue.

We are all acquainted with the wholesale lying indulged in by ministers of religion concerning the terribly low moral of young people after leaving school. The stories are not true, and those who hawk these falsities, from the Archbishops downward, know they are not true. No one gave places where these degraded children came from, or what schools they attended. That there were, and are, large numbers of children who were underfed, badly clothed and housed, and that they formed a group that was a disgrace to the country, no one will deny. But the highly placed clergy never appeared to be greatly upset by it, and they were satisfied by distribution of charity—which helped to advertise the clergy and their churches. The change came only when it was discovered that the churches were losing their hold on the rising generation, and with them many other vested interests that ought long since to have been wiped out. Then it was that the plan was launched to give more religion, and more definite religion in the schools.

In face of this situation we are the more pleased to see in the "Yorkshire Post" for March 29 a letter from a Unitarian minister (Rev. H. W. Kemshall) flatly questioning these clerical liberals on the younger generation. Mr. Kemshall says, as we have often said, the children of the present generation are better, not worse, than those of earlier years. He says:—

"There is to-day much less humbug and hypocrisy than there was a generation ago, and a much cleaner and healthier attitude towards life. In addition to the brazen and painted young women, I see a generation of young women and young men 'with the flame of freedom in their souls and light of knowledge in their eyes.' I see them clear-eyed and honest, with clean minds and healthy bodies. Many of them reject the teaching of

orthodox religion, but they are more essentially and truly religious than ever before.

I am not at all sure that there is to-day actually more venereal disease than there was before the war, or in any time past. May not the explanation be that what was once ignored, allowed to fester, and politely whitewashed, is now openly and frankly recognised and treated? Divorce has certainly increased, but there is, at any rate, more real marital happiness and sincerity. Hooliganism by youths, due largely to high spirits, always increases in time of war, when parents are absent, particularly the father. There is, however, much less ignorance, stupidity and degradation among the youth of to-day than there was a generation and more ago."

We congratulate Mr. Kemshall on his courage and common sense.

We were glad to see, from "The Times" of April 3, that at a meeting of the East London Teachers' Association a resolution was carried requesting the National Union to "investigate the secular solution." That seems a very bold move, and we hope that the National Union will have the courage to adopt the suggestion. If the N.U.T. is not up and doing, and a trifle more courageous than they usually are when religion is on the board, they will discover when it is too late that teachers will have lost their status and their educational influence.

But here is another point of view. "R. Fielding," writing from The Rectory, Thorpe St. Andrew, writes, in the "Eastern Daily Press":—

Church-people pay rates like everybody else, and I ask: Is it fair that their religious beliefs should be excluded from Council schools?

We wonder whether Mr. Fielding is quite so simple as he reads? As it happens, Mr. Fielding's religion is in the school already. What he means is: Why shall he not have the particular creed of his sect (Church of England) in the schools? Well, if his religion could be put in the schools, would he agree to Buddhists, Mohammedans and Atheists having their views on religion in the school? And if not, why not? Finally, Mr. Fielding does not pay for his peculiar religion. He pays only for what he gets. But why should Atheists, on the Fielding level, have to pay school rates and not get Atheism taught?

We wonder whether many people know that many of the so-called dialogues between opposing opinions that are arranged by the B.B.C. are written—question and answer—by the same person? That explains why the criticisms are so feeble, and why the Christian advocate comes out on top.

There seems no end to the duplicity and the substantial intellectual dishonesty of the B.B.C. It lies and wriggles, and wriggles and lies. It gives us faked discussions on religion in which someone is permitted to put questions, only to discover that the parson who answers the questions and the one who puts them are one and the same person. It runs a Brains Trust, of spontaneous answers, only to find that what we get is a record, while the questions asked and the answers given would hardly disturb the serenity of a mid-Victorian old maid. Of course, such questions as "Why do the tails of cats always grow behind?" or "How does one acquire an appetite for poetry?" may be of great importance—to half-wits, but most of them could be answered in a few minutes with an encyclopaedia, and the questioner would be the better for creating his own facts instead of having them thrown at him. Why eminent men and women patronise the Brains Trust is a bit puzzling. It cannot be for the sake of the fifteen guineas, at least one does not like to think it is. It must be for the advertisement. But it is a pity that they do not rise above both baits.

Here is the latest "wriggle" by the B.B.C. Recently a query was asked about religion, a very polite and reasonable question that in itself would not have startled anyone—except the Brains Trust. The writer was told that it could be brought before "The Anvil," which is to be resurrected. This was declined, because that merely says what religion is. It does not answer reasonable

questions. The correspondent replied, and we quote this paragraph:—

I think you cannot fully realise what a deeply disheartening effect your censorship has on people of free intellect. If Freethinkers are in the minority, what can be done, what harm can come from allowing them to voice their point of view? Has not England always prided herself on her fair play towards minorities? If they are in the majority, then surely to seek to suppress them entirely can only bring derision and contempt upon your autocratic organisation. It is really a shame in a country that has always stood for liberty of speech to use such guile and simply tear up questions that threaten to be in any degree embarrassing.

The writer's name is one that must be well known all over the country.

One of the sentences penned by the B.B.C. is worth remembering: "The one subject which the Brains Trust does not discuss is religion." That is interesting, because some time ago readers will remember we published a letter sent by one of the Directors of Broadcasts that religion was not discussed in the ordinary broadcasts, but would be discussed by the Brains Trust. This was because the writer had mentioned only the ordinary broadcast.

May we put a question publicly? Why do not the controllers of the B.B.C. secure liars who are worthy of their salt? We mean finished, polished liars who can stand a strain? After all, lying is a very ancient pursuit, and there have been liars whose stories have aroused the admiration of the world. Why not get a really expert liar, and not trust to so many bungling amateurs?

In our issue of March 28 we gave a reference with criticism of a passage taken from the Roman Catholic "Herald." We attributed it to the "Universe." We regret the error and also any annoyance we may have caused the editor of the "Universe."

THE LONDON THEATRE IN WAR TIME

WHEN Canadian journalist and Tory M.P. Beverley Baxter recently wrote in the London "Evening Standard" to the effect that there are few English plays to be seen in the West End, he was well on the way to a truism. But what made the statement no more than a half-truth is the fact that there are plenty of plays by British dramatists being produced; the trouble is that they fail to find a sufficiently large public to support their running for more than a few months. This is, of course, entirely due to the West End manager, who thinks he knows what the public wants, and accordingly gives it what he thinks is good for it and what he thinks the public think good for itself. Of course, the "manager" cannot always be wrong, and so we get in war-time London frothy and loosely-written comedies, well-worn vintage musicales and the usual leg and bust shows, playing to big business. The managers rub their hands and cry "We told you so" to justify their own stupidity and lack of imagination, making quite certain to ignore the equally big success of a play like "Watch on the Rhine," which is still filling the Aldwych Theatre after a run of nearly twelve months, despite the fact that it concerns itself with a few of the serious problems of our civilisation.

And so, it should be asked, what happens to all the worthwhile playwrights in this country who cannot descend to the level of writing the wittish farce and the sexy thrillers; the men and women who, with proper encouragement, might write an English prototype to the American "Watch on the Rhine," but who now, because their work is considered too "uncommercial," are compelled to entrust it to experimental theatres like the Gate, Arts or the Mercury, where, as often as not it gets a hasty production and is indifferently cast? Why, our greatest living

playwright, Sean O'Casey, was compelled to give his last play, "The Star Turns Red," to the Unity Theatre people here—they, who although tremendously enthusiastic, are frequently rather graceless amateurs. Nor is "The Star Turns Red" an isolated instance of a great play being seen only at a small out-of-the-way club theatre. Not only Americans like Clifford Odets and Irwin Shaw, and Russians like Gorky and Afinogenov, have had their plays done first of all (and sometimes only!) at the Unity Theatre, but virile and vital writers of this country like Ted Willis and Geoffrey Parsons have both produced works of a consistently high standard which have only seen the light of day, if the reader will pardon the mixed metaphor, on the stage of one of the amateur clubs. If the "powers" behind the West End theatre were genuinely anxious to improve the standard of entertainment they would have grasped the chance before this. For now nothing is a big flop, and the highbrow play well done is proving—as in the case of Shaw's "Doctor's Dilemma" and Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler"—as big a box office attraction as those farces which frequently strike a new low level for pointlessness. But every theatre is open, and as soon as one mediocre piece is withdrawn—for these are the only pieces to be withdrawn in this terrific boom—another takes its place. It is hard to get a theatre for even a Priestley play in the West End, but is this because with his new play Priestley, at last, has found something to say? I wonder. Anyway, J.B.'s "They Came to the City" has now been touring around the English provinces for over three months, and to date shows little sign of discontinuing its journey.*

And so it seems that if you have anything to say you must be a Shaw or an Ibsen—that is, unless you are an American like Mr. Steinbeck or Miss Hellman, and even these gentry of the realist school have to be "supported" by an imposing cast before their works are considered sufficiently "commercial" for London's Shaftesbury Avenue. The even harder-hitting unorthodox American school, O'Neill, Odets, Dreiser, Sherwood, Rice and Ardrey, are done—when they are done—by the small theatre groups.

Miss Hellman appears to be the one American writer who has effected the perfect compromise of saying sufficient to make the average manager think he's taking a chance with an advanced work; but never, except as in the case of "Children's Hour," does she make the mistake of saying too much. For the English Lillian Hellmans there is nothing but frustrated hopes. An instance of how culture prostitutes itself to mammon and reaction in our war-time theatre was recently seen in the productions of two war plays, "Lifeline" and "Flare Path." A spirited young writer, Barbara Toy, endeavouring to stop the rot of escapism, wrote in conjunction with Norman Lee a warm, hearty and honest play about the Merchant Navy in the present war, "Lifeline." It was well produced and acted, received a quite lyrical reception from the critics, and then disappeared. Produced about the same time, "Flare Path," which is a box of theatrical tricks about life in the R.A.F. (the occupants of a country hotel, and their relations to the planes which raid Germany nightly in a nearby aerodrome, a middle-aged actor who arrives at the hotel in search of the girl wife of a pilot who has hysterics in the "Journey's End" tradition of George Belcher characters and the final happy ending by all concerned) is, despite a mixed press, but perhaps because of its lack of integrity, still running.

I cannot blame the public for its failure to accord "Lifeline" the run it deserved, for again we are confronted with our old enemy the "commercial" manager. Some of the critics had mentioned whilst praising "Lifeline" that it was slightly

* Since writing the above, a "home" has at last been found for Mr. Priestley's fine play, and it will open in the West End of London at The Globe Theatre on April 20.

narrowing in parts (did Shakespeare ever write a major play that wasn't? Or Ibsen, Strindberg and Miss Hellman?). Well, this piece of realism which was applauded vigorously by all who managed to see it, was produced without any "names" in the cast at an out-of-the-way theatre and left unadvertised, despite the press praise, until it was withdrawn after a run of barely four months.

How different the care and attention paid by the same types of management to "Flare Path", and such trite bits as "Warn That Man," "A Little Bit of Fluff," "Sleeping Out," "Other People's Houses" and "Quiet Week End," to name but a few. The critics weren't particularly enthusiastic about any of them, the audiences rarely recommend, but because they have all been "plugged" and the managers haven't the responsibility of presenting anything either very serious or good, they fill up the gap in this English war-time theatre in which every play produced from the pen of a British dramatist must meet the demands of escapist managers. Religion, politics and all serious thoughts are practically barred (even in "Brighton Rock," where Roman Catholicism plays a large part in determining the morbid character of the central figure, this idea of the author's has been skated lightly over by the producer), and the manager will assure you, if one ever manages to talk with the exalted Being, that the public are now getting what they, a war-time public, deserve.

It must be for all of us who care about the future of the English theatre—in the immediate future as well as in the days of peace—to remove from control of plays and players those who chain art to the wheels of the present political system. We shall then perhaps get what we deserve, and of which we shall make the public worthy; no longer a kept thing, but a reflection of the lives of real people. What more can culture offer for the advance of human happiness and enlightenment? If the theatre is to be regarded once more as a serious art in this country, it cannot afford to offer theatregoers less.

PETER NORTHCOTE.

CORRESPONDENCE

HEAR ALL SIDES.

Sir.—Mr. du Cann is quite capable of defending himself. I would like to ask Mr. Robertson whether Freethinkers must suspend their Freethinking for the duration and must willy-nilly refrain from criticising the general common-place attitude, of which he appears to be so able an exponent?

In the general bleed and burn catastrophe into which the human race has plunged, may not one sane voice or pen indulge in any other analysis than the popular one at the risk of being called dangerous?

This is the game which the Nazis are playing.—Yours, etc.,
A. SELLS.

Sir.—I have read with interest Mr. Robertson's rebuke to your contributor Mr. C. G. L. du Cann, and should like to endorse the former's protest at the type of anti-war propaganda appearing over Mr. du Cann's name from time to time in THE FREETHINKER. We can only build up some protection for mankind against want, filth and ignorance when the Fascists have been defeated. If this war ends before Hitlerism has been completely exterminated, then we shall all be living in a state of suspense till war comes again; the ever-present danger of aggression is surely almost as terrible a poison as the degradation of war itself.—Yours, etc.,

PETER NORTHCOTE.

Sir.—In the issue of THE FREETHINKER for April 4, under the title "Freethought and War," Mr. Archibald Robertson protests against what he describes as "pacifist propaganda" by Mr. C. G. L. du Cann being published in the columns of THE FREETHINKER. I do not agree with the lop-sided presentation of the Jesus of the Gospels in the article "The Blood and Burn Brigade." Jesus the gentle is more than counter-balanced by

the Jesus of hatred and intolerance. I am not a pacifist with regard to the present war, neither was I in the last war against Germany. Nevertheless, I was glad to see that THE FREETHINKER still lives true to the principles of Freethought, publishing what others might be afraid of. There is far more danger in time of war of "playing the Nazi game" by preventing the free expression of honest opinion than can possibly come from the handful of conscientious objectors or pacifists who have the courage to state opinions contrary to the popular ideas of the moment. The free expression of opinion is the essence of Freethought, and is "downright dangerous" only to those who (like the Roman Catholics with regard to the International Freethought Conference) are ashamed of what they should be proud of, and proud of what they should be ashamed.—Yours, etc.,
L. EBURY.

[We have received other letters in the same vein as these three, but cannot spare room.]

THE FUTURE OF MAN.

Sir,—In your April 4 issue the writer of Sugar Plums says: "The wealth of the world should be open to the world."

The trouble is that the wealth of the world is lamentably inadequate. At the Royal Institution on September 27, 1941, Professor Desch, an eminent chemist, said: "Copper, tin, gold and phosphates, at the present rate of production, are believed

(Continued on next page.)

OBITUARY

We regret to announce the death of Mr. Fred Bransby Carlton, who passed away on Monday, April 5, at the age of 48, after a brief illness. Mr. Carlton has been for many years a member of the Newcastle Branch of the N.S.S., and for a time was an active propagandist in that town. Although severely handicapped by semi-blindness which recently threatened to become complete, the deceased had for a score of years been extremely active on the platform and in the Press in connection with economics and politics. The local civic life will be poorer for his loss. The funeral ceremony was conducted by George Whitehead, a friend of many years' standing. We extend our sincere sympathy to his brother, mother and wife.

Sunday, April 25th, 6 p.m.

CAXTON HALL

Public meeting on the

Future of International Socialism

Speakers: John Hynd, Paul Tofahrn, Frank Horrabin, Szmul Zygjelbojm, Minna Specht, Andre Philip.

Organised by Socialist Vanguard Group

Tickets 1/- at door

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, Mr. W. B. CERRY, M.A., B.Sc.—"Looking Forward in Education."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

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

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Brierfield (Market), Sunday, 3-0, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Burnley (Market), Sunday, 6-15, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a Lecture.

Higham, Friday, April 16, 7-30, Mr. J. CLAYTON, a lecture.

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Bigg Market), Sunday 7-0, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON, a Lecture.

THE FUTURE OF MAN.

(Concluded from previous page.)

to have a further life of less than a century." Many minerals are even rarer. If these resources were open to the world they would be exhausted in no time.

Shortly before the war an international conference at Newcastle demonstrated that the forests of the world are being used up far faster than they are growing. Yet timber is one of the main raw materials.

More than half the people in the world live in areas where enough food can be grown only by spade cultivation. Even then it is mostly rice, or some other prolific cereal. Colin Clark has shown that each New Zealand worker produces twenty times as much food as a Japanese worker. The Jap is by far the more skilful, and actually produces nearly five times as much per acre as the New Zealander. The New Zealander, however, has ninety times as much land as the Jap.

Warren Thompson, in "Danger Spots in World Population," compares Japan with the American State of Iowa. Japan has thirty times as many human beings as Iowa, but Iowa has six times as many cattle, sheep and swine as Japan. The Japs have no room for animals; every inch of land is needed for rice.

If the wealth of the world is really opened to the world it will make a tremendous fall in the standard of life of every English-speaking people.—Yours, etc.,

R. B. KERR.

[That the wealth of the world should be shared by the world has no necessary reference to quantity. And Mr. Kerr appears to ignore the possibility of substitutes, new discoveries of deposits and new inventions of all kinds.—EDITOR.]

THOMAS HARDY

(Concluded from page 150.)

IN all these novels, as well as in those written between, Hardy takes the attitude of an accurate observer. He sets out the facts of human life as he sees them—not to expose, or to explain—merely the truth as he sees it, with this proviso: that as the innocence and helplessness of his victims increases in the later novels, he begins openly to side with those victims. He is judicial in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," but in Tess he becomes closer to being her advocate. "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," A Pure Woman—faithfully portrayed by Thomas Hardy—runs the title.

In "Under the Greenwood Tree" we are given a charming picture of Wessex village life—just as organs are superseding the village minstrels with their serpents and other strange instruments in the gallery. We follow the simple love story of Fancy Drew through the idylls of The Waits and The Tranter's Ball, and so on to its proper consummation after the Church marriage. All is bright and simple except for the ominous note, "the secret which Fancy would never tell." So, with "Far From the Madding Crowd." Again the country setting for the love of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene. But their uneasy story until at last they are safely, if not happily, married brings in two things: (1) What they went through before they were united definitely reduces their earlier vitality and sense of mastery of life. (2) Their story involves the tragic fate of Fanny and her swaggering soldier lover, Sergeant Tray. It also involves the fate of Squire Boldwood, in whom you meet the first character seemingly caught up in a web of circumstances beyond his control which ultimately brings him to a futile end.

In "The Mayor of Casterbridge" we start near the wedding and go through to death. Henchard is caught early in the story in a net of circumstances—of his own making, it is true, in part—he gets drunk, he sells his wife, he swears off strong drink for 20 years, during which he prospers in business and in society, but inwardly wears himself out by his unremitting fight against his passions. The 20 years up, he lets himself

go, and slowly, remorselessly, fighting hard, he is overwhelmed. All the odds are against him, and there is nothing to save him from an initial set of blunders and mistaken lines of conduct. And so we reach Tess. The story of a simple girl betrayed in her ignorance by the degenerate sprig of a recently ennobled house. The story proceeds remorselessly through her life with all its sweetness and pitiful ignorance. Like Pompilia in Browning's "Ring and the Book," Tess brings out the best in the good people and the worst in the bad people whose lives she crosses. In the end she murders her paramour and is hanged at Winchester Gaol. This time Hardy as much as says: "It's all very well for a Henchard—he's a strong man and can fight back—it's a fight, even if an unfair fight. In Tess, the whole malevolence of the universe falls upon an ignorant and innocent girl, victimised by her father, her seducer and her husband."

And so all is ready for "Jude the Obscure," published in 1896 to a popular outcry. "The Letter Killeth" is Hardy's sub-title. This time we haven't the strength of Oak, or the vitality of Bathsheba, or the pugnacity of Henchard, or the saintliness of Tess. We just have the obscure lives of Jude Fawley and his stupid little cousin, Sue Bridehead—their aspirations to learning—their half-baked philosophy, their need of each other, their victimisation by society, and their joint and separate utter failure after a series of heartbreaking experiences.

"As flies to wanton boys, we are to the gods;
They kill us for their sport."

And with this heartbreaking picture Hardy stopped writing novels. But ten years later published the great epic drama, "The Dynasts." He takes as his subject the whole complex picture of the 15-year struggle against Napoleon, fought out on sea and land the world over; and he presents it not merely as the war it was, but as a picture and symbol of seething, struggling anti-like human life in the mass—as seen from a great distance, in perspective, by the gods. He still retains the sense of universal powers, sinister and cynical. But in "The Dynasts" they fall into a scheme and a pattern, and Hardy envisions a new controlling power, infinitely remote, impersonal, disinterested if you like, but still a controlling power. IT is the name he uses, and subtly throughout this epic drama he implies that humanity struggles, suffers, loses, questions, but does so as it works out, however blindly, a destiny. The final words of the play are significant:—

"Consciousness the Will informing
Till IT fashions all Things fair."

I leave you now with the problem, and a fascinating one it is. Was Hardy's ultimate solution, as shown in "The Dynasts," a higher wisdom born of mature thought and a deeper philosophy—OR was it an easy mental escape from his perplexity?

(Reprinted from "The Rationalist," N.Z.)

SPRING

In my small cartilage the flowers,
Now welcome drench of April showers—
Shy violets rise.
And when I seek these vernal friends,
A modest muse sometimes attends—
In rustic guise.
She is not fit for lofty flight,
Quite simple themes are her delight—
She's rather shy.
But still she finds somewhat to say
To me, in her own artless way—
When none is by.

EDGAR SYERS.