

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIII.—No. 38

Sunday, September 19, 1943

Price Threepence.

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Life and the Churches

"ARTIFEX" is, I believe, the pen-name of a clergyman who is a regular contributor to the "Manchester Guardian." If I am wrong in this assumption, I apologise, for I have no desire to accuse a man of being a clergyman at a time when being a minister of the Gospel cannot avoid carrying with it a suspicion of insincerity or primitivism. This seems a hard thing to say, and to some it will sound very much like sheer extravagance. Yet look at the facts. We are living eighty years after the publication of "The Origin of Species" and seventy years after the world was presented with Tylor's "Primitive Culture." The frames of thought indicated by these two epoch-marking works are now so well established that their essential significance is recognised and admitted all over the civilised world. Even the Christian clergy cannot escape the occasional use of the phraseology of evolution though they ignore or at least distort its meaning and significance. If the clergy were all admitted fools one could simply smile and let the matter pass. But they are not more foolish than other sections of society, even though they are the professional hawkers of foolish ideas. They must, if they are honest, admit more than they say, they must *know* more than they preach. They are in a desperate state. If they are to retain the more intelligent of their congregations they cannot help undermining the religion they are paid to preach. If they are to remain loyal to their religious doctrines they must be content with a constantly shrinking band of followers drawn from the relatively less intelligent section of the community. I think the reader will now understand why, if "Artifex" is not a professional preacher of the Gospel, I apologised to him for my blunder.

To get back to our muttons. A teacher wrote to "Artifex" asking whether he would agree to banishing religious teaching from the schools and, in its stead, put "simple ethical teaching." "Artifex" declines to reply, and justifies himself by saying "There is not, there never has been, and from the nature of things there never can be, any ethical system divorced from a religious basis." In support of this sweeping but foolish statement he cites the earliest ethical code "known to history," that of Hammurabi, who received it from his god, and the one given to Moses "from the hand of Jehovah." It does not seem to occur to "Artifex" that these laws were mere recognitions of ideas and practices that were in existence long before the two friends of God named. Nay, ethical rules, rigidly enforced, were in existence before the gods came into being.

Neither the circulation of the blood nor the movements of the planets were dependent upon discoveries made a few hundred years ago. The discovery of the "law" they illustrated did not determine the function of the blood

system or the swing of the planets. And man was a developed animal appreciating the tribal pressure of "ethical" rules long before he understood completely their function.

At this point "Artifex" reminds himself of the systems of Confucius and Buddha, but seeks protection by explaining that while these two teachers may be without a theology, they are "certainly not religious." But unless there is a God in the offing, on what ground may we call a system religious? How can we have any religion without a theology? Theology is nothing more than a study of the wishes and nature of God, what he does and what he wishes man to do, how to worship him, and so on. After all, merely saying "I believe in God" is a very lean religion if that is all it means or says. Such a God would be of little use to anyone, and none at all to a clergyman. There is not, there never has been, and it is impossible that there should ever be a religion without a dependant theology. Religion involves a belief in God, theology tells us what God is like and what he wishes us to do. And always God wishes us to respect the priest, of whatever brand he may be. That is perhaps the only thing on which theologians are agreed. It is a feature that begins with the medicine man and runs right up to the Pope.

If these controversial clerics would pause to remember that it is the established teaching of anthropology that gods, big and little, savage or comparatively civilised, are late attendants on the life of mankind, and if they would also master the lesson that it is a very important part of the teaching of a scientific Atheism that the appearance of gods are to be expected in the course of the development of social life, if controversialists would bear these things in mind, a great deal of time would be saved and understanding would be nearer completeness.

The gods are inevitable appearances in the life of humanity. They are comparatively late arrivals, but they need not be permanent in their stay. Up to the present man may be said to have spent a great deal of his time and ingenuity in bringing gods into existence, and an equal expenditure of time and energy in getting rid of them. Man is the great decide.

There is, of course, nothing new in this. It is as inevitable as anything in human life can be. But we should like a man such as "Artifex" to explain how it is that while he is ready to grant that man finds his way very slowly through the world, committing blunder after blunder, and misunderstanding most things to begin with, on what grounds does he conclude that where the existence of gods is concerned man discerned that "truth" from the outset? It seems to reverse the whole experience of humanity in other directions.

Theology is religion in action. But it is curious to note how inevitably it distorts man's sense of justice and even of truth. As the reader will have concluded, I have some respect for the ability of "Artifex," greatest when he is



not writing as a theologian, but always admiring the skilful way in which he dodges the issues. But when it is the interests of established religious ideas that are in question, his ability and exactitude sink several degrees. Defending his thesis that a belief in God is essential to morals, he says:—

"In the first flush of Darwinian enthusiasm Leslie Stephen here in England and Georg Simmel in Germany recognised this obvious fact. . . . That is to say, if man is a purely natural creature, it is as meaningless to say what man ought to do as to say that lions ought to be vegetarians or that crocodiles ought to have furs and not scales."

I have not any of the writings of Simmel in my library, but I have most of the works of Leslie Stephen. He wrote a bulky volume of 462 pages, not to prove that morality was impossible and ethical rules inoperative without a belief in God, but to demonstrate that morality was a natural growth, developed as the physical organism is developed, and that theology ("religion") distorted morals to their disadvantage. Here is one of many quotations that might be made from Stephen's "Science of Ethics." It is the very opposite of "Artifex's" statement:—

"Morality is a product of the social factor; the individual is moralised through his identification with the social organism; the conditions, therefore, of the security of morality are the conditions of the persistence of society. . . . The determining cause of the moral objection to vice is in all cases measured by the perception of the social evils which it causes. . . . The ethical sentiment becomes stable and demonstrable when that which is the real cause of its development is recognised as being also its sufficient reason."

Now let me put a very simple challenge to "Artifex." His claim is that "there never has been, and from the nature of things there never can be, any ethical system divorced from a religious basis." Against that I set the following: There never has been, and in the nature of things there never can be, any admittedly ethical practice or system that has not been based upon social contacts and consequences. Mankind is not always aware of the essential character of the promptings that lead to action any more than he is aware of the functions of the lungs or other parts of his animal structure. He practices morals as he discharges his physical functions, without any reliable knowledge of their nature or consequences. And he discovers the real function of conduct, ethical and other, as he discovers the significance and origin of the functions of his physical structure.

Ethics is a form of conduct, but it does not cover all conduct. Its essential quality is an expression of human relationships. There is no necessary ethical quality in my getting up at six o'clock in the morning or remaining in bed till mid-day, so long as my doing one or the other has no bearing on the welfare of others. On the other hand, there are forms of conduct, such as meeting my obligations as a parent, a friend, a citizen and so forth, that fall within the category of ethical. As Socrates said many centuries ago, "'Good' means good for something. Otherwise it is good for nothing." All conduct that betters or worsens our relations with each other come under the heading of ethical. Conduct that has no such consequences does not

come within the category of "ethical." So far everything is clear sailing.

Now, there is no doubt to-day that man originates from the higher animal world. But "originates" does not mean with science instantaneous. That is reserved for the Bible God, who said "Let there be" and there was. How long it took for the animal form to take on what we should call a human cast no one knows, but it must be at least a million years, and it is only in the latter part of the million years that the gods make their appearance. That is another perfectly safe statement to make. But during the tremendously larger part of that million years men and women lived as members of a horde or group. They begat children who were cared for by their parents and protected from outsiders by the horde. They developed a sense of obedience to the tribal laws, they created customs and eventually created gods, good and bad. Custom led to law and experience created judgments. Men built huts, they taught their children the tribal lore, and if at a later date they attributed their own discoveries to the tribal spirits, that is because like their descendants of to-day, they used "god" as an explanation of things they could not understand. God was the "asylum of ignorance" at the beginning, he is the asylum of ignorance in 1943, and he, or they, will continue to be so until the last god fades out of the mind of a really civilised humanity. We are told to-day that the world can be made fit for human habitation only when we have cleared Nazism out. The formula would be the more impressive if they tacked God on to the Nazis. They are really an outstanding religious type, for there are no democracies in the Christian heaven. There is an autocrat, and the chief business of those who have the misfortune to go to heaven appears to be singing his praise. That also appears to be the chief business of those who are ruled by Hitler.

I would have preferred to send this reply to the "Manchester Guardian," but this country is still influenced by the Christian Churches, so I put it in these columns. But I would like to put a final question to "Artifex": If mankind—pre-god mankind—could raise animality to humanity without God, what does he mean by telling us that there never could be an ethic without religion? But I expect he will not reply. Still, he may think about it.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## RELIGIOUS "AVERAGES" OF THE B.B.C.

WE are a great nation for cricket; in fact, the term "it is not cricket" has passed into the language. The staff of the B.B.C. are "cricket fans," so one wonders what their idea of the game would be if the one side had all the innings while the other simply fielded. Yet that seems to be the B.B.C. idea of national broadcasting, national in the real sense that all the people of Britain who have receiving sets pay for the piper, yet are not consulted about the tune. This applies with special force to religion, especially the particular creed of the so-called Established Church. This would be bad enough if the Church paid for all the wireless licences, but how much less can be said for a "National" service to which every licence holder contributes, whether Christian or any of the hundreds of other "religions," and including Atheists, agnostics, "Christian Scientists," or the enormous mass of the people who care not one whit about any "faith," as their everyday actions demonstrate, and empty



churches show. If the Church had its own transmitting stations, one wonders how many would tune in, especially if the Church stations broadcasted nothing but religion all the time, on the principle that one cannot have too much of a good thing.

Take a representative week, from August 1st to 7th inclusive. On August 3rd, at 10.15 p.m., we were treated to one quarter of an hour devoted to "Why I believe in God," described as one of a series of talks by "people from different walks in life belonging to different Christian traditions on their grounds for belief in God." This talk, by the way, was the fifth, by Arnold Williams, "film industry executive." What the film industry has to do with a belief in God is not stated, other than to presume that the Almighty has his Eye on picture theatres and Hollywood, but he must nod sometimes, judging by the recent catastrophes at East Grinstead and elsewhere. Still, Mr. Williams is only allowed fifteen minutes to explain why he—and presumably not the film industry—believes in God, so he had little time in which to be convincing. He cannot have had the time to produce any evidence of God's existence, and his mere statement of his belief (that is, if he had any real belief at all, and not merely a belief that he does believe—not the same thing by any means) cannot have been very convincing to any others than the "faithful." Yet brevity is the soul of wit, and maybe of truth, but many of the clergy could be more brief, and presumably more truthful, if they had summed up the question with the word "stipend," or if they wished to elaborate, they could have included "offerings of the faithful," especially at Easter.

One would have expected, in cricket parlance, that the other side would have been granted an innings, but one searches the "Radio Times" in vain for another broadcast on "Why I do NOT believe in God," and if so, not a mere reading from an "approved" manuscript, passed for broadcasting by the cricket-loving B.B.C.

Now we come to the analysis for the week. Taking the Home Programme only, as presumably the Forces have something else to do than to listen to "services"—but one must remember that a soldier, quite recently, was "disciplined" for refusing a "Church parade"—"services" only preach, but are most careful to explain nothing. The obvious idea seems to be that what a soldier cannot swallow, willingly, must be rammed down his throat willy nilly.

The religious "innings" of August 1st took 108 minutes, but that was Sunday, "Parsons' Day," when, presumably, all soldiers cease from fighting and stand at ease—or unease—while the padre has his innings at the religious wicket. On Monday this time was cut down to 20 minutes only, in all, which seems to prove that the boasted "popularity" of religious broadcasting is easily satisfied. On Tuesday this time was extended to one hour, including the fifteen minutes of Mr. Williams explaining why film executives do, or should, believe in God. On Wednesday this time was again cut down to 35 minutes, and on Thursday to 30, but in this week there were five duplicated broadcasts by the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Lichfield, entitled "Lift Up Your Hearts," significantly enough at 7.15 in the morning, so that this "talk" could be digested with the presumptive eggs and bacon—if any. But five "Talks" of a quarter of an hour each, and all just the same! Herbert Spencer talked of "repeated iteration for reluctant minds." He must have had the Lord Bishop in mind. Someone should point out to the Right Rev. that this, in the lowest class of the musical profession, is known as "plugging." One must imagine that there is a dire need to "Lift Up Your Hearts" for the man in the street and the soldier on the battlefield. On the other hand, there should be no such need for the Bishop to play tricks with his anatomy, especially as the Bishop's stipend does not appear to be in any danger. But then this exhortation may be only intended for other people, perhaps only for those of great faith, which means, in the eyes of the Bishop, those of the Christian faith, and the Bishop's own

particular brand of that. All other "religions" (with their millions of followers, including the worshippers of visible idols, compared with those who worship an unseen and utterly unknown God) are excluded. Or perhaps the Bishop's own heart needs some uplifting, as he may be worried by the fact that his own God does not appear to be attending to business just at present. He may be distracted somewhat by the other billions of worlds, which those meddlers, the astronomers, still persist in discovering. The projected American 200-inch telescope may, and probably will, discover a few billions more.

Still, the Lord Bishop should cheer up. An innings of nearly three hours in one week, compared with just no time at all on the other side, should make for victory in the long run, if he forgets that his "Faith" has had an innings of nearly 2,000 years up to date, and still cannot fill the churches. Evidently a little more prayer is necessary to the Almighty, who seems to be a little overwhelmed with business just at present.

HERBERT CESCINSKY.

## GOD, TIME AND CREATION

IS it reasonable to believe that the universe was created? In my opinion it is not, and I would like to explain, if possible, why I think it is a primitive, irrational belief, rendered superficially credible by incorrect word-valuation.

To analyse the words I have chosen as the title of this article will serve to clarify the position, and a correct estimation of their value and import, together with their legitimate application to the question and their natural relationship to each other, should not fail to indicate whether or not the story of the created universe may be believed.

God, to an Atheist, is difficult to define. In fact, it is impossible; for how could an Atheist answer the question: "What is God?" when the question postulates the existence of that which he considers to be the most gigantic of all man's illusions? He could say only: "Nothing!" which leaves the question unanswered. So, as an Atheist, I turn to Roget's Thesaurus for a definition of God. Roget has a great deal to say about it; too much to quote at length, so I must be satisfied with the following: God: Lord, Jehovah, the Almighty, the Supreme Being, the First Cause, *Ens Entium*, the Author, etc., of all things.

Note the pathetic capital letters. They are Roget's, not mine. Only Jehovah really deserves one. All the others are little pieces of worship, which also serve to turn ordinary words into "holy" ones.

Time is easier to define. To the human mind, time is a relative measurement between events. Without events, time is utterly without meaning.

Creation does not mean assembling the parts of the universe and setting them off like a machine. It means nothing other than the supposed act of a god in calling the matter of the universe into existence. There is no creation apart from this, and conversely, there is no destruction.

With these definitions, it may be possible to formulate an answer to the question of the creation of the universe.

The universe is the sum of all that exists and happens. It is not possible, truly, to imagine a period before the universe came into being, as this would require an event prior to the creation from which to measure the duration of the non-existence of matter, which is obviously absurd. It could not even be a measurement, for the event and the succeeding "time" would be unique. There could be no other events or periods with which to compare it. We may say, if we wish, that this time was infinitesimal or that it was almost "eternity." In the absence



of any means of comparison, both estimates are right. Moreover, the event which is required is fatal to the argument for creation because it is a happening and the existence of matter must be postulated before it can occur. Therefore, the duration of the universe's existence must be extended to include this "pre-creational event" and the matter involved. So must it be seen that time is meaningless outside the universe and is, therefore, sub-universal and entirely dependent on the existence of the universe and on variations in the relationships between aggregates of matter. Therefore, we may say that before matter existed there was no time, which is the same as saying that the universe has always been in existence.

Is this less credible than the theist's God, for whom the same eternal being is claimed?

If the theists are right, and God has existed for all eternity, then the universe he created must be of less age than himself, and he must have chosen some particular time to create. It must have been *some* time, if there was a creation. Why did God choose that time in preference to any other? After "being" for an unknown "time" in "space," utterly alone, God decided that the "time was ripe" for a universe to be made. How could this be? There was nothing to influence God in favour of such a decision, for God was all. The time chosen was no different from any other time, aeons before. There was just God, and nothing had changed. We may be told that God just "thought" the time was propitious, in his own mind, but this is not tenable, as a moment's consideration will show. How could an Eternal God, entirely alone in space, be said to think? What is thought? Is it not the act of comparison, of weighing up and valuing relationships, of selection and rejection in the light of experience? How could the completely alone future Creator compare and relate ideas concerning the initiation of a non-experienced type of being? For God to set about creating a universe, he must have had some preconception of what a universe is like. A thing cannot be imagined which is not like any other thing. All that can be done is to jumble and amalgamate the features and attributes of things that are known. We can imagine a mermaid or a centaur, for instance, only because one is half-girl and half-fish and the other is half-man and half-horse. There is really nothing new in these imaginary creatures.

It is, however, quite impossible to think of a "squiggle," shall we say, until we gain some idea of what a "squiggle" is like. It is useless to rely upon the thing being suitably named, and say that a "squiggle" is obviously something like a worm, for that is a mental short-circuit. Nothing unlike anything else can be imagined. Therefore, God must have known some-other-thing that was like the universe he conceived, if we are to believe that he did create it. But there could not be a pseudo-universe, obviously. A universe, however its internal economy may be arranged, must always be the sum of all being, the total of all that can be referred to in terms of spatial and temporal dimensions; in other words, it can never be anything other than a universe. There could not be a "thing" that was half-universe and half-"some-other-thing." Therefore, God could not have known what he was creating, which rather diminishes his majesty.

Also, in this connection, we meet with another difficulty. How did God create? Out of his thoughts, or—an idea of immense antiquity—by the uttering of a "word," to call the universe into being by naming it? If God was all, surely the conception of the universe in his "thoughts" must have been the creation itself? The anthropomorphic idea of a vocal "word" is quite unnecessary, apparently, until it occurs to one that if the universe "came into being" of the thoughts of God, it was not a creation at all; it was a projection of what might be called "theoplasm," and had existed eternally in the Eternal God as, shall we say,

unrelated thought-forms. These were just as much a part of God as anything else can be said to be part of a spirit.

Some of these questions may be superficially answered by the reputed omniscience of God, but, if the theologians are allowed to introduce this doctrine, they must be prepared to answer some rather difficult questions. For instance, of what use is the universe to God, who must know what the end will be? (We may concede that an end will come, if we agree that there was a beginning.) If God does not know how the universe will work out, is it all an experiment? And if so, with what is it to be compared? With other universes of the past, now destroyed, and with future universes yet to be created?

These arguments get us nowhere, it may be complained, and I would be the first to agree. Perhaps it is because there is nowhere to go? I do not believe a creation ever took place. There are some who say that the universe *is* God, which gets round the question quite well, as a creation is obviously dispensed with. I prefer, however, to believe that this "sum" which we call the universe, this temporal and spatial frame of matter and events, has always existed, in a state of fluctuation or pulsation, changing from one extreme to another, perhaps from ultimate concentration to ultimate diffusion, or may be—at the risk of seeming metaphysical, perhaps I may say—from extreme "positiveness" to extreme "negativeness." These descriptions must always be inadequate, and perhaps they seem a trifle silly. Nevertheless, they serve to make it possible for our limited minds to form a shadowy conception of what the conditions of space and time may be like at the end of each age-long swing of the eternal pendulum.

Perhaps I have now explained why, to me, it is more reasonable to say with Lucretius:—

"Nothing from nothing ever yet was born."

R. GAUNTLETT.

## CHARACTER AND BELIEFS

THE debate in the House of Lords on Educational Reconstruction gave the Lord Bishop of St. Albans an audience for a clever display of verbal conjuring. Taking the words Faith, Character and Christian, he manipulated and palmed them into a formula for more religion in the schools and religious tests for teachers.

The Bishop thought there would be general agreement in a crowd of people that they wanted to produce Christian character. Well, there is no harm in the Bishop having such day-dreams, but a more important point is that nobody seriously in search of authoritative data would go to a crowd for a lead on social ethics. But don't let us spoil the display. The crowd wants to produce Christian character, and Christian faith is the basis of Christian character; therefore the more religion you have in the schools, given by Christians only, the greater will be the output of Christian character; it seems simple enough.

But our Bishop is a bit mixed, a possibility with anyone going to a crowd of people for philosophy. The term Christian character is no doubt intended to imply that Christianity produces an exclusive character of its own. That is not so. There are not two sets of character operating in Britain, one Christian and the other secular. Character is secular in origin and there is no such thing as Christian character with a separate origin. Christianity is a belief, character is quality of conduct—quite different things. You may believe Christianity or have nothing whatever to do with it, but you haven't that option with character.

Character has a social survival value, Christianity has no social survival value. That is why it becomes weaker with every generation, and why millions of people can dispense with it altogether. You need not have any religious belief, but you cannot escape having character. Character is a practice. Remember we are discussing character, not the varying shades of character, which



is a different matter. Character is born of human relationship and social experience, it is a secular growth and it no more depends upon a knowledge of the Ten Commandments, and a belief in a baby god, than does a suet pudding depend upon a tin of treacle.

Beliefs may colour character, just as a man's associates have a similar effect. That, however, does not alter the secular origin of character. Society allows a certain latitude for the influence of beliefs and associates upon the normal measure of character, but it protects itself as soon as that latitude has been overreached. There are countless mediums through which character is tainted and religion is one of them. The man who acquired a Family Bible by dishonest means and presented it to a branch of the Salvation Army did so under the stress of his religious zeal.

We grant all sincerity to the Bishop of St. Albans in his speech in the House of Lords, but what does it really amount to? Remember he spoke in full knowledge that about 90 per cent. of his fellow citizens give practical testimony that they are not interested in his institution. If the Bishop's remarks mean anything at all it is that that sort of thing has got to stop. That the machinery of the State must be used to stop it. The schools must be used as a branch of the Churches. Religion must percolate throughout the school all the time. The school must become an "environment of a-worshipping, witnessing, working and fighting Christian fellowship" and "the continuous education from infancy to death—within the living fellowship of the worshipping body of Christ." Teachers who are not genuine Christian believers must be cleared out.

Now if the Bishop was not a Christian, he would be shocked at such an impudent misuse of privilege and dictatorship in another man. Even as a Bishop he would bubble with indignation if similar demands were made for any not definitely religious organisation. But his character, under the stress of his religious beliefs sees nothing wrong in demanding that, as far as is humanly possible, the present limited measure of freedom of thought shall be abolished for future citizens. The children of to-day must not be allowed the same chances of ignoring the Churches like their parents, for from infancy to death they shall worship the body of Christ, the teaching profession shall be closed to all except those holding the same religious beliefs as the Bishop.

That is not Christian character; there is no such thing. There is Christianity, and there is character, and the Bishop of St. Albans was putting in a plea, not for character but for Christianity, practical Christianity, the practical teaching of "Our Lord" when he taught "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). It is the Churches' wail of God's impotence. But it is a hopeless wail; character is a living influence, Christianity is mental dead wood, character is stronger than the Bishop's religion; it has met and defeated his religion before, and will do so again as soon as it threatens the main artery of character—namely, decent human conduct among those worthy of decent human fellowship.

R. H. ROSETTI.

#### FAITH

Denied the blessings of a Day of Prayer,

The brave Red Army manages to bear

The bloody battle's brunt;

While we are told to kneel to show we're tough,

And promised, when we've piled up arms enough,

There'll be a Second Front.

P. V. M.

#### ACID DROPS

EITHER the "timing" of God is badly arranged or his followers in this country have messed things up. For example, everyone was pleased when it was made known on September 8 that Italy had surrendered. That meant a good step towards the end. On September 3 we had a day of national prayer for victory, and just five days later Italy surrendered. The two events might have been connected in terms of cause and effect. But alas! Italy had already surrendered on September 3, the date of the day of prayer. What awfully bad "timing."

Meanwhile it may be noted that Russia goes on winning victory after victory, and has no day of prayer before its battles and no days of thanksgiving after them. What do our British Christians make of this? Are we to believe that the Russians can do without God what we require God's help to accomplish? Are we to believe that while the Russians, without the help of God, can put up a fight that has aroused the admiration of the world, we Britishers cannot equal it without getting God to help us? We don't believe it. We believe that the British people are as good as the Russians, however much the Churches may deny it to be the case. God is a superfluity.

Two admissions by Mr. M. de la Bedoyere in his latest book, "Christianity in the Market Place," are worth noting. The first is "the problem of Christianity's failure to impress the contemporary world." The second is that "the Christian is in danger of never thinking for himself because he expects all his thinking to be done for him." It is rather late in the day for a Catholic writer to announce something that has been patent to every anti-Christian for centuries. Christianity has almost always failed to impress the "contemporary" world except by Hitlerian methods. And the reason why so many people still call themselves Christians is proof that they have never thought for themselves but allowed the Churches to think for them. The Christian who *really* thinks for himself becomes a Freethinker.

The movement that was started in Manchester a little time back with the aim of converting Manchester and afterwards the rest of England, does not appear to be making headway. Manchester is not more Christian than it was, rather less. Of course, any such movement, if introduced by men of standing, will bring a certain number of *Christians* forward, but how many non-Christians will it bring over? We are willing to wager that non-Christians in Manchester are more numerous than they were when the crusade opened. At any rate, that seems to be so, if one may judge from the report of a meeting to hand and also from other centres.

One cannot say that the movement spread from Manchester to Newcastle, for that would imply that it moved of its own impetus, just as influenza or small-pox might. It seems that a few *Christians* at Newcastle thought they might run a crusade there on the Manchester plan, of which one hears but little. But at a meeting the other day the Lord Mayor and others agreed that nothing could be done with *laymen* only. This means that the man in the street doesn't care a damn for conversion, but if the clergy come in and bring with them some of their own congregation, they can be converted all over again, and the recording angel will be fooled into counting them as new souls saved. That trick has been often worked.

"A Churchman from the United States" writes to the "Church Times": "Religion should be officially represented at the Peace Conferences." The Lord Mayor of Newcastle, W. Thompson, with all the authority that is vested in a Lord Mayor, and all the wisdom that belongs to all men holding such an office, says that no "desirable world" is possible if it is not built on Christian principles. Now the vast majority of the people who fall under British control are not Christian and never will be. So it will fill Mohammedans, Confucians, Buddhists and Atheists, and millions of others, with complete confidence in a reign of justice to all if they can be assured that the Christian Churches will rule the roost. Or perhaps it won't.



We note a number of excellent letters in some of the provincial papers protesting against recreating our school system so that its outstanding feature shall be the teaching of the Christian religion. But it is interesting, and perhaps educating to those who have no particular religious game to play, to note that in this freedom of discussion the provincial papers are more liberal in this matter than the London Press. We are offering no explanation of this state of affairs; we notice them as of interest to those who really desire to re-shape our social life.

The "Church Times" gives a lengthy account of a schoolmaster who has to go a very long way to "make his Communion," only to find that often he is the only one in the church. That may be taken as evidence of the interest the bulk of people have in religion. But worse than being the only "communicant," the parson takes no notice of him. That is very sad for the priest to turn his back on the whole of his congregation at once. The "C.T." points out that no one would be so silly as to give up his religion on this ground. We are not so certain of this. We have read of many who left a church because the parson never spoke to them.

The Archbishop of Cologne properly, as a Christian, puts the responsibility for the air raids on Germany on God. He says they are "a judgment of God on the world." That is good, sound theology. God is displeased, and being displeased he arranges, or inspires, air raids, which kill quite indiscriminately. When God gets riled he punishes not the people who have offended him, but children who cannot offend anyone and adults whether they have offended him or not. He is out for blood—and gets it.

There has been from time to time many complaints about the parsonic voice, and one of the latest comes from the "Church Times," which comments that "One of the commonest complaints one hears about religious broadcasting is that the B.B.C. employs the most maddening parsonic voices. . . . The trouble is that almost every cleric is afflicted with an idiosyncrasy which seems to elude diagnosis, and consequently, cure." The rebuke is well deserved. It may, of course, be that broadcasting demands, if it is to be fully effective, a certain kind of speech, but the voice of, say, the Radio Padre, is of such a character as to suggest to any impartial critic mere humbug.

Still, there is something to be said on behalf of the historic parsonic voice and of religious intonation and phraseology in general. To begin with, the Old and New Testament story is written in a language that never was spoken as a colloquial tongue, and never existed outside the sacred books. Anyone who is familiar with the colloquial writing of the Elizabethan period will know this to be the truth. And if anyone is inclined to put the matter to the test, we advise him to read for an hour the New Testament, and then turn to the introduction of the Authorised version of the Bible. His ear must be useless if he does not recognise that he has two distinct forms of language.

But there is a deeper reason, or one might say another reason, for the parsonic voice and the parsonic manner. Miracles, as we have just said, occur with people who already believe in their possibility. And to present to the contemporary mind a series of stories such as the Bible contains is to invite their rejection. The conflict between the tale and the prevailing conditions is too great. For a Christian priest to walk about in ordinary clothing, with an ordinary voice and everyday speech when he is talking religion, means that he risks losing at once nine-tenths of his influence. So the "Church Times" must be cautious. Tell the story of Jesus as though it might have happened yesterday and in the next street, and a child of eight would "wink the other eye." You cannot modernise an absurdity when the nature of the absurdity is plain to all.

The "World's Press News" says that the Press "has little time for religion." We suspect that this was written by someone who would like to see all newspapers crowded with sermons or full of exhortation for stronger religious belief.

As a matter of fact, the Press does what it can to advertise religion, and gives it a fair proportion of space for direct advocacy. The weekly sermon, or semi-sermon, has become a regular feature with most papers, and prominence is given to the movements of the religious world.

But the greatest service to the Churches is the careful manner in which the vast majority of the newspapers shield the Churches and their doctrines from attack. There is the symposium, which professes to give different views on religion but which really gives nothing of the kind. How often does one find the Atheistic side presented? How often does one find fair space given to Freethinkers in any discussion about religion? Some of the provincial papers are liberal enough to publish the Freethinking side, but the London Press hardly ever. And yet we venture to say there is no topic that would create greater and more widespread attention than a newspaper that allowed the Atheistic side to be fairly represented.

"No living man," says the Rev. W. H. Elliott, "can deny that there has been something uncanny in this war. We have been drawn back from the precipice again and again, not by our wits nor by our own strength, but by a Power that is not at all obvious." God has drawn us back from the precipice, and if we are saved then it doesn't matter a damn about the millions who have gone over the precipice. The great thing is that we are saved. The horrors of the war are bad enough by themselves, but they become infinitely worse when, as some of the priests say—and all imply—that God could save the world from the war but preferred only to save men of the type of the Rev. Elliott and his kind. The more one analyses the Christian creed the more contemptible it becomes.

The Bishop of Southwell asks: "What is the will of God for men and women?" Does it matter? If we find out what is right—and the only way we have is that of trial and error—does it matter what the will of God is? Half the ills of the world are due to finding out what the gods want and then acting on the supposed discovery. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" was one declaration of the will of God. "Thou shalt have no other God but me," with its long string of persecution, was another. To trust in prayer instead of work was another. The major part of the troubles of man may be traced to the discoveries of what God required. Our job is to find out the best way of going about our own business and let God look after himself. God's gifts are akin to the promise of big returns from a swindling company.

Those who say miracles never happen overlook the fact that with the Roman Catholic Church, the largest and the most powerful section of the Christian Churches, miracles are always happening. In the hands and at the command of the priest bisenits are changed into the flesh of Jesus, and a very cheap wine transformed into his blood. Then we have the Virgin recently playing tricks with the sun in the sight of three little children. There are thousands of these miracles, and now the "miracles" of Brother Bendilis have been examined by priestly critics and declared genuine. So Brother Bendilis is to be beatified, and his miracles go with the mass of other miracles in which all good Catholics believe.

All the same, these miracles are not performed with a due sense of economy. People are not converted because of the miracles, the miracles occur because they already believe. It will be remembered that even Jesus could not perform miracles where people did not believe beforehand, whereas a greater effect would have been produced had they occurred with a body of unbelievers. Consider the national, nay, the world-wide effect that would be produced by a real miracle occurring in the "Freethinker" office? But always a miracle is the reward, not the cause of faith. And we should be the last to deny that under the conditions that prevail, and always have prevailed, miracles do occur. They will continue so long as people are foolish enough to believe in them.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

S. SIMMONS.—We hope to publish very soon Volume 1 of "What is Christianity?" It contains all the articles that ran for about twenty weeks through these pages, with corrections and additions. The issue deals with the Old Testament and is complete in itself. Mr. Cohen will commence writing the second part—the New Testament—soon.

J. CLOSE.—Many thanks. Arrived quite sound.

C. H. JAMESON.—All of Santayana's works are now out of print, and second-hand copies are not easy to obtain. We hope they will be reprinted when paper is more plentiful.

W. E. FRIGGIN.—We believe that the reason given for registering in the Armed Forces and its auxiliaries is formally correct. There is no authority for insisting on a man—or woman—registering as belonging to some religion. "Religion None" is a legal reply, and "Atheist" is now generally accepted. Everyone should insist on their right description being accepted and refuse to sign any other.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—The General Secretary, National Secular Society, gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 1s. from Mr. E. Maxwell to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—D. J. Cavanagh (U.S.A.), 10s.; Mrs. B. Houston (Canada), 3s.

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

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

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

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

WE are delaying the publication of monies received on behalf of the New York "Truth Seeker" until next week. We guaranteed on behalf of "The Freethinker" readers the sum of £100. We had a number of liberal promises, many of which we sealed down considerably, and we have these to fall back on if necessary. At the moment we have promises amounting to about £90. The balance is quite secure, and we hope to be able to publish a complete list of receipts in our next issue.

The English press, or perhaps one ought to say that section which caters for the Churches, is—by accident or design—confused over the new measure of liberty given by the Soviet Government of Russia to the Churches. There is talk about the Russian Government permitting the re-establishment of the Church in Russia, of the Russian leaders taking a different attitude towards Russia, and so forth. The truth is that so far as the leaders of Russia and the new generation of Russians are concerned, the position of religion in relation to the Government remains substantially where it was.

Russian Communism was Atheistic from the outset, and it still remains so. But in the early days of the revolution the rebels found themselves fighting both the enemy within Russia and the enemies without. As will be remembered, no lie was too great to be used against Soviet Russia, no villainy was too black for circulation against Lenin and the revolutionary government. And throughout Russia the Church, powerfully organised, upholders of Czarism and its crimes, was working with all its strength with such adventurers as Denikin and Co. They did what they could to oppose the Soviet regime. Stern measures against the Church had to be dealt with as part of the European plotting against Russia. If those plots had been successful, the greatness of the new Russia, now generally admitted, would never have existed.

But there was no attempt to remove religion by force. Churches could, and did exist, but subject to restrictions. Gradually these restrictions have been lightened, and the Soviet has now agreed to some kind of a federation of the Churches, and that is all. The Moscow Correspondent of the "Daily Telegraph" warned its readers that relaxation of the regulations concerning the Churches "does not mean that the Soviet leaders are becoming religious, but they recognise that there will always be a proportion of religiously-minded people." All this is needed to make this passage completely correct is to read it as expressing the fact that religious frames of mind cannot be expected to die out in a few years, but it will gradually grow weaker, and as it weakens, and if the Churches confine their energies to religion, no opposition to their operations need be feared from the Government. In other words, the Soviet Government realises that religion in Russia is growing less and less important to the masses of the country.

As a kind of footnote to what has been said in the above paragraphs to enable one to understand the Soviet system, we advise the reading of two books by J. F. Hecker, "Moscow Dialogues" and "Religion and Communism." The books were published by Chapman and Hall at about 10s. per volume. They will help one to understand the commendable elasticity of the philosophy which rules in the Russia of to-day.

We are getting some curious illustrations of the kind of freedom that some of the people in power among the Allied nations believe in. In the U.S.A. permission to send English publications through the Customs is denied to books that have hitherto passed without question. The only observable reason is that the Roman Church is in the U.S.A. The case is to be taken into the courts, so we say no more at the moment. In England the Government is busily engaged in handing over to the Churches a substantial control of the schools and so threatening the quality of the teachers and also of education in general. In India books that are not denied in the home country are denied circulation. And there are other instances which go to show that when we have conquered Germany we have to reconquer some of our lost mental territory at home.

The latest instance that comes to us is from New Zealand. From the "New Zealand Rationalist" we learn that in one of the prisons—not in all—the "New Zealand Rationalist" is denied entrance. Pressed for a reason why the superintendent explained that "reading of contentious matter is not desired" and "where a number of men are in close association controversial matter leads to disagreements." Bless the dunder-headed people who write thus. What literature that is *not* controversial is worth reading? Conversations, to be helpful and intelligent, must involve exchange of different opinions. Consider the discussion that might follow the subject "Is the superintendent of this particular prison fit to have control over the lives and movements of men?" In any civilised community the answer would be in the negative. We hope the "New Zealand Rationalist" will keep the question before its people.

Miss Elizabeth Millard, Secretary of the Radio Freedom League, has issued a very useful pamphlet, "Radio Freedom League," price sixpence. It is a very strong and deserved



criticism of the policy of the B.B.C. with regard to freedom of expression on the air. Miss Millard's comments are bitter but warranted, for the B.B.C. as at present conducted is a threat to real freedom of thought. A number of opinions of well-known writers are given which form an unanswerable indictment. It seems much easier to fight for physical freedom abroad than to induce a battle for intellectual liberty at home. The pamphlet may be obtained from "The Freethinker" Office. We wish it every success.

A correspondent of the "Daily Telegraph" recently expressed, with regard to such miracles as the "Angels of Mons," that "when the limit of endurance is reached, the spirit may function and impress on the mind events and things that are not seen normally." We are in cordial agreement with this. Spiritual insight may be brought about by an overdose of whisky, it may come with men in an open boat at sea gasping for water, angels appearing to dying people, a dose of opium, and by other methods. We congratulate Mr. Gardener in grasping a great truth. Visions are very easy things to create, but one should not go too far with it, for plenty of people in these "materialistic" days may find themselves in an asylum for no other reason than this grip on the spiritual unseen.

## THE SONG OF AN INSECT

This bug with gilded wings.—POPE.

The little, shrivelled, meagre, hopping, though  
loud and troublesome insects of the hour.

—EDMUND BURKE.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING peoples are indebted to the U.S.A. for countless innovations of speech. Conversation in that country scintillates with startling epigrams and many quaintly worded phrases. The art of repartee or "wise-cracking" either delights or exasperates according to the degree of culture of people in Great Britain. Of late we have been regaled with a song which says that "the love-bug will get you if you don't watch out."

Whilst it is true that the word bug, as a general term, is used in a very loose manner in America, it comes as a shock to hear of a bug being associated with Cupid, however loosely the names may be coupled. To think of Cupid joining forces with such a loathsome creature for the express purpose of stimulating amorous feelings is repulsing. But the subject must be dealt with in a dispassionate manner, and so, having overcome a feeling of irritation, we proceed with our task without asperity, otherwise heated comments would provoke the question "What's biting you?"

Long, long ago, paterfamilias caused much amusement in quoting:—

"So, naturalists observe, a flea  
Has smaller fleas that on him prey.  
And these have smaller still to bite 'em,  
And so proceed, ad infinitum."

Now, as Edmund Burke referred to certain elements in England as insects, and as Jonathan Swift said that certain insects prey on smaller insects, it is not very remarkable to learn of an insect having affectionate inclinations. In this case the result is not merely epidermical but reaches very deeply into the body and often reaches the heart.

Time was when the predatory prowls and capricious capers of the flea were treated with the utmost contempt, and attacks were called merely "flea-bites." Nevertheless, it is hoped that evidence will be forthcoming to show that an affinity exists not only between fleas and man but between fleas and God. God is credited with having created "all creatures great and small," and must be debited with the results of the depredations of those forming attachments of a personal nature.

Man has taken the flea, not only in head, but in hand too. As a box-office attraction the flea now rivals the largest quadruped in performing acts of great dexterity. The flea bites as well as delights us. Evil and good insectified, as it were! By instructing the flea in this manner man has "started something." There is every reason to suppose that the flea's propensity as an irritating agent may be so controlled as to become discriminating in its objective. In other words, it may be possible to divert the attacks on man's head to the God head! It may be remembered that the Egyptians and their beasts were plagued with lice. The lice are blood brothers to the flea. Now, as God made man in his own image, is it unreasonable to suppose that these creatures were the natural adjuncts of —? But we shall not labour the point, as the inference is plain enough. Lest it be thought that such a deduction is far-fetched, it is thought that Mr. G. W. Foote, founder of "The Freethinker," would have agreed. He had ample evidence to prove that Jack the Ripper and Jehovah were one and the same person!

Where there's dirt there's danger. Older readers of this journal will remember a brilliant discussion on the apparent association of dirt and religion—particularly during the period known as the Dark Ages—between Mr. Chapman Cohen and Dr. E. Lytton, former Headmaster of Eton College. Displaying a wealth of argument and supported by many hard facts, Mr. Cohen demonstrated that dirt and religion had been "close companions" for hundreds of years. He pointed out two causes for what he termed "this alliance between Christianity and dirt." The first was the intense hatred for everything pagan—science, art, literature and sanitation—and the second was the division of life into spiritual and material, helped by the conviction of the approaching end of the world. "Neglect of cleanliness," he said, "was common to all—more or less," and cited the case of Thomas à Beckett, who, after his murder in Canterbury Cathedral, was found to be wearing a hair shirt swarming with vermin. Again, "lack of cleanliness was, once upon a time, accepted as an indication of saintliness." For 700 years Christian Europe was without a public bath! Compare this dismal record with that of the old Roman Empire.

The atmosphere in Europe for centuries was heavy with the oppressive odour of supernaturalism—fateful harbinger of the germs of ignorance and darkness—and until the refreshing breezes of reason and understanding commenced to blow, about 200 years ago, the air of superstition kept the people in a state of God-intoxication, intellectual insensibility and moral stupidity.

Hygiene and common sense now combine to keep in check the attacks of vermin. Vigilance must remain the watchword, and elimination must follow the detection of all these pestiferous marauders on the health of man.

When war rears its lousy head, vermin are on the warpath too. The soldier on active service, deprived of his accustomed amenities, is particularly prone to attack. In an interesting brochure entitled "The Amazing Insects," by G. E. O. Knight, the author narrates an incident in the last war. Whilst being transferred from one prison camp to another he counted 5,478 lice on his person. A fellow-prisoner counted over 9,000! In times of adversity and distress the power of endurance in man is amazing also. In contemplating the unhappy lot of soldiers on the battlefield, the lot of the Egyptians who were plagued with lice must have been frightful. It is not recorded in the Bible the record number of lice found on a single Egyptian, or his beast, but God knows. He can number the hairs of your head.

Moussorgsky gave us the "Song of the Flea," and an American composer the song of the (love) bug. 'Tis true that "music hath charms," but the charms have not been potent enough to charm away these pests. Perhaps a hymn or an anthem would be effective, and God himself could join in a prayer.

S. GORDON HOGG.



## DEAR VICAR

## I.

BEFORE half-past-ten o'clock Mrs. Telff came out of her house and stood at the gate, looking expectantly toward the gateway of the next house.

The morning was mild and springlike, so Araminta Telff could stand with more comfort than she had done on many previous occasions during the past wintry months.

Her plain face assumed a pleased yet eager, almost hungry expression as the Vicar of Saint Clement's Church emerged from the adjacent gateway on his bicycle, and turned slowly past her.

Seeing the woman the Reverend Isaac Graye smiled and gave her a quick raise of his hat, to which she responded with her most beaming smile.

Immediately he was beyond her the clergyman's brows frowned. His usually placid countenance looked annoyed, and his lips set tightly after saying soundlessly, "That woman!"

She walked slowly up the road. The Vicar of Saint Clement's made a practice of calling upon two or three old parishioners mornings, leaving them in time to read the Morning Office in church.

Knowing this, Araminta Telff strolled toward Saint Clement's Church, making a ten-minute walk last nearly half an hour, thus arriving in time to participate in the service. Never more than a dozen people were present, which gratified Mrs. Telff. It gave her a more individual sense of closeness to the vicar; of being the object of his ministrations, and also being helpful to him by forming a devoted as well as devout member of his congregation.

Dear vicar! Araminta Telff would like to have been more helpful to him, but it was difficult. He had an income of one thousand a year a big vicarage handsomely furnished, a capable wife, delightful children, efficient servants, excellent health, a hard-working curate, loyal Church officers—there seemed nothing she could do.

So she sauntered along, heedless of all save her own imaginings, weaving daydreams round fanciful but highly unlikely, really impossible relationships with the Reverend Isaac Graye.

Her girlhood had been quiet, humdrum to dullness, her father much preoccupied by making a living in a small business, so caresses lavished on her were hasty and perfunctory. She longed for more.

Now Araminta Telff saw herself again a long-legged, round-eyed child running to meet a father who was the physical facsimile of the Reverend Isaac Graye. He welcomed her with the smile which was possible only to such a warm-hearted man, flinging wide his arms for her to leap into, to be hugged and kissed, fondled and petted.

Such a father would have made her a vastly happier girl than she was. The more he resembled the vicar the more ideal he would be, and the more bliss to herself.

What was he like when younger? She had no brother. One featuring the Reverend Isaac Graye would have been perfect. How she would have loved him, and he guarded her in his growing manliness!

They would have played together, talked and laughed, argued and joked, quarrelled and fought and made up again affectionately. There would have been no reservations between them. They would have shared secrets, seen each other in all stages of intimate personal detail, undress and underclothing and night attire, sometimes naked and always unashamed.

He would have been the elder, teasing and ordering and sometimes bullying, but ever devoted to her at heart, winning her adoration as an older brother should. It was a beautiful vision.

## II.

Communing thus, Mrs. Telff arrived at Saint Clement's Church, to listen entranced to the vicar's dulcet tones, to join with the tiny week-day congregation in prayers and responses, and to feel she was experiencing spiritual quickening, heightened by the ideal priestly medium through which it flowed.

When the reverend gentleman came out she was standing on the sidewalk at the corner, prominently visible. Again she enjoyed his smile and did not notice the hastiness of his salute, missing too the compression of his lips and the unspoken "That woman!" as he pedalled rapidly away.

As Araminta Telff went along the next street the Reverend Isaac Graye was coming out of a little general shop where he often bought cigarettes and sweets, Miss Farr, who kept it, being a loyal churchwoman.

Mrs. Telff hoped to be there before the vicar had gone, but standing not upon the order of his going, he mounted his bicycle and fled.

Feeling the need for communicating a little at least of her ecstasy and receiving corroboration of it, Araminta Telff entered the shop saying, "Good morning, Miss Farr."

"Good morning, Mrs. Telff," responded the elderly shopkeeper, slightly pursing her lips.

"The dear vicar read the service beautifully this morning."

"He always does."

"As he does everything."

"No doubt. But we haven't all got time to spare to run about after him and see and hear everything he does."

This with emphasis on the "everything."

Suddenly descending to business, the customer bought a bar of chocolate and left the shop.

"Fool!" ejaculated Miss Farr. "Doesn't she realise what an exhibition she's making of herself running about after the vicar? Everybody's remarking and laughing about it."

To relieve her indignation she banged vigorously about as she tidied up her shop. She too was an admirer of the Reverend Isaac Graye. Something suspiciously like jealousy afflicted her when she saw him genial to ladies younger than herself.

Araminta Telff's ruffled equanimity smoothed again as she walked slowly back home meditating on the excellences of Saint Clement's incumbent.

Her imagination took more daring flights. What a supreme husband he would make for the right woman, one who understood him and would cherish him. The present Mrs. Graye, estimable enough, was far too ordinary and worldly for a man of the vicar's grandeur and spiritual eminence.

She herself would be more sympathetic and devoted to him, loving him with all the intensity of her ardent nature. At present it had no scope. How dreadfully ill-mated she was!

Roderick Telff was a good husband in an abstracted, unemotional way. He had taken over the small factory her father left, and was developing it. Hence his main interests in life were business and finance. His wife was chiefly the means to keep his household running, to provide food and comforts. He was no lover, never had been, grew less so with passing years. Their relations were as matter-of-fact as their meeting at meals—tolerant equality, mild companionship, unmoved by passion.

Whereas, she mused, the Reverend Isaac Graye would be soulful and provocative, calling from her all the resources of charm and femininity of which she felt sure she was capable, but had no use for with Roderick.

The Telffs were childless. Neither was modern, so did not consult a gynaecologist or discuss the matter in detail, accepting it as inevitable.



Now, thought Araminta Telf, if I had a husband like the vicar; had him for my husband, our son would be a reproduction of him, heightened by my feminine grace and influence—the perfect son.

Thus day-dreaming she arrived home to prepare lunch, her hopes resting on anticipation of seeing the dear vicar again, that day if possible, or next morning.

A. R. W.

## WHAT IS THE USE OF ART?

PROBABLY everyone who has the remotest connection with the arts has, at one time or another, been asked by some supercilious big business man the question which appears at the head of this article. At first sight the question may appear to have common sense on its side, for it might be thought that those whose main interest in life consists merely of putting together words, or colours, or shapes, or sounds cannot possibly play a rôle as important as that played by sanitary engineers or analytical chemists.

And yet there is a very easy piece of psychological synthesis which can be carried out by anyone, and which at once justifies the artist in his assumption that he is an important person—if not, indeed, the most important person of all.

The scientists, engineers and technicians, we are all agreed, do a job of work which is of some value. We should be in a sorry state if we had no electric light, no radio sets, and no lavatories. (But let us not forget that, if we did not have those things, neither should we have bombing aeroplanes, tanks or speeding motor-cars, with the resultant toll of death that these bring in their wake.) But, taking science and its applications as being entirely for the good of humanity, let us consider what is the precise value of these things. What is the difference between the average position of a human being to-day and that occupied by a man or woman in the benighted ages before science and big business waved their beneficent wands over the world and gave us all the opportunity of living what was regarded, until very recently, as a fuller, more satisfying life?

First of all, let us consider music. The average music-lover of a couple of hundred years ago enjoyed the religious music of Bach and Palestrina and the secular jollity of Purcell. The average music-lover of to-day (note that I am speaking of averages, not of that small minority whose indiscriminate applause has made the promenade concert into as fine an exhibition of mass hysteria as one well could meet) enjoys the rubbish produced by Moody and Sankey in the religious sphere and the equally pernicious mediocrity of George Gershwin and Cole Porter on the secular side.

Consider poetry again. In the past Shakespeare was enjoyed by the masses, and the best work of Byron and Tennyson sold in thousands. To-day T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read and Yeats are appreciated by small minorities, while the third-rate platitudes of Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Wilhelmina Stitch are synonymous with genius in the minds of the multitude.

Fiction is in just as parlous a state. We no longer get books like "War and Peace"; we now get books like "The Fall of Paris," which, whatever their merits as journalism, cannot claim to be great works of art.

What, then, is the good of art? The increasing application of scientific discovery to everyday life has tended to lower the standards of artistic appreciation everywhere. That appears to be undeniable. But art—if one can apply the term to everything which involves some measure of emotional appreciation—is the main end of the lives of most of us. If the cinema, the radio and the cheap lending-library novel were eliminated from our lives, what would be left for most people in the way of enjoyment? We might live in houses which were miracles of equipment, we might be provided, by some super-Beveridge plan, with a measure

of security from the cradle to the grave, and yet life would be dull and lacking in everything that is genuinely worth while.

Art, in other words, is what makes life worth living. One man may find his whole existence pivoting around the hearing of Beethoven, while another may live for the reading of the works of Edgar Wallace. The levels of enjoyment may be different, but the essential meaning of that enjoyment is the same.

In the complex modern world in which we live the developments of science are doubtless necessary. No one would deny that in the external sense the modern man lives a life which is more comfortable than that of the past. But all the lessons of history go to prove that comfort is not the sole criterion of happiness. Men have readily foregone their comforts for the wildest of reasons. They have martyred themselves for their religion, they have risked their lives for political ideals, they have fought in all kinds of wars, just and unjust. And many an artist has spent all his life in a position of penury rather than undertake a job of ease and comfort, if that entailed the abandonment of his artistic ideals.

Art, then, is of use because it gives us a reason for living: it gives the meanest of men the feeling of partaking in something greater than his puny self. The artist gives man a basis for his life, while the scientist, at his best, merely gives him assistance in the task of living more comfortably.

S. H.

## THE B.B.C. AND LISTENERS' LETTERS

FREETHINKERS and other critics of the B.B.C. often complain that it ignores their letters, but I have not so far seen an examination of the B.B.C.'s policy in regard to correspondents. This policy is published in the B.B.C. Year Book for 1943, and is as follows:—

"The B.B.C. receives every day several hundreds of letters from listeners about programmes. These are all carefully read and recorded. Every letter and postcard, whether it contains a suggestion, a criticism or an appreciation, is seen by a responsible official, and points of special interest are circulated within the B.B.C. Every effort is made to reply to letters, especially to those asking for information about matter which has been broadcast, provided that such requests are accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope."

Now, I am going to suggest that this last condition is not a genuine example of business efficiency, but nothing more than a cloak for B.B.C. intolerance and timidity.

First, it sets up a criterion that no reputable business house or public body would endorse. The common-sense and business-like way to treat letters is to give them the attention their contents deserve. Some organisations, in the interests of their reputation for courtesy, will reply to all communications, but they would certainly not agree that a stupid letter with a stamped and addressed envelope enclosed ought to have priority over a sensible one without such an enclosure. In fact, when one is busy, a letter with a stamp for a reply is a confounded nuisance, since it demands on the score of honesty what ought only to be accorded to matters of importance.

Secondly, the B.B.C. is careful not to give this rule too much publicity. The B.B.C. Year Book, a slim volume published at 2s. 6d., is chiefly devoted to pure puffery of the Corporation's various departments, and has little real interest. I came across it in my local public library. So discreet is the B.B.C. about its own rule that it does not even take the trouble to inform its own staff, as the following incident shows. Before I knew about the stamped and addressed envelope policy I wrote to the B.B.C. protesting against what I considered an improper use of broadcasting for unfair and one-sided propaganda.



and suggesting that the other side of the case should be given the opportunity of being heard. Not receiving a reply, I called at Broadcasting House and asked to see the Director of Talks. At the inquiry office I was told that this was impossible, that the ten days' interval I had allowed to pass was not enough in view of the large number of letters they received, and that I would certainly receive a reply in due course. I was not asked if I had enclosed a stamped and addressed envelope and, of course, the promised reply never arrived.

In short, this B.B.C. policy, like some of the others that B.B.C. officials are so astute in devising, is merely a wriggle to avoid facing criticism and argument. From the point of view of listeners, who appear to come last in the B.B.C.'s scheme of things, there is nothing to be said in its favour.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RE "MISSING" ASTROLOGICAL PREDICTION.

Sir,—In your issue of August 22, 1943, you make a statement that no astrologer in the world foresaw the manner or date of Mussolini's fall.

Like the small boy who looked at the ostrich and said "It ain't true," your contributor was over zealous in negation and deficient in observation.

I suggest he reads my articles in the back numbers of periodicals issued in the last few years, or numerous volumes by myself, published by Messrs. Hutchinson. He will find that not only the manner and date of Mussolini's fall was predicted, but many other events which occurred contrary to popular expectation.

The above correction is made in no carping spirit but simply to call attention to available evidence, if your contributor sincerely wishes to examine astrological forecasts.—Yours, etc.,

R. H. NAYLOR,

[We are sorry that Mr. Naylor does not carry far enough his insight into the future concerning things that are of vital importance.—Ed.]

### THE B.B.C. PERSEVERES.

Sir,—The first broadcast of the news that Stalin had received representatives of the Russian priesthood informed the world that he "offered no objection" to their request for a Holy Synod, but before the second and subsequent transmissions the B.B.C. censors got busy and substituted the phrase into the word "approval."

Your readers will note the vast difference between "no objection" and "approval" and mark it down as another example of the effrontery of the official purveyor when it becomes a question of presenting news.—Yours, etc.,

W. ROBSON.

### "A CHRISTIAN LEGACY."

Sir,—Gibbon's account of Jewish excesses in the wars of independence against Rome is derived from the Roman historian Dio Cassius, and is therefore *ex parte*. A Jewish version of the same events would no doubt be very different.

In any case, the Romans were not qualified to throw stones. It is impossible to estimate the amount of human misery inflicted by the builders of the Roman Empire (Pompey, Caesar—the best of a bad bunch—and the rest of them). Their favourite amusement was the gladiatorial games, and their usual punishment for the rebel, other than a Roman citizen, was crucifixion. Unless we make allowance for the hatred provoked in the Mediterranean peoples by this Fascist imperialism, we are in no position to judge the Jews or the Christians.

To say that "man is just a great mischievous baboon" is to stand self-condemned. Does Mr. Ormerod's experience of his friends and neighbours bear out such a judgment? Mine tells me that, on the whole, men and women wish to live and let live, but that we are born into tangled social arrangements which we did not create and usually do not understand, and that when we are hurt we "see red" and want to hurt back.

The problem is to understand and control the conditions that hurt us. The best we can say for ourselves is that we are nearer to such understanding and control than the Romans, Jews or early Christians were. It is more important to help forward the process than to waste energy in dancing on the grave of the past.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### Report of Executive Meeting Held September 5, 1943

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

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Lupton Morris, Miss Woolstone and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Glasgow, Bristol, Edinburgh, North London, West London branches and the Parent Society.

Lecture reports covering the open-air season were before the meeting and future arrangements discussed. Correspondence from Bath, Preston, Glasgow, Bradford, Edinburgh, U.S.A., India and London districts was dealt with and instructions given.

The President drew attention to an effort being made to ban the circulation of certain Freethought books, including "The Bible Handbook," in America and the steps being taken to challenge the move. A suit had already been filed in the Federal District Court.

Several cases of refusal to allow a change to non-religion in the Forces were before the meeting and are awaiting more definite details. A number of minor matters were dealt with, the next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Sunday, October 17, 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. Parliament Hill Fields. 3-30 p.m.: Mr. L. Ebury.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. E. C. SAPHIN and supporting speakers.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.: "The Townsman's Countryside."

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6-30. Mr. J. V. SHORTT's "Reply to the Bishop of Blackburn's Broadcast." Blyth (The Fountain).—Monday, September 20, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End).—Saturday, September 18, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Clivinger.—Saturday, September 18, 6-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON. Enfield (Lanes).—Friday, September 17. Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Fatfield (Bridge End).—Tuesday, September 21, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Meetings held weekly, weather permitting.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. W. A. ATKINSON: A Lecture.

North Shields (Harbour View).—Wednesday, September 22, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Padiham.—Sunday, 2-45 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Laycock's Cafe, Kirkgate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Anvil—Religious and Allied Questions.

Houghton-le-Springs (Christian Youth Discussion Group).—Sunday, 7-30. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: "Why and How I Manage Without Your God."



**New Pamphlet**By  
C. G. L. DU CANN**Will You Rise from the Dead?**An Enquiry into the Evidence of Resurrection  
Price 6d. Postage 1d.**The Bible Handbook**

For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians

Edited by G. W. FOOTE AND W. P. BALL

Ninth Edition

*The passages cited are arranged under headings—***BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS, BIBLE ATROCITIES  
BIBLE IMMORALITIES, INDECENCIES AND  
OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFUL-  
FILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES.**

Full references are given for every citation

*Tastefully bound in Cloth. There is no  
war-time increase in price***Price 2/6** Postage Twopence Halfpenny.**MATERIALISM RESTATED***With special chapters on "EMERGENCE" and  
the "PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY"*

By CHAPMAN COHEN

"MATERIALISM RESTATED" is written by one who does not mistake obscurity for profundity or assertion for proof. It is a simple but complete statement of a position that is of first rate importance in its bearings on religious and scientific problems. It is a book that no Freethinker should miss and one which all intelligent Christians would be the better for the reading.

**Price 4/6** Postage twopence halfpenny

PIONEER PRESS, 2 &amp; 3, FURNIVAL ST., LONDON E.C.4

**Pamphlets for the People**

By CHAPMAN COHEN.

**What is the Use of Prayer?****Deity and Design.****Did Jesus Christ Exist.****Agnosticism or . . . ?****Atheism.****Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live.****Freethought and the Child.****Christianity and Slavery.****The Devil.****What is Freethought?****Must We Have a Religion?****Morality Without God****Price 2d. each. Postage 1d. each.***Other Pamphlets in this series to be published shortly***GOD AND EVOLUTION**, by Chapman Cohen.  
Price 6d.; postage 1d.**AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY**,  
A Survey of Positions, by Chapman Cohen.  
Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.**CHALLENGE TO RELIGION** (a re-issue of four  
lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester),  
by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.**THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH**, by Chapman  
Cohen. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.**PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN  
THOUGHT**, by Chapman Cohen. Price 2s.;  
postage 2d.**ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING**, by Chapman Cohen.  
First, second, third and fourth series. Price  
2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d. The four volumes,  
10s. post free.**A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT**, by Chapman  
Cohen. An outline of the philosophy of Free-  
thinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.**THEISM OR ATHEISM**, by Chapman Cohen.  
Price 3s. 6d.; postage 2½d.**BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL**, by Chapman  
Cohen. Price 3s.; postage 3d.**THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH**, by Colonel  
Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.**ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day.** By  
Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 8d.**WHAT IS RELIGION?** by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll.  
Price 2d.; postage 1d.**THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH?** By Colonel  
R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.**MISTAKES OF MOSES**, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll.  
Price 3d.; postage 1d.**THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS  
CHRIST**, by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.;  
by post 5d.**THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS**, by C. G. L.  
Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.**PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS**, by  
J. M. Wheeler. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 1½d.**FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST**, by J. M. Wheeler.  
Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.**INFIDEL DEATHBEDS.** The last moments of  
famous Freethinkers. By G. W. Foote and  
A. D. McLaren. Price 2s.; postage 3d.**SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS**, by G. W.  
Foote. Price 2s.; postage 2½d.**THE MOTHER OF GOD**, by G. W. Foote.  
Price 3d.; by post 4d.**BIBLE ROMANCES**, by G. W. Foote. One of the  
finest Freethinking writers at his best. Price  
2s. 6d.; postage 3d.**THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL  
CHRIST**, by Gerald Massey. With Preface by  
Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.**THE RUINS OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLU-  
TIONS OF EMPIRES**, to which is added **THE  
LAW OF NATURE**. By C. F. Volney. A  
Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an  
Introduction. Price, post free, 2s. 2d.**THE PIONEER PRESS****2 & 3, FURNIVAL ST., HOLBORN, LONDON, E.C.4**