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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and Us

SATIRE is a very deadly weapon in controversy. It can express condemnation in a sentence and hold up to ridicule ideas that, with the mass of people, pass for profound wisdom. Satire amuses in the process of instruction, and makes plain to the world forms of foolishness that may be masquerading under the guise of profound wisdom. Voltaire's comment on the story of the beheaded saint who walked thirty paces with his head under his arm, that he could believe in twenty-nine of the paces if he could only surmount the first, left nothing more to be said. And when Gibbon summed-up the attitude of the early Christians in the sentence that it was not in this world that Christians expected to be either happy or useful, he voiced a vital truth that so many forget in their solemn analysis of the world's greatest superstition. Voltaire might not have caused Christians to see themselves, but he did enable others to understand them. Finally, we must point out that satire, as an instrument, must be carefully handled. Its touch must be light if it is to be effective. It must never sink into buffoonery or be over-weighted with a profound but ostentatious display of scholarship. It may use the rapier, but never the bludgeon. Satire is essentially the weapon of the quick-witted. The natural dullard must content himself with plain, literal, pedestrian language.

A newspaper account of a speech by Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding brought us the other day one of the best examples of finished satire that we have met for some time. He had been listening to the praise of the heroes who did so much to win the Battle of Britain and unquestionably saved this country from an immediate German invasion. Lord Dowding was addressing a Service Club luncheon party, and in the course of his speech said:—

"At the end of the Battle of Britain one had the sort of feeling that there had been some special divine intervention to alter some sequence of events which would otherwise have occurred. . . . As time goes on I see that this intervention was no last-minute happening. These series of events had been planned for years—nay, for centuries. It was all part of the mighty plan. It was the part that our dear country was to take in the regeneration of the world."

Capital! It would be an insult to Lord Dowding to assume that he meant these remarks to be taken literally, we take them as examples—very fine examples—of satire, a case in which actual events having been used by the Churches as planned occurrences are restated by a master satirist in such a way as to make their absurdity plain to all intelligent people. As a plain statement of events, the delivery would be nonsense, as an example of satire it is

first class. Lucian did nothing better, Voltaire could not easily have excelled it. Well might it take a part in books on English literature as an example of attacking a stupid belief by way of stating it as though it embodied impeccable wisdom. It runs with such ease, and the language is markedly simple. We confess we have made attempts at satire, but our attempts look poor indeed at the side of this exhibition by Lord Dowding. This holding up of the Christian statement—not wrapped in familiar ecclesiastical phraseology which numbs the intelligence of those who believe in it—is so superb that it leaves little to be said. We wish we could count Lord Dowding among our contributors.

God's World

It is almost impertinent to dwell upon the theory that Lord Dowding sets forth. But all are not ready to recognise its quality and may therefore miss the implications of the passage cited. The Christian Churches cannot disown the teaching of the address. The first clause in the Christian creed is that God made the world and all that is in it. But merely making the world and its animal contents would not do. A painter creates a picture for others to admire, an author writes a book for others to read; and a God would not enjoy his power if no one existed to praise him for his work. This is plainly stated in the Christian statement that God made man for his glory. Another important claim is that God can see from the beginning to the end, and that everything is part of a "divine plan." There is also the further inducement in the teaching that all who believe in and worship God will spend eternity in the blissful—but rather monotonous—exercise of praising Him.

But there is a plan running through the universe, as Lord Dowding is careful to suggest, and like a true satirist he states it as though he fully believes it: That being the case we ought to revise our opinion of Hitler, for he is also part of a long-standing plan. He also must have a part in God's scheme. It was also part of the plan that Germany should initiate the war of 1914 and be defeated, and that she should plan a second world war on a larger scale. All this, suggests Lord Dowding with a solemnity that might deceive the less wide-awake, was part of a mighty plan designed centuries before the Battle of Britain was fought.

It might be asked why did not God provide another plan that would have nipped Hitler's war in the bud? But piling satire on satire, Lord Dowding anticipates the suggestion by pointing out that such an intervention would have prevented the part that "our dear country was to take in the regeneration of the world," and how could Britain reach the high level of regenerating the world if God had exerted his power and prevented the world war? The logic is incontestible, and the satire is sustained to

the end. Never has the quality of the "divine plan" been better exposed than by Lord Dowding in fewer words.

There was a king of France who began life as a Protestant, but the time came when the throne of France was his if he discarded his Protestantism and became a Catholic. And, said Henry IV., probably with a suspicion that it was part of God's plan that he should forsake his creed, "France is worth a Mass." So with a courage that many would lack even to suggest the obvious retort, God must have thought the events of 1939-43 were cheaply bought if it secured us the proud position of having saved, not only "our dear country," but also the world. No consideration can wipe away this great religious truth.

To the Bitter End

Lord Dowding does not ignore another phase of the matter. The air Battle of Britain was fought and won by young men, and certainly some of those present amongst Lord Dowding's audience must have found their minds straying to these bright young lives, of what they might have become, of the plans they had laid for their future, now wrecked by the war which had been planned centuries ago. But the satirist remains true to himself and faces the facts before him in Christian terms, thus:—

"Of those who did not return to their base I have nothing regretful to say because they have nothing to regret. They are, and they remain, a glorious happy band of brothers in that life as in this."

As mere satire that is sufficiently crushing, for it is either satire or selfishness carried to its extreme. But consider if our satirist had felt the position too ghastly even for Christians, and that at this point he cast aside the cloak of the satirist and faced the human aspect of the facts. Might he not have said something of this kind:—

"My friends, let us look at the facts as they are in this war, as indeed in all wars. Let us not overlook that the air battles form only one form of war. What is done in the aeroplane is done on the sea, under the sea and on the land."

In all these phases of the war area there are men with parents, with wives, with children, with friends. There are young men who were looking forward to a career, looking forward to marriage. They were filled with ambitions and courage, and in many cases their prospects in life were such as to promise the realisation of their ambitions. There were men of all forms of religious belief, and those without any religious belief at all. Many of these men were engaged in scientific studies that might have resulted in benefits to the whole human race. What of all these human ties and laudable ambitions? Can we imagine that these men, when they reach heaven, will so far forget the many ties that bind them to earth as to continue as a happy and glorious gang because they have discovered that God had millenniums ago devised a plan for the salvation of the world through the activities of the British people, and that what we have counted to Nazism as wickedness is an exhibition of the fact that they, with us, were tools in the hands of God, puppets who were carrying out His plan? Would even Christian parents be comforted to discover that their sons, their parents, their friends were in heaven, a glorious happy band with their happiness undimmed by a consciousness of the sorrow that those on earth were suffering? A scientific analysis

of Christianity reveals some ghastly things, but I doubt whether it has ever revealed anything quite so ghastly as the picture of sons, fathers, husbands, friends, enjoying to the full the curious joys of heaven and living on as a glorious happy band, their minds undimmed by a knowledge of the agony suffered by those on earth whom they once loved.

But there is one obvious danger in Lord Dowding's satire. People may take it seriously. They may think Lord Dowding really meant what he said to be taken literally. And, in that event, Christians may ask: Why if God is so much and so far in advance of us, could he not have created a plan which would ensure that no innocent people suffered, and that ill-doing should be less powerful than it is? In our poor, weak manhood we are boasting that when this war comes to an end the most strenuous efforts will be made to prevent differences between peoples being settled by war. And if we poor humans can devise plans for the peaceful settlement of differences, where was the need for God to enforce a "mighty plan" running through the ages that was finally to end the Germans, who must so far have been instruments of God? Really, Lord Dowding appears to have been bringing against God a charge of culpable negligence in the first degree. Man would have done better if he could, God could have done better if he would. That appears to be a fair summary of the matter. Gods always appear to be lagging behind their worshippers. It may be conceded that gods, like men, learn from experience, but always man has to lead the way; the history of religion proves that gods are the last things that man educates—out of existence.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE DAWNING DAYS OF ANCIENT ROME

PROJECTING like a long leg, with an island resembling a shoe at its foot, the Italian peninsula is perhaps the most striking feature in the West Mediterranean Sea. Nearly 600 miles long, with fine stretches of fertile soil for the growth of cereals and fruits, and with extensive pastures for flocks and herds, Italy ultimately became the garden of Europe. In such surroundings, her agriculture long preceded her industry and commerce, while these activities were so successfully conducted by the Carthaginians and Greeks.

Much as prehistoric Crete was overrun by barbarous northern invaders, many of whom afterwards developed into the greatly gifted Greeks of antiquity, Italy also proved attractive to the uncouth nations of bleak northern regions who invaded the southern peninsula and basked in its genial climate. As early as 2,000 B.C. Swiss lake-dwellers descended along the Alpine passes and erected their pile-houses in the lakes of Northern Italy. Dr. Breasted intimates that: "The remains of as many as 100 of their pile-supported settlements have also been found under the soil of the Po Valley, once a vast morass which these people reclaimed by erecting their pile dwellings further and further out of it. The city of Venice, still standing on piles, although it is built mostly of stone, is a surviving example of the way the lake dwellers once built their little wooden houses on piles in the same region. They had their influence on the later Romans, who afterwards made their military camps on a plan exactly like that of the Po Valley pile villages."

The northern newcomers were already in possession of metal when they appeared in Italy, and their names for copper and bronze point to an eastern region, as their place of origin, for the former name points to Cyprus and the latter to the Aegean.

Among the migrants who entered sunny Italy were the Italic tribes who settled in central and southern districts. As the intruders extended their territory, the dispossessed population must have been subdued or driven to flight, and it is suggested that the European mercenaries who are displayed on Egyptian monuments of the 13th century B.C. represent the fugitives from Italy who sought service in Egypt.

But these Italic settlements were soon threatened by the arrival of sea rovers—the mysterious Etruscans—whose original habitat is still undecided. But perhaps Dr. Toynbee and Professor Breasted are right in their contention that the Etruscans came from the near Orient. Still, it is practically certain that they established themselves in Italy at an early date and that the Indo-European population retreated as they advanced. The Etruscans ultimately occupied the western shores of Italy from the Bay of Naples northwards nearly to Genoa, and extended their dominions inland as far as the Valley of the Po.

The Carthaginians were then bidding for supremacy in the territories of the Italic tribes. The great colony of Carthage facing Sicily from the African coast had become the leading commercial mart in the Western Mediterranean. The Carthaginians subsequently created their colonies in Sicily and Spain. But the celebrated Greek settlement at Syracuse maintained its independence against every rival, and the Hellenes prevented the Phœnician conquest of Sicily, as well as southern Italy, while the Greeks were mainly instrumental in destroying the sea power previously exercised by the Etruscans.

The Greeks held back both the Carthaginians and Etruscans and, within their City State of Syracuse, were erecting the finest architecture in the island so far seen in the Western Mediterranean. Indeed, 1,500 years after the Italic peoples had settled in Italy, there had arisen in the south of the peninsula a Greek civilisation distinguished by both science and art.

The beginnings of the later widespread Roman power occurred in the seven hills adjoining the Tiber River, where Latin tribes had established their homes. Dwelling in small scattered communities, they cultivated cereals and shepherded their flocks on the uplands. On the Alban mount they built a primitive sanctuary for their leading divinity, Jupiter, and there an annual festival was celebrated in his honour. On this festive occasion, all the semi-independent tribes gathered together to worship and adore their deity.

Their chief settlement was Alba Longa, whose leadership the various tribes accepted whenever they were assailed, especially when attacked by the Etruscans from the other side of the Tiber. Still, trading transactions were customary with the enemy Etruscans, and in the rude villages destined in later times to become the mistress of the world—Rome herself—the inhabitants must have been composed of blended stock owing to the presence of overseas traders and settlers and the many outcasts of alien communities who sought shelter by the Tiber's side.

The Latin tribes were long apprehensive of an Etruscan invasion, and when this occurred the intruders triumphed and captured the Latins' citadel on the Palatine. Thus, early Rome became an Etruscan kingdom whose domains extended from Capua as far north as Genoa. The Latins, nevertheless, retained their language, although Etruscan rulership lasted 250 years. Many sepulchres of this period survive, but like the Cretan, their Etruscan inscriptions so far remain undeciphered.

The Etruscan kings made many improvements in Rome, but their tyranny proved insupportable and the Latins at last rose in insurrection and the foreign rulers were expelled. A Roman Republic then arose, but the prolonged influence exerted by the Etruscans on government, religion, tribal customs and architecture survived their expulsion. The commercial relations of the Latins with the Greeks also set their seal, and notably on language. The Greek alphabet was utilised for purposes of trading and communication and was adapted to Latin require-

ments. The Greek letters derived from the early Phœnicians thus extended their sway, and the original Oriental letters, writes Dr. Breasted, "were carried a step further in the long westward journey which finally made them the alphabet in which this book ["The Conquest of Civilisation"] is printed. In the hands of the Carthaginians and Romans in the West, and the Arameans in the East, the Phœnician alphabet at length stretched from India to the Atlantic."

In improvements in coinage, so essential in foreign trading, and in many of the amenities of civilised life, Greece became the instructor of Rome. Only in the science and art of government did the Romans ultimately excel their Grecian teachers. The realistic Latins marked the chronic weakness that characterised the constantly conflicting tiny Greek City States, ever at variance with one another. The Romans, on the other hand, made their ever increasing territories into a compact whole, and made them so secure that they successfully withstood all assailants for centuries to come.

In the realm of religion the Roman deities were, for all practical purposes, the Homeric divinities bearing Latin names. The sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, where the Greek Sibyl announced the divine oracles, was regarded with reverence and awe in Italy. Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Venus, Juno, Vesta of the sacred fire, and Ceres, the grain goddess, and others were the duplicates of the ancient Greek gods of Olympus. To the Romans the Greeks imparted the tales of old time, so long sacred to themselves, and the listening Romans were persuaded "that Venus was the Greek Aphrodite, Mercury was Hermes, Ceres was Demeter."

When collected in the Sibylline Books, the oracles of Delphi were superstitiously treasured as reliable revelations of future events. Divination by means of the inspection of the entrails of animals devoted to sacrifice, was apparently a practice of the Etruscans, who carried the custom with them from their earlier Asiatic home.

Yet, the Roman was severely practical in his religious observances and, so long as the sacrifices were duly performed, and ample offerings were made to the ancestral spirits, his religious duties were completed. Then he might safely rely on the favour of his divinities until, in later and more enlightened generations, the educated classes became sceptical, although, for social and political purposes, they condescended to conform to religious rites and ceremonies in public, and thus satisfied the cravings of the crowd.

T. F. PALMER.

A CHARTER OF FREEDOM(?)

"THIS war is being fought that man should be free." How much longer is this to be thrust down our throats? What do these people mean by "being free"? I thought that peoples of at least those parts of the world ruled by Britain and the U.S.A. were free, for, according to our teaching, have not these two great Powers waged many wars of Freedom? It would seem that past wars have been waged and won in vain. Will it be so with regard to the present one? The Atlantic Charter says definitely "No!" Four great Freedoms are to be bestowed upon mankind as a result of the present war.

To completely review this Charter of Freedoms volumes would be inadequate, but three of the Freedoms need very special attention. Let us begin with "Freedom from Want."

Man has, with the aid of Science, beaten Nature in the fight for subsistence and thus eliminated the cause of his being in want. But despite this, hundreds of millions have been, and are still in want. Why? Because the very authors of the "Freedoms" have from time to time engineered the destruction of the necessities of life. They burned wheat and coffee, ploughed

in cotton, threw fish back into the sea, paid farmers and growers for *not* producing food, and in a host of other ways manufactured want in an era of plenty. These Powers, now that the sacrifice of the common man is essential to the continuance of their rule, offer "Freedom from Want" in the future. Man does not need this. He has already won it. What he needs is "Freedom to enjoy his Plenty."

"Freedom from Fear." This, coming from the source it does, is sheer nonsense. Fear is the chief fetter of the human mind. Do the authors of the Atlantic Charter seriously intend to unshackle the minds of millions? To free a man from fear, one must first take from him belief in the Supernatural—the base of all fear. Do they intend to do that? What liars! Why, in the same breath, they tell us to "Fear God"!

Freethinkers know that Fear can only be eliminated by freedom of thought. Man will cease to fear when he learns the truth of Priestcraft and Religion. He needs "Freedom to Learn."

The Charter, in fact, encourages Man to fear. Does it not promise "Freedom to worship God in his own way?" Who is trying to prevent him? It is true that Atheists are increasing their numbers, but surely no one ever heard of an Atheist trying to compel a man to refrain from worship. Atheists seek to show the religious the other side of their creed and let them judge. On the other hand, however, it is not so long ago that Church dignitaries tried to invoke the law with a view to making it impossible for Atheists to attend their own International Conference! Then, take notice of the millions in this country alone who have freedom to worship, but who go to the pictures or something on Sunday instead. That is, where they are allowed entertainment on the Holy Day. Does the "Lord's Day Observance Society" believe in worship by freedom? Not on your life. Worship by the Devil's choice—compulsion sums up the attitude of that cheerful body.

There is, however, a sinister side to this "Freedom to worship God." No need to ask which God! The God of the authors. The Bible God it *must* be! It seems to imply that the worshippers of other gods, plus those who have no gods at all, may interfere with those who wish to worship Jehovah. He is a jealous God. Then, of course, it must be the Bible God as the authors know him, or to be more exact, as he will be when the authors have made their post-war adjustments to him. Thus, a man will be free to worship this readjusted God in church, chapel or synagogue. But what about those who wish to exercise freedom *not* to worship, and to tell the world why? True, an Atheist will not wish to worship, but he does want the world to know why. Can anyone imagine Powers who rule through ignorance granting freedom for the latter "in his own way"?

The Christian, for instance, is to receive special freedom to worship three in one and tell the world why, thus increasing the liberties he has and can take at the present time. The clause should read: "Equal Rights for Religious and non-Religious Alike."

Now, just a word about the authors of the Charter themselves. Who and what are they? Firstly, they are Christian and Jewish. (God is stressed, but Jesus not mentioned.) One does not suppose for a minute that any Moslem, Buddhist, Taoist or Confucian has been allowed anything to do with it. In short, this is a Dictatorship of the Bible in the making. Believers in the Bible are in a minority. That minority is shrinking. Hence the Charter aims at a new "Herrenvolk" in the New World. The Fascists of the Bible.

G. L. C.

The man who cannot draw wisdom from a fool is wasting his time to try to get it from a philosopher.

Fear of death is born of the jargon of the priest. It has been to his interest to arouse it in the minds of the unfortunates who have come under his care.

EDWARD GIBBON: FREETHINKER AND HISTORIAN

"THAT wonderful man monopolised, so to speak, the historical genius and the historical learning of a whole generation, and left little indeed of either for his contemporaries. . . . Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read, too."

Such was Freeman's tribute to the work of Edward Gibbon, the famous 18th century Freethinker and historian, the 150th anniversary of whose death falls on January 16 (1944). Educated at Westminster School and Magdalen College, Oxford, at 16 he had already mastered Tacitus, Herodotus, Xenophon, Echar'd's "Roman History" and Howell's "History of the World."

In some ways Gibbon's life appears uneventful and colourless. Devoted to his father, an improvident country gentleman who lived beyond his means, the famous historian was always poor. As a young man in his late teens he spent several years in Switzerland, and in 1760, on his return to England, joined the militia, serving for two and a-half years. All the time, however, he had in mind the writing of a great history on characters like Sir Philip Sydney, Richard I., Montrose and Raleigh. But the writing of English history involved controversy, and so we find him writing: "I must embrace a safer and more extensive theme."

Not until Gibbon embarked on a grand tour of Italy did he find the theme of his chef-d'œuvre. "It was at Rome," the historian wrote, "on the 15th of October, 1764, as I sat musing against the ruins of the Capitol while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started in my mind."

For some time yet material considerations occupied him. With his friend, Duyverduin, he started a periodical "Mémoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne," but only two volumes of it appeared. After his father's death, when living in Bentinck Street, Manchester Square, London, Gibbon, as a member of Boodle's, White's, Brooks's and Almack's Clubs, mixed amongst the literary and political leaders of the day. Elected in 1774 M.P. for Liskeard, moreover, he tried to resolve his financial difficulties by seeking a sinecure. This probably accounts for his unwillingness to criticise North and Thurlow for the crass blunders that provoked the American War of Independence. At any rate, in 1779, his reward came—a Lord Commissionership of the Board of Trade, which lasted until the office was abolished in 1783.

Henceforth Gibbon found the cost of living in England beyond his means and, deprived of his political income, found it expedient to continue his great "Decline and Fall," already begun in 1772 at Lausanne, where, with his dog Muff he set up house. It was here, "on the night of the 27th June, 1787," he declared "that I wrote the last page in a summer house in my garden. . . . I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on recovering my freedom and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatsoever might be the future fate of my History, the life of the historian must be short and precarious." Gibbon's life work, the account of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, covering a period of over 1,300 years, which indeed ended only with the fall of Constantine in 1453, was done. Six and a-half years later he died in London.

Yet Gibbon's career, like that of the late Charles Hargrove, might well be described as a journey "From Authority to Freedom" in religious matters. "From my childhood," Gibbon wrote, "I had been fond of a religious disputation." Of his religious education at Oxford he says: "Without a single lecture, without any academic subscription. . . . I was left to grope my way to the chapel and communion table." Middleton's "Free

Enquiry Into the Miraculous Powers Which Are Supposed to Have Subsisted in the Christian Church" had the effect of turning him into a strong believer. In 1752, at 15, a supposed moderate Churchman, Gibbon suddenly came under the influence of a fanatical young Roman Catholic, who converted him. "I read, I applauded, I believed. . . ." "After repeating at St. Mary's the Athanasian Creed, I humbly acquiesced in the mystery of the real presence." His father, "neither a bigot nor a philosopher," was astonished by his son's "sudden departure from the religion of his country."

At Lausanne, however, whither he was sent in 1753, Gibbon began to retrace his steps. His host was the Calvinist pastor at Crassy, Curchod by name, whose daughter Susan, having narrowly escaped becoming Mrs. Gibbon, finally married Necker, the great French banker. Soon Gibbon could write: "I still remember my solitary transport at the discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation. . . . The various articles of the Romish creed disappeared like a dream, and after a full conviction on Christmas Day, 1754, I received the sacrament in the Church of Lausanne." He thus was a Catholic for but 18 months.

Up till December 18, 1763, Gibbon was certainly a believer. In a private journal dated then he speaks of a communion Sunday at Lausanne as affording an "edifying spectacle." But gradually he came under the influence of Hume, Bayle and the leading sceptics of the age. By 1776, when the first volume of the "Decline and Fall" appeared, he was an avowed Freethinker.

It is interesting to note to what causes Gibbon attributed the rapid spread of early Christianity. "Inflexible and intolerant zeal," "the doctrine of a future life improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth," the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church, the moral respectability of early Christians, a desire to court martyrdom for its propaganda value and the union and discipline of the believers—these he regarded as the fundamental facts in the spread of Christianity.

His pictures of the medieval Church have caused few protests even from the orthodox. Clerical intrigues in the Palaces at Constantinople and Ravenna, figures like Athanasius and the absurdities of asceticism—all live still through his ironical pen and show to what disgusting levels religion can sometimes sink.

Gibbon was probably more of a Freethinker than many of his contemporaries realised. In the French Revolutionary period he even joined the ranks of those attacking Price and Priestley, themselves fairly advanced "heretics." To-day, however, Gibbon's real worth is eclipsed. Not merely does his classical style deter students from tackling "The Decline and Fall"; the style of medieval history itself is being neglected, and too many people remain contented with the romantic versions of medieval society, propagated largely by Roman Catholic historians, who would like us to believe that medieval, priest-ridden society was a heaven on earth peopled by numerous counterparts of St. Francis. Gibbon's life may have been colourless, but his great historical masterpiece remains a noble work still capable of disillusioning a good few would-be Roman Catholics.

R. D. W.

STALIN AND THE BISHOPS

THE Press and the B.B.C. were delighted to give prominence to the announcement that Stalin had received the Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, the sequel of the Kremlin meeting being that there would be no objections to the election of a Patriarch and a Holy Synod.

The Archbishop of York is on a visit to Moscow; the religious world is astir. My workmates say that all is well now that Russia is going religious. So that's the idea—a religious

revival in Russia. As an example of wishful thinking it is very good.

The most significant delusion of the past 25 years has been in matters relating to Russia. Stalin has been reviled like the devil by the Christian Democracies—now he is a figure of tolerance and benevolence. Christians, you are suckers! Never has Freethought been in a stronger position, and this is religion's darkest hour.

For the truth is that Lenin was a militant Atheist, and Stalin has always been an out-and-out Atheist. No religious sentiments can be attributed to the Russian Communist Party. Religion has no place in the Soviet schools except as an objective study in delusions. The terrible Bolsheviks—Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin were the leaders—tore religion from its roots in factory, field and home.

What is behind the Kremlin meeting, then? Simply that Stalin, confident of the end in view, can now, after 26 years of Atheist rule, invite religion into the open to live or die upon its merits. The so-called victory of the Bishops is a portent of religion's death. The forces of evil is not confined exclusively to Fascism, and the Atheism of Soviet Russia is a nightmare to the religious world.

Atheists in England can wage guerilla warfare against the Christian foe, for religion pervades the whole national life. The politician, professor and professional man must pander to religion in order to secure the plums of personal success. Bradlaugh and Bertrand Russells are all too few—the price to be paid is too much for many Atheists, so they make the most of a possible world by taking the line of least resistance.

In Russia there is no taboo upon Atheism, no suppression of the intellect, and no racial prejudice to combat. The test came in 1941 when Christian Hitler launched the most powerful military machine the world has ever seen against Atheist Stalin. The military, political and economic structure of the godless Communists survived the menace. Now the Christian armies are retreating back to the Polish frontier, and Russian Atheism will go on from strength to strength. The religious minority dwindles with time. Those who were brought up in the ignorant, superstitious Tsarist days are the ones who still attend Russia's churches. The millions of young people educated in the free-thinking schools of the first Atheist State are the Russia of to-morrow.

E. HANSON.

ACID DROPS

THE typical Christian attitude is to be on the knee, moaning of one's unworthiness and begging God to give a helping hand. We are not, therefore, surprised to find that here and there even professional Christians find the prayerful attitude more or less disconcerting. In the "Daily Telegraph," for example, the Rev. E. L. Macassey writes in favour of Christians praying for God's help because they deserve it instead of moaning and groaning of their unworthiness. In other words, he wishes Christians to stand up to God and tell him that he has his part to play, and to see that he does not forget it.

Mr. Macassey quotes Pitt as saying: "God, who governs the world by His providence, never interposes for the preservation of men or nations without their own exertions." Perhaps that was Pitt's way of saying that the only time that God helps man is when there is no need of his doing anything. In other words, God, like some of our prominent politicians, is always at the front of the stage when the limelight is turned on.

The "Daily Telegraph" criticises the men employed by the Vicker Armstrong Company for holding up production for a claim of 7s. 6d. a week. But the same might be said of the Vicker Armstrong employers. The dispute on both sides is for 7s. 6d. per week. Perhaps our lack of acquaintance with economics prevents us appreciating the greater patriotism in refusing the 7s. 6d. than in demanding it.

The papers are still supplying much talk—from Christian preachers—about the “revival of religion in Russia,” “the revival of the Church in Russia,” “the return of Russia to God,” and many yards of similar rubbish. And yet the situation is very simple. The degradation of the Russian people under Czardom was maintained largely by the Church in Russia. And when the revolution took place it was the Churches that fought with might and main for the restoration of the old regime and plotted with the “Whites.” In self-defence the Soviet Government was compelled to restrict the activities of the Church and so refuse to the established Christian Church the privileges that were freely granted to other forms of religion. Now the Government finds that the Church is no longer the serious danger it was. A new generation has come into existence, and the revelation—to the people of other countries—of the inestimable benefits the revolution brought to the people of Russia, without religion, is plain to all. What the Government has done is to place the Christian Church on the same level as other religious bodies.

Lord Atkin is of a very sanguine nature. Addressing a meeting of the English Presbyterian Church, he said that for the next fifty years “the entire Christian Church would be engaged in fighting anti-Christ and the materialism that threatened.” We do not know whether at the end of the fifty years Christianity will have been annihilated, or that opposition to Christianity will be dead. But as the opposition to Christianity grows steadily wider in its spread and more successful as the years pass, we repeat that Lord Atkin is a very sanguine individual. Christianity will take a long time dying, but real Christianity is very, very sick.

The “Catholic Times” explains that as “Atheistic Communism is anti-Christian, and is condemned by the Church, no Communist may receive the Sacraments or expect Christian aid.” Agreed, but who is this likely to affect? The Communist and the Atheist do not wish to receive the Sacrament, nor do they thirst after a Christian burial. Of course, the message may be directed to the Roman Catholic Church, but as the man who can be frightened by the “spiritual” threats is not likely to have enough mental independence to leave the Roman Church, the counsel seems quite unnecessary.

The Rev. Donald Soper is a well-known Christian propagandist, but complains that Christians are not up-to-date with their teachings. He says: “The days have gone by when preachers like John Wesley talked about hell-fire. It is a sheer waste of time to preach in that fashion to-day. The atmosphere in which we live is becoming increasingly more secular and far removed indeed from the days when Sunday was a day for hymn singing, saying prayers and going to bed early.”

We think Dr. Soper is right, but we fail to see how that can make Christians cheerful or hopeful. Wesley was both an able man and sincere in his religious beliefs. He did not go round asking what it was people wanted, he told people what they must believe if they were to save their souls from hell. The great Methodist movement was based on and lived by the beliefs at which Dr. Soper sneers. And not only the Methodist movement, but the Christian Church as a whole. Wesley did not go about asking people what kind of religion they would like, and then proceed to teach it. He told people what they ought to believe, and sent them to hell if they didn't. The difference between Dr. Soper and the Christians of a hundred and fifty years ago is the difference between real Christianity and the hodge-podge of the propagandist who will make Christianity fit in with anything that is likely to take-on.

History in the hands of Christian propagandists takes on strange forms. Note we say “strange forms,” not unusual ones, for there is nothing new in the main statements of Christians on the defensive to-day and what was said over a century ago. In the main this consisted in trying to give to Christianity a new form, and one that was not a truthful one. It became with

Christian advocates—of the more wide-awake variety—a policy to see what meaning could be read into the Christian religion that had not been read into it before. In the beginning of the Christian era Christians might accept the demonology, the magic and the superstition of the Old and New Testaments with honesty. But step by step the world gained knowledge, science developed, and what could be accepted honestly at one period became impossible in another. More and more the position of real Christianity is that of a man who lacks the courage either to live honestly or die with self-respect.

There has been for some years a steady campaign to use the Press as an organ of Christian propaganda. One of the leaders in this unavowed campaign is Mr. Henry Martin, Editor-in-Chief of the Press Association, who is perpetually calling upon journalists to take part in a policy of advertising “the part Christianity plays in their professional lives.” We have no doubt that a fair number of journalists will respond by writing “fake” accounts of how much Jesus helps them in their work, for we believe that a fair number of newspaper journalists are always ready to write anything that may promise advancement. The type of journalist who writes what is expected of him is fairly common. To please editors is what this class is aiming at, and it matters little whether what they write is honest writing or not. But we take it that the majority of the craft have enough self-respect not to be led like second-rate preachers to please Mr. Martin, who, we believe, is foolish enough to believe all the religious nonsense to which he gives vent. We hope that self-respecting journalists will make it quite plain that they do not intend to be treated like a mob of Sunday School children by Mr. Martin.

There are not too many opportunities for laughter nowadays, so one may welcome the statement in a Catholic paper that Catholics have never raised a voice against the Government's educational plan. That is true—in a way. All they ask for is that Roman Catholic schools shall be run entirely by Roman Catholics, nothing but Roman Catholicism shall be heard by the children, no non-Catholics shall be employed, and the cost of it all shall be met by the State. With these trifling amendments the Church supports the Government proposals.

The truth is that there will never be efficient teaching in the schools, peace maintained, and children learn completely the lesson of communal peace and oneness, until religion is kept altogether out of the State schools. At present we have separatism advertised where unity should reign. And children learn much in the schools that has to be unlearned as they grow to maturity.

The “Catholic Bulletin” of New York issues a solemn warning that posts under the Allies in Italy are being sought by non-Catholics. Presumably, the “Bulletin” would wish these posts to be occupied by Catholics only. Of course, a lot will be appointed, and there is enough Roman Catholic strength—out of all proportion to numbers—in this country to see that such appointments take place. But there is a very strong body of Freethinkers in Italy, and it is to be hoped that there will be a strong Freethinking propaganda set going.

The Archbishop of Canterbury suggested the other day that we ought to have a Christian University established in Jerusalem. This, after pointing out that Jerusalem was now a centre of Hebrew culture. We do not know exactly what is meant by Hebrew culture. There are, of course, plenty of Jews who are cultured, but for a very long, long time the culture of the Jew was the culture of the country to which the Jews belonged. There has been no Jewish culture since the “dispersion.” There have been Jews in all parts of the world who have kept a number of religious practices and beliefs alive, but they can hardly be called the equivalents of modern culture. As to a Christian University in Jerusalem, that would be little better than a piece of elaborate sarcasm.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- W. FREEMAN.—Pleased to hear from you. Thanks for cutting.
- E. L. ROBERTS.—"The Patriot" is one of the few English papers that still writes as though the lies told about the Russian Revolution had never been exposed. Its chief use is that of warning the people that the anti-Russian movement is not dead in this country.
- C. H. WATERS.—The Editor hopes to be able to resume "What is Christianity?"—Vol. I. of which will be on sale very soon. It will run to about 120 pages—war-time printing, which means rather close printing to economise.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

TO DAY (October 10) Mr. Chapman Cohen will lecture in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. The chair will be taken at 6-30 p.m., and as the moon will be approaching the full then, people may reach their homes with the minimum of inconvenience. Mr. Cohen's subject will be "The Coming of the Gods."

The following letter appeared in the "Sheffield Telegraph" of September 27:—

"Recently I went for an interview with respect to joining the Navy. When asked my religion I answered that I was an Atheist, to which the recruiting officer replied: 'We don't have Atheists in the Navy; I'll put you down as C. of E.'"

"I was brought up as a Methodist, but have since discarded it. How long has religion been compulsory, and what right has a recruiting officer to assume dictatorial powers on this subject?"

—"ATHEIST."

The answer to this question is "None whatever." But bigots will be bigots. Every man—or woman—joining the armed forces has the legal right to be placed on the records as belonging to any religion he pleases to select or to have himself recorded as being without any religion whatever. That is the legal right of anyone joining the armed forces. And it is a piece of impudence for any official to deny that right to soldiers, sailors or airmen. If "Atheist" will send his name and other identification particulars to the Secretary of the N.S.S. the matter will be taken up at once.

Mr. H. G. Wells has just issued, in the Penguin series, a scathing attack on the Roman Catholic Church, under the title of "Crux Ansata. An Indictment of the Roman Catholic Church." This has roused the ire of (Miss?) Winifredo Hollywell, who writes a few notes weekly for the "Universe." She calls the booklet a "scream," but offers only the comment to Catholics: "It is rather encouraging as showing that the Church is still powerful enough to drive the old gentleman into a fury."

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much." We can see no indication of "fury," and there is nothing new for those who attack the Roman Church to recognise its power. It would be a waste of time were the Church powerless. The Church is dangerous *because* it is powerful, and it works its will by trading on the superstition of some, on the self-interest of others, and on the fear that so many have of its underground methods of activity. Mr. Wells is to be congratulated on having the courage to attack the strongest Christian Church in existence—and the most dangerous one.

We think the following will be of interest to our readers. It comes from a friend who has just returned from the U.S.A. and one who is not merely capable of observation but has also the capacity of reducing bias to a minimum. It has its application to some extent to this country:—

"Reaction in America has the bit well between its teeth at the moment, and unless the more liberal-minded elements there get together and hit back hard, the future promises to be singularly unpleasant. The Roman Catholic Church is, as usual, hard at work in Governmental circles in the States, where it has several men in positions of great importance, and its influence is one of the major explanations of the unsavoury Darlan episode, the fostering of Giraud at the expense of De Gaulle (presumably because De Gaulle has around him many liberal and Freethinking elements) and the recent appeals to Badoglio and the puppet King of Italy. American liberals look hopefully towards Britain, whom they believe (and I think quite correctly) to be miles ahead of them in the understanding of social problems and the necessity for 'global' thinking. They hope that Britain and Russia will get closer together, and by learning from each other, demonstrate to the American people that there is a promising alternative to the so-called 'Individualist' world proclaimed incessantly by American Big Business."

An Ipswich reader would like to get in touch with other Freethinkers within range for the purpose of forming a discussion group. Those interested are asked to communicate in the first place with Mr. A. W. Self, 21, Brunswick Road, Ipswich.

Our contributor, Mr. W. Kent, who is well known as an authority on London—his "Encyclopedia of London" is packed with information about our great city—is now conducting a series of special tours organised by Messrs. W. and G. Foyle, Limited, from Charing Cross Road, every morning at 10-30. Mr. Kent, we understand, "will explore the byways as well as the high-ways," and readers on a visit to London, and many Londoners as well, we are sure will find these tours of exceptional interest. Particulars and programme can be had from Messrs. Foyle.

We were pleased to note in a recent issue of the "Durham Chronicle" what appears to be a very fair comment on "How I Manage Without God." The title was a challenging one, and one is not surprised when Mr. J. T. Brighton, who does such useful work in the Northern Area, participated. The discussion was between Mr. Brighton and the "Houghton Discussion Group"—a religious body. Mr. Brighton was, as usual, "forthright" in stating his case, and knowing him and his persuasive methods, we shall be astonished if he did not sow seed that will fructify in attracting to Freethought many of his listeners.

Only one correction is needed, and that is a personal one. He is reported as saying that the only paid officials in the N.S.S. are the Secretary and the President. The secretariat is, of course, a whole-time job, and receives, as the secretary of the N.S.S. has received for many years, a salary. But the Presidency is still an honorary post, and always has been. We also take it that the comment, "The group went away to a man more convinced than ever that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life," is almost an insult to the group; but Mr. Brighton would probably have another tale to tell.

THE B.B.C. AND RELIGION

IN Lytton's "Paul Clifford," the former highwayman, Augustus Tomlinson, in his "Tomlinsonia," at the end, states certain aphorisms which may be useful to memorise; among them is this: "When you are about to utter something astonishingly false, always begin with a positive statement such as, 'It is an admitted fact, etc.'" Thus, in the "News-Chronicle" of August 7, Frederick Laws begins with the astonishingly false statement, "Broadly speaking, the B.B.C. has no opinions. In monopolistic control (note the word 'monopolistic') of the most powerful machine for the spreading of views invented since the printing press, this Corporation has no propagandist policy. . . . Its servants watch perpetually to see that every moderate broadcast statement, true or false, is duly balanced by an equally moderate statement of the other side."

As an example of "Tomlinsonia," this statement is hard to beat, especially as Mr. Laws proceeds to point out that since the war the time given to religious broadcasting has increased three-fold, while, at the same time, "several wave-lengths have retired for the duration." Now can Mr. Laws point to one broadcast on the other side? And where is the "due balancing" mentioned above?

Broadcasting has one thing in common with pulpit preaching: there is no answering back. To say that the B.B.C. has any means of assessing the popularity or otherwise of its religious broadcasting is obvious nonsense; if any listener were to ask for an agnostic broadcast as a change, and as an example of the boasted "balancing," has anyone any doubt whatsoever that the request would receive no attention? On the other hand, testimonials from the clergy (of which the B.B.C. must receive shoals) are regarded as "evidences" of popularity. If this is not a trial where the one side only is allowed to give evidence, what is it?

Mr. Laws proceeds then to describe the daily broadcast service at 10.15 a.m. as a "real need," just to show how fair he is to both sides! One wonders if the troops now fighting in Italy, with no observation of the Sabbath, be it noted, describe this 10.15 service of hymns and platitudes as a "real need," or do they ignore it altogether? If the B.B.C. ever attempted to gauge popularity (that is if they had any means to do so), it would be found that the broadcasts of "Ikey Goldbloom and his Boys" in their "refrayned" entertainment, would establish a "real need" which would leave the 10.15 service nowhere.

Can one ask for some explanation from the clergy, who are so emphatically "in the know," as to the side which the Almighty is taking in the present world war and why he allows the other of the world "religions" to persist? If numbers only count for anything on the sacred principle of "majorities" (if majorities really count for anything at all), if all the "enemy" gods from India to China and Japan (to mention only a few) were totalled together in populations, where would the "elect" ranks of the "Christians" be? And there are dozens of these, remember, especially in much-bombed Italy, including Pontiff Rome. The kindest reply would be that the "Christians" would be heavily outvoted—that is, to anyone who thinks; but this would not include the "balanced" B.B.C.

HERBERT CESCINSKY.

A ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE CLERGY

IT appears to have escaped general notice that the present Government, with its avowed interest in things religious, appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the condition, earnings and status of the English clergy. The Commission duly set to work, made a number of inquiries, heard a large number of witnesses and finally reported thereon. This report has not yet

been issued to the public—there is, indeed, reason to believe it never will be; but having, by a curious chance, come into possession of a copy of the report, I am thus able to place the principal portions thereof before readers of "The Freethinker."

In a kind of preamble the report says:—

"The subject of the appended inquiry deals with what was once unquestionably—if we exclude the military—the largest and most flourishing occupation in the British Isles. Although of foreign origin, its growth in these islands was very rapid, and for generations it gave employment to a large number of people—how large there are no reliable figures upon which a calculation may be based. For many years, however, owing to the competition of an increasing number of new occupations, there has been probably an absolute, but certainly a relative, decrease in the number employed. New occupations do not, however, account for all, since it appears that the home industry has suffered severely through importations from Italy in an earlier period, and later from Germany and France. These importations, consisting of ideas totally at variance with the best interests of the clerical profession, have worked irreparable havoc among those on whom the clergy depended for support; and your Commissioners are convinced that, could a more rigid system of protection have been maintained, what is now a decaying industry might have been in a far more flourishing condition."

Under the head of "Occupation," the Commissioners report:—

"Considerable difficulty has been experienced by your Commissioners in arriving at an exact estimate of the number of persons engaged in this profession. Although those so engaged are banded together on the usual trade union lines, yet, owing to these being split up into a number of more or less autonomous societies, and also to the animosity existing between them, we have been unable to obtain exact figures. Still, we are convinced that between 40,000 and 50,000 would be an approximate estimate—the larger figure being probably nearest the truth. The difficulty of an exact calculation is enhanced by the fact that this particular occupation has associated therewith a large number of practitioners who have no official or trade rank. These seem attracted thereto by various motives—love of gain, dissatisfaction with more laborious methods of employment, sheer vanity, or the mistaken idea that they are specially fitted for the work. But your Commissioners have observed that there are few occupations so easy to follow, or that demand less preparation for those who adopt it.

"While on the whole this occupation seems to be a fairly healthy one, we yet find associated therewith diseases and disorders of a well-defined character. These disorders, while not confined to this profession, certainly manifest themselves to a quite abnormal extent. Your Commissioners feel themselves justified in assuming, therefore, that while these diseases may be produced, they are certainly and generally aggravated by the occupation in question. These maladies are very largely of a mental character, but one may cite among the more physical ones the great prevalence of myopia and other forms of ophthalmia.

"The majority seem quite incapable of seeing things in their right proportions or in their true relation to other things. Aphasia is also common. Under this head may be noted the prevalence of amnesia, there being a marked inability in a large number of cases to find and use the right word in describing people or things. In a series of experiments conducted by your Commissioners, in which the subjects of investigation used such words as 'Faith,' 'Miracle,' 'Inspiration,' 'Providence,' etc., it was found that there existed nothing like a common agreement as to meaning, and indeed in a large number of cases meanings quite at variance with the legitimate ones were given to the words in question. Mental disorders are deplorably common, notably various kinds of ego-mania. The delusion that they are called to their work by a supernatural power seems to be held by all; and although your Commissioners pointed out to these unfortunate

people that their trade was generally selected for them by parents or guardians, that they served an apprenticeship as in other trades, the delusion seemed unshakable. An inflated egoism leading men, often of less than mediocre attainments, to publicly declare the belief that their existence is essential to the national well being, with the refusal to look at national concerns from that of any other point of view than of their own sub-union, demonstrate the existence of mental disorders of a most distressing kind.

"Your Commissioners also desire to record their conviction that most of these people appear to have brought their disorders into the trade, if these were not the actual condition of their adopting it. In this way there appears to have been a process of selection at work, by means of which people of weak or disordered intellect are deliberately kept from other professions and placed in this one. In this direction the clerical profession certainly serves a useful function, since it provides an opening for people afflicted in the manner described, and who might otherwise lower the general character of other trades, or become a burden on their friends or on the public purse. But in the course of its investigations your Commissioners have come across not a few cases where the more brilliantly endowed members of a family have been selected for other callings, leaving the less endowed for this one. It may also be noted that the conditions of the occupation tend to aggravate whatever weakness the subject starts with. The system of apprenticeship seems elaborated to this end. During the course of training to which they are subjected independent thinking is strongly discouraged, the official text-books with which the students are supplied are mostly of an antiquated kind, the students are shut off from all advanced knowledge having a bearing on their profession, all of which combine to produce a degree of weakness and helplessness painful to behold, and fatal to their helpful efficiency in after life.

"Concerning the earning of this class your Commissioners have also failed in securing exact figures. Many who complained that their earnings were miserably small were found to have deducted therefrom the cost of clothing, boots, food, rent, riding, etc., and only to reckon as earnings the residuum. Some certainly possess large incomes. Others, again, are comparatively small, although the average for the whole of the industry is certainly not insignificant. But here it is to be observed that the only satisfactory test is to take this industry in relation to other industries, and with regard to its social efficiency. So far as the last factor is concerned, we have quite failed to discover any useful function subserved by this profession. Certainly there are no social functions that would not go on as well in its absence as at present. Moreover, we have had evidence placed before us which goes to show that these persons are largely the agents of other interests in the country, and by their activity during election times, as well as on other occasions, distract public attention from issues that are of vital consequence to the well-being of the nation. And, with regard to the first, the earnings of this industry, in relation to others, your Commissioners observe that, while many may possess but meagre incomes, there is no reason whatever for imagining that they would be better paid in other occupations. Thrown on the ordinary labour market, the presumption is that their earnings would certainly be less than they are at present."

The report contains a list of "suggestions," from which I take the following:—

"Although your Commissioners are strongly impressed with the conviction that the industry under examination is a dying one, and one impossible of permanent preservation, it does not advise any drastic action. Much might be done by selecting the younger and healthier persons, teaching them a new trade, and thus surround them with a healthier environment. But obviously this could only be applied to a small number of people. Many having been placed in this trade because their natural qualities

did not permit of their adopting with profit any other, it would be unwise to expect that the method suggested above would be of any value except in relation to a few. And, bearing in mind the large numbers engaged in this profession, very serious evils might result from throwing on to the world, destitute of either natural or other resources, a body of men incapacitated by inclination, by training, and by custom, from earning a living in any other direction. Apart, too, from the financial aspect, we would point out that, in segregating a certain type of mind, the clerical profession does perform something of a social service. Of the evils resulting when this type of mind emerges in politics there is ample evidence; and therefore the letting loose of some 50,000 men in the political field could not but be productive of much injury. Probably the most satisfactory plan would be the establishment of a fund from which might be drawn yearly incomes for such as are fitted by nature for no other industry or occupation than the one in question. This would serve the purpose of keeping them from lowering the tone of other professions, and, at the same time, the inevitable growth of public education and public opinion might be trusted to make the type less numerous in future."

There are many other important passages in the report, but I have given nearly all that are of interest to readers of this journal. It is to be hoped that some Member of Parliament will take the matter up and press the Government for the speedy publication of the work of the Commission.

"QUONDAM."

GOSSIP

IN the opinion of some folk, gossip is an innocent form of entertainment. A number of people foregather and, over a glass of beer or a cup of tea, or during a game of cards, they pass on to each other titbits of information which have come their way, and discuss the why and wherefore of current events. If it stops at that, all well and good and no harm is done; but it often happens that one or the other of the party has—so he says—just heard of something which he feels he must tell the others without delay, in case. . . .

To create the necessary atmosphere and to give the impression that he really is in the know, he will begin by saying that "It came to me on good authority and quite accidentally," or something to that effect, and then, with an expanded chest, let himself go while the rest listen open-mouthed.

"He hath a devil and is mad," someone whispered many centuries ago—and eventually Christ was crucified! More recently someone started a whispering campaign that Dreyfus, a captain in the French Army, had sold important French military secrets to Germany, with the result that he was condemned as a traitor to his country, imprisoned on Devil's Island and subsequently pardoned as a perfectly innocent man—only to die fairly soon afterwards, broken in both body and spirit! Dozens of similar cases could be quoted—cases of where a lie has been told and someone has, in consequence, suffered torture both of body and mind, or death—but the foregoing will suffice for the moment.

Tell your friends that So-and-So expressed such-and-such an opinion, and the probability is that he will be regarded as "Agin the Government"; hint that he has been seen with someone who wasn't his wife and he will be written down as immoral; say, further, that you have reasons to believe that he is atheistically inclined—if not actually an Atheist—and he will be condemned as quite unfit to associate with decent people. It is all so very easy. You have only to assume an attitude of righteous indignation and give the story a good start, and it will grow and spread like a prairie fire.

The great majority of people have fixed ideas of what is right and what is wrong, both in speech and action, and if anyone crosses their path with an unorthodox opinion or a standard of

conduct different from theirs, they feel that their position as important members of society is being assailed, and that they must do something about it. Their own ideas—or what they fancy are their ideas when, as likely as not, they are just parrot cries—may be as scientifically out of date as the Dodo, and their own morals those of the farmyard—but they are, so they think, their own ideas and unquestionably correct, and they will see anyone else damned first before they will admit that they can be in the least degree mistaken about anything under the sun.

Well-meaning folk will tell the person who is maligned or slandered that he should "treat it with the contempt which it deserves," that "truth will prevail," and so forth, but poor Dreyfus—who was wonderfully courageous and had far more philosophy than the average man—found that these were but catch phrases, and notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, he was robbed of the loving companionship of his wife and family for many years and sent to an early grave by a malicious tongue. Dreyfus, of course, was a Jew and that was just enough—for some people! It suited their vile purpose to point out that his religious faith was different from theirs and that he was not of their "class"—he was, as a matter of fact, a moral giant when compared with his accusers—and the rest was all so very easy—for them!

They knew, no doubt, that the public has a thirst for news—"news" being a story that is at all defamatory about someone, or, better still, a wee bit "spicy"—and they had only to start whispering to ensure their story being accepted as an incontestable fact. The public wanted to believe the lie and they did, and had it not been for another courageous man—Zola, who risked everything in his fight for justice for the accused man—Dreyfus would never have been given a "free pardon"—pardoned for doing nothing, mark you!

Of course, gossiping is not a favourite pastime of the rich or the poor, but is common to all classes of society and, generally speaking, is indulged in wherever and whenever two or three are gathered together; and the subject of discussion may be a person of either high or low estate. It matters not who the individual is, if he or she—and if there is a woman in the case so much the better, so much more credible is the story!—once he or she gets a bad name the mud-throwing begins. Many a man has ruined his career—got himself talked about in the club or pub and held up to scorn—because he has refused to go the way—the secretive, back-door, dirty way—of the majority; and many a woman has been ostracised—if not found herself in the social gutter—because she has dared to think that her private affairs concerned no one but herself!

The character of any man or woman can be measured very accurately by his or her readiness to run about with tales of other folk, or his or her willingness to give ear to that sort of thing when it is brought to them. To some people gossip is like a bowl of water to a thirsty dog, and it is lapped up just as eagerly.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

IS FREETHOUGHT INCREASING?

I WAS prompted to ask this question after looking at a copy of "The Freethinker" for August 29, 1886. The paper was then in its sixth year of publication, and a few weeks previously fire had practically burnt out the publishing offices and destroyed valuable stocks. Fortunately, most of the printing plant was rescued and the paper appeared as usual, but the financial loss was very heavy, particularly as a "technical hitch" prevented the payment of any insurance. The readers rallied devotedly, however—as they did again over half a century later in similar circumstances—and badly needed subscriptions and loans soon eased the situation.

Throughout this arduous period the tone of the Editorial remained cheerful, though fully alive to the difficulties, and it

was noted in "Acid Drops" that "God appears to be somewhat impartial in sending fires after all," because the entire establishment of the "Christian Commonwealth" was thoroughly burned out a few weeks later! At this time, too, the famous comic illustrations, which served their purpose so well, were still appearing on the front page of "The Freethinker," and it was one of these that actually incited my question.

The illustration is entitled "The Religious Museum (1886)," and it depicts relics of the (then) presumably extinct Christian religion. In the centre stands a pitiful effigy of the crucified Jesus, and—on a table in front—rest the "Holy Bible," a cross and rosary beads. On either side of their Saviour stand General Booth (complete with ear-trumpet) and Mr. Spurgeon, each in a glass case, while two other figures in benedictory attitude complete the picture, one being the Pope (holding the key to heaven) and the other apparently a Protestant Bishop.

This prophetic picture was doubtless the result of the great advance in Freethought during the 19th century. What had previously been mainly the work of individuals was then organised, and the learning and capabilities displayed in oratory and writing by Bradlaugh, Foote, Wheeler, James Thomson (B.V.) and others, backed up by a worthy body of supporters, had made Freethought a real intellectual fighting force. The influence of scientists like Darwin, Huxley, Lyell and Tyndall, was also strongly anti-Christian, and although Freethinkers were fully aware of the hard battle ahead, they were confident of victory in the end.

Prosecutions only served to strengthen their determination, and before the end of the century there were evident signs that the opposition was weakening. They were less ready to come into the open, and there was a desperate attempt on the part of Christian apologists to reconcile their religion with the new discoveries of science. Tylor's monumental work "Primitive Culture," had been published in 1871, and both cultural and physical anthropology were making great strides. Man's affinity with the anthropoid apes had been demonstrated beyond all doubt, confirming Shakespeare's remarkably far-seeing description—"the paragon of animals"—and shattering for all time the Christian conception of a fallen angel! Similarly, religion itself was shown to be a purely natural growth, and traceable back to very rude and elementary forms. Instead of a revelation from God, it turned out to be a blunder of primitive man! The intellectual world had, in fact, passed into a state of passive unbelief!

Nevertheless, even to-day, those who owe so much to the Freethinkers of last century rarely acknowledged their debt, and the influence of Freethought, though always much greater than it appears, is kept mainly hidden from the masses through the obloquy of its opponents and the reticence of the so-called "advanced" parties. There is no doubt that each generation is less religious than its predecessor: the Churches are lamenting their decreased congregations, but this is more often due to apathy rather than Freethinking. Still, it is only through the advance of Freethought that the young people can afford to be apathetic or treat religious matters with disdain, as they so often do.

Progress is generally slow, however, though it does, at times, make sudden spurts, and Freethought progress—the most difficult yet most valuable progress—is no exception. If we regard the latter half of the 19th century as one of the "spurts" or "leaps"—which I think we may—since then Freethought seems to have slowly but surely increased. Possibly the time is ripe for another "leap," and if this is so, I can think of no better aim than the establishment of the "Religious Museum" by 1986! At the first Millennium Christians expected the return of Christ and the end of the world. How much better for mankind if the second Millennium saw the end of Christianity and its mythical gibbeted Saviour!

C. McCALL.

THE ARMY'S MEN-OF-GOD

ANYONE who visits the cinema at all regularly must have seen films in which handsome parsons are always on hand in air raids to calm the panic-stricken crowd of ordinary folk by a prayer or hymn. Recently, too, there has been a good deal of "plugging" of a song celebrating the "sky pilot" who, when the gun-team had been knocked out, carried on in their place, shouting "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition." Not having observed, however, that people who have been in air raids or soldiers who have been in action single out clerical courage for special mention of the kind described in film and song, I am inclined to suspect "inspiration" when I come across such stories.

Even if I were not thus hard-boiled I cannot imagine myself falling for an impudent piece of puffery perpetrated in the "Sunday Dispatch" of September 12 by the Marquess of Donegall, to whom I owe the title of these notes. In his weekly dose of empty chatter he proceeds to butter up the gentry whose calling enables most of them to avoid the war-time sacrifices that men inferior in holiness endure so readily:—

"Has it occurred to you," asked a colleague the other day, "that the Royal Army Chaplain's Department—in other words, the padres—have had the highest percentage of casualties of any unit in this war?"

It had not occurred to me, although I was aware that padres had the highest percentage of any unit in the last war.

The prestige of men-of-God must have fallen indeed if such ridiculous lies as these are needed to bolster up their reputations. Anyone with the slightest experience of military action knows they are lies and can see how ridiculous they are. Let us first take the noble lord's statement that he is "aware that padres had the highest percentage (of casualties) in the last war."

No figures are necessary. All who served in infantry battalions on active service in the last war know that during quiet periods of trench warfare a unit in the front line regularly lost a few men every day as a result of intermittent shelling and sniping by the enemy; and that in a successful assault a battalion would lose anything from 20 to 80 per cent. of its men as casualties. To maintain an infantry battalion at fighting strength, therefore, it had to be continually fed from home by substantial reinforcements. Thus the percentage of casualties of a typical infantry battalion on active service for any considerable period usually amounted to several hundreds per cent. of its normal strength. The Marquess should tell his readers how he arrives at a higher percentage of casualties among the chaplains.

I don't suppose the Marquess will be able to do this, for a newspaperman's awareness of highest percentages does not appear to include any knowledge of particular figures. Otherwise, why should it have been necessary for him to visit Lieut.-Colonel the Reverend H. C. Davies, M.B.E., M.C., one of the big guns of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, to seek information regarding casualties in the present war? Has he not already told us that one of his colleagues knew that the padres had suffered the highest percentage of any unit? (Curious paper, the "Sunday Dispatch," to have two such statisticians on its staff.)

The reverend colonel did not, by the way, disclaim first place in the casualty percentages for his padres, but he did give the Marquess figures that reveal his colleague's statement as the purest poppycock. In this war, out of over 2,000 uniformed chaplains with the British armies, 18 have been killed, 41 wounded, 122 captured and six are missing. Since it is common knowledge that whole fighting units have been entirely wiped out during the various reverses our arms have suffered, the under 1 per cent. killed and the 2 per cent. wounded amongst the padres scarcely deserves describing as "the highest percentage of casualties of any unit in this war."

On the front page of the same issue of the "Sunday Dispatch," the editor says that the aim of its news and comments is to inspire confidence. The remarks of the Marquess of Donegall and his colleague should, therefore, have given the editor two vacancies to fill.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTIAN ORIGINS.

SIR,—In reply to "Alert," I must regretfully plead guilty to not having read Gerald Massey. I hope one day to correct the omission.

Meanwhile I am not disposed to contest the view that the Jewish Jehoshua Ben-Pandora (who dates anyway from the second century) may embody a tradition of the real Jesus. I have never denied that elements from Egyptian and other mythologies helped to build up the mythical Christ. The trouble, it seems to me, with both historicists and mythicists is that neither reckon with the possibility that they may *both* be right, each looking only at their own side of the shield!—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

OBITUARY

At the City of London Crematorium, Manor Park, London, E., the remains of Frank Howells were cremated on Saturday, September 25. In his 66th year at the time of death, which took place after four months of illness, Frank Howells was a regular reader of "The Freethinker," and all his thoughts and actions were framed within Freethought principles. It was that which made him an outstanding character among his acquaintances, which included many warm friends who valued his companionship. His wish for a Secular Service was duly respected, and before an assembly of relatives and friends, a service was conducted at the Crematorium by the General Secretary of the N.S.S.

R. H. R.

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