

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIII.—No. 46

Sunday, November 14, 1943

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### News from Heaven

THE Moscow Conference appears to have ended in a satisfactory manner, and those who prayed for its success will register another answer to prayer. But the success of the Conference recalls a curious experience I had just after it opened. I came down one morning and turned on the wireless just in time to hear the tail-end of the B.B.C.'s 7-55 terror's grovel before God. There were the usual "Thees" and "Thous" delivered in a manner that reminded one of a squalling tom-cat, and a confession of the speaker's miserable weakness, the truth of which was convincingly illustrated by both matter and manner. While waiting for the news I was startled to hear the speaker asking God to "bless the Moscow Conference," then in earlier stages. My first impression was that the speaker was indulging in the common practice known as "leg-pulling." Then I wondered whether he was not really serious. For English preachers to ask God to bless us was understandable, for they might have been reminding God in a courtly manner that we had done a deal for him, and he might show his appreciation by doing something for us. We had praised him, flattered him, and protected him by law and custom. As Heine put it, it is the business of God to help us, and in return we had kept him in being. But to ask God to bless the Moscow Conference was equal to asking the Poles to thank Hitler for the invasion of Warsaw.

I listened to the news and then sat back in a comfortable armchair to consider things, particularly the request for God to bless a meeting at Moscow. If the preacher was indulging in the common practice of leg-pulling, he was running great risks. Perhaps I fell asleep, but I appeared to be wide awake, and I was suddenly aware of the sound of trumpets, the twanging of harps, the flutter of wings and the sounds of multitudes singing "Glory to God in the highest." Then came a lull. The music and the singing died down, and I heard what I afterwards found out to be a dialogue between the angel Gabriel and He who sitteth upon the throne. What I remember ran as follows:—

GABRIEL: "Lord, we have a message from earth, and it is marked 'Urgent.' It is a request that you bless the Moscow Conference."

THE VOICE: "Moscow? Isn't that the place from which I was banished a few years ago?"

GABRIEL: "Not banished. Your places of worship were merely restricted. It was your preachers who led you astray as to the facts."

THE VOICE: "How many are attending the Conference?"

GABRIEL: "Three. They represent England, the United States and Russia."

THE VOICE: "I believe I have had prayers from the first two, but what about the other one? Just ask the recording angel to look up their dossier."

GABRIEL: "I am afraid that the record is black. The two first worship you, after a fashion, but the third has a very bad record. For over twenty years the Russian Government has from Moscow been doing what it could to lead people away from you. They have banned religion from their schools, and you know how useless it is to expect children to grow up as loyal worshippers of yours if it is not driven into them during childhood. The Russian Government insists that you are a myth, and that civilisation will never be complete while men continue to worship you. The Russian Government insists that man must be his own saviour."

THE VOICE: "That is too much. Time was when I have destroyed a whole city because the people worshipped another God instead of me, and you will be aware that I am not particular in selecting my worshippers. I have admitted among my followers those who have been tyrants, murderers and robbers. I have raised no demur when my Protestant followers have killed Catholics, or when my Catholic followers have slaughtered Protestants. I have even refrained from action when my oldest followers, the Jews—who stood by me when I was just one of a host of minor gods—have been tortured and ill-used by my Christian followers. But if I do not discriminate between those who worship me and those who do not, I shall—horrible thought—soon be a god without worshippers. Russia has already robbed me of millions of worshippers, and where can I look to-day for these to be replaced? Men may live without gods, but where is the god who has been able to survive for long without worshippers? How can I bless a Conference in Atheistic Russia without blessing declared Atheists?"

GABRIEL: "Lord, we are alone, and can afford to be frank. It is true that no prayers will be said at this Conference, but if it is successful, and if good follows it, that success will be cited in proof of your uselessness. Already the Atheism of official Russia has encouraged your enemies all over the world. Will not the success of this Conference without your intervention encourage them much more? Lord, we cannot nowadays afford to lose a single worshipper. If we announce through our accredited representatives that we have blessed the Conference, then we shall be able to claim that the success was due to us. Besides, we know that the majority of people in Russia still have some sort of belief in us. Can we afford to offend even them? We are alone and may be candid in this matter."

THE VOICE: "Gabriel, you have said that in our solitude we may speak with frankness. Let us do so. We know, and our priests on earth know, that it is the older people in Russia who continue to give us a modicum of worship.

But we have lost the younger generation in Russia. Let us then look that fact in the face, and remember that the same tendency exists elsewhere. The new generation continues to look upon their elders with respect and even with affection, but they hold their religious beliefs in contempt, and openly disavow allegiance to me."

GABRIEL: "But we have it on the authority of an English Archbishop that the churches he visited were thronged with worshippers. We must not forget that."

THE VOICE: "Do not let us be deceived even by the talk of an Archbishop. The greater freedom given to my followers in Russia was not due to the weakness of my enemies, but because the Soviet Government felt that so much had been done to weaken my power that they could afford to relax their vigilance. They can now stand quietly and watch, as they think, the inevitable process of our decay. After all, the history of mankind proves that immortality is not a quality of gods."

GABRIEL: "But surely we must look beyond the present and hope for better possibilities in the future. Religious revivals have happened before. Remember that our rise to the first place in the world of gods followed the decay of the gods of Greece and Rome. Even then it was at one time a mere toss of a coin—to use an earthly phrase—whether we or some other gods should take the place of the decaying deities. An accident may determine our security for another lengthy period. Remember that it was our worshippers who swept aside the secular power of ancient Rome and the glory that belonged to Greece. It was our followers who did so much to bury the philosophy and science of the ancient world and to place us in supreme power. It was upon these victories that the so-called "Dark Ages" were built, but which we know was the period of our greatest power. Secular culture may be lost far more quickly than it is acquired. There are those on earth who talk glibly of the power of knowledge, but we gods know how much greater may be the power of ignorance, and also how much we have benefited by it. We may be too subservient to what is called modern culture. More than once the culture of a nation has decayed and died. Sciences have died, and philosophies forgotten, and with each period of decay gods have enjoyed a new lease of power. We have not yet lost all possibilities of revival."

THE VOICE: "Your case is cleverly argued, Gabriel, but what is now happening to us has happened to gods who hoped for an unending reign. We gods have always claimed to be indestructible, but we are aware of the number of gods who have passed and whose very names are now unknown. Before I had claimed supreme rule, the gods of Greece were mighty in their power and beautiful in their presence. I knew that their claim to immortality was a pretence. These ancient gods were already tottering, and soon were glad to enjoy existence as spirits of the woods and rivers or as an inferior order of demons. Nearly two thousand years ago Lucian of Samosata could make the great Zeus say of the then reigning gods that 'It stands upon the edge of a razor whether we are any longer to be acknowledged and adored on earth as gods, or neglected by all the world and counted as nothing.' As you have tried to cheer me, so one of the minor gods tried to cheer Zeus by saying that it did not matter if the wiser ones ceased to worship, the majority, the ignorant, the foolish, the dregs of the populace were still their worshippers; and

Zeus replied that while that might be true, he preferred the worship of a handful of wise men to that of a multitude of fools. That position is rapidly becoming ours. We gods are being strangled in a mesh of our own devising. We have insisted that we are immortal in the face of the fact that history is littered with the memories of dead and dying deities. Even the very names of many of them are unknown. We are living in a universe which to our undoing we claimed was of our creation. To-day many, even our followers, are pointing out that we really know nothing of the universe which we claimed we had called into existence. Its real nature has been stated by man.

"While our worshippers were as ignorant as we were of the nature of the universe we were sure of their worship; to-day, like Zeus, we would prefer the worship of a handful of philosophers to the adoration of a multitude of fools. I know that some of our most exalted representatives try to give us a longer life, by assuring the people that without the worship of us, honesty, decency and truthfulness would disappear from the earth. We cannot feel content with a worship that comes from a fear of punishment or is animated by the power of greed. Even the best of our followers do not worship us because of our wisdom. In common with those who deny us worship because they do not believe we made the universe and still control the world in which they live, they affirm the very opposite. They justify the modicum of worship they give us by saying that without the belief we exist the 'lower classes' cannot be kept in order. They keep us in being as nursemaids bring bogeys to restrain a boisterous or disobedient child."

GABRIEL: "What, then, are we to say to those who ask us to bless the Moscow Conference? We seem to be on the horns of a dilemma. If we decline to bless a Conference in which our avowed enemies play a great part, we shall lose the prayers of those who always turn to us when they are in trouble. We must not forget that our followers on earth pray hardest when they are in trouble, and even our official representatives stress the point that this is the case. After all, you have laid it down in the book which you inspired and expressed your will, that our worshippers should not resist evil but should turn one cheek when the other is smitten. And if we ignore the petitions we have received, shall we not be saying that prayer does not matter, things will take their course whatever we may say or do?"

THE VOICE: "It is unkind of you to throw my book in my face. I have realised for many, many years what a blunder it was to set forth my wishes and give details in print of how I created the world. Other gods were not so careless, and they lived happy and joyous lives to the end. To be frank, that was a great mistake. It enabled my enemies to bring my own words against me."

"But we are gods. We came into the world as gods, and gods we must remain. We must tell those on whom our very existence rests that in due time they will know our will. We must bear in mind that belief in us is kept alive, not so much on account of what we do, but on account of what people think we do. It is hope and fear on which we gods thrive. We will let our intervention remain an open question. If the Allies win the war our faithful followers will give us all the credit. If by some chance the Allies lose the war, our aloofness will send our

followers more certainly to their knees beseeching forgiveness. The chastising of men and women, of the child at the breast and the old man tottering to the grave, all these things will count to our greatness, and the prayers of our followers will be more insistent. We must follow the old lines and tell the old story. We gods are the slaves of routine."

We have no more to record, for I came to myself to hear my wife calling me to breakfast, and my vision was at an end. Perhaps it may recur.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## ALL FOR TUPPENCE!

READING the Catholic press as a regular task requires that one shall become rather case-hardened and generally indifferent to the spate of lying, deceiving, mental cheating and general fooling that is carried on therein; with the result that one passes by much that seriously calls for challenge and correction.

A recent edition of the "Catholic Herald," however, proved too much for even a studied indifference to stomach without revolting, and I propose to take a little excursion into that one edition for the benefit of those who are spared the regular ordeal of wallowing in the literature of the Lord.

First, let us look at the column of a gossip writer. Having claimed the late Miss Radclyffe Hall as a faithful and exemplary Catholic (without mentioning by name her banned book, "Well of Loneliness") this writer goes on to quote the following statement made by a "close friend of Radclyffe Hall":—

"She died after six months of suffering, enduring with a true Christian resignation such as I think few could emulate. At the time when she fell ill she said to me, 'You know this is probably a cancer, and if it is, it is God's will, and must not only be accepted, but welcomed.'"

I do not know whether the "friend's" statement is correct, of course, or whether it is one of those fanciful pieces of work with which we are all familiar; but it seems quite clear that it was printed and offered to Catholics as an example of personal religious philosophy.

Now, to suggest that a cancer is God's will, and must not only be accepted, but welcomed, may be the act of a religious mind, saddened by and resigned to a serious illness. The only test of the sincerity of such a statement would be to know whether or not a doctor was used in an effort to overcome God's will. At any rate, we could do no more than sympathise with the sufferer who made such a statement.

But what are we to think of a newspaper that approves such an idea by printing the statement for public consumption? Such a statement not only stamps the god concerned with the mark of viciousness and immorality, if not actual homicide, but it also stamps those who approve it with the mark of the primeval savage, who knew nothing of the relationships between human beings and disease, and whose ignorance was only equalled by his belief in the monstrosity of his god.

Cancer must be welcomed—Glory be to God!

Elsewhere in the same issue a reporter graciously informs us that this country is a democracy, and that Catholics have a grievance against the Government in regard to religious education. He means, of course, religion in schools, but we will let that pass. He writes:—

"The country, which has heard only the Government's point of view about this matter on the B.B.C., is entitled to hear the other side. Let the B.B.C. act democratically; let the people hear what Catholics have to say, too."

Splendid! Except that he is wrong on one essential point—though perhaps Catholics wouldn't know. He refers to "the other side" as though there were only two sides to the question.

But there are at least three, one of them being the Secular side. As the reporter is a true democrat, and as Catholics love democracy (just now), may we hopefully await the reporter's correcting paragraph, pointing out to his readers the existence of the Secular viewpoint, together with a further democratic demand that this, also, shall be heard on the B.B.C.?

Yes, we may hope; and no doubt we shall continue to hope, for this will be one of the distorted religious "truths" that must usually be passed by.

On another page we find that Catholic Bishop Marshall, of Salford, during the recent Manchester demonstration concerning "our schools," declared that "every conscientious non-Catholic teacher must know that he is not a fit person to teach our Catholic way of life."

Very well, Bishop Marshall, have it that way if you like. But it is a two-edged argument. By the same token no Catholic teacher can be a fit person to teach the non-Catholic way of life, and if you are thoroughly honest in this pronouncement of yours you will go ahead and persuade the Hierarchy that instructions must be given to all Catholics, who are teachers in non-Catholic schools that they must resign forthwith. But perhaps this was only another piece of Catholic "kiddem," unsupported, as usual, by any consistent social application of the so-called principle involved.

Picking out the prize lie of this issue of the "Catholic Herald," we again find Bishop Marshall in the news, with another statement made at the same demonstration. He declared that the Catholic Church and "her schools" are the bulwark of law and order! In face of this piece of blasted impertinence, typical of the Romanist "boss" when speaking to those who dare not answer back, I am constrained to remind Bishop Marshall that the Catholic Church, and "her schools," produce by far the largest proportion of juvenile delinquents. And what is more, poverty cannot be accepted as an explanation of this fact. I am sorry, my dear Bishop, but if you insist on putting your head into the noose by making such ridiculous statements you cannot blame a Freethinker for giving the rope a hefty jerk.

Space is getting short now, but I cannot conclude without, in an effort to be fair, pointing out that at least two honest admissions were made in this issue.

H. G. Wells recently published a book, "Crux Ansata," which caused a furore in Catholic circles. Wells, in this issue, replies to attacks made upon him by various Catholic writers, and the Editor courteously affords him space, and equally courteously replies to Wells's points. I say he replies to them, which does not necessarily mean that he answers them. But in his reply, the Editor gives away some information that, prima facie, damns the Catholic religion out of hand.

"The average Catholic," he writes, "is far more worried about himself because it is his business to be worried about himself, whereas the soul of his neighbour is not his business, but his neighbour's. But he is always ready to give any help, by prayer or advice, to ensure that his neighbour—of whom God alone is judge—does save his soul."

Now the cat is out of the bag. The average Catholic is far more worried about himself! What a personal foundation for a social and moral creed! And as for being ready to help his neighbour to save his soul, methinks I have read somewhere or some of the methods by which the Church itself sought to save the souls of neighbours. Same old Church, same old philosophy—but different days, thank God!

The other honest admission by the Editor was that H. G. Wells got a reception in the "Catholic Herald" that "fell short of Christian charity." Well, it was decent of the Editor to admit this; but it all goes to show that there is no such thing as Christian charity when the real Christians (the Hounds of Heaven) are on the track of the heretic—even one so moderate as H. G. Wells.

F. J. CORINA.

## ACID DROPS

WE assume it was a printer's error which led a recent number of the "Soviet War News" to announce that, in the presence of the Archbishop of York, the Patriarch of the Russian Church asked his congregation to "pay" for him. We have a suspicion that the word should have been "pray," but one can never be certain in such matters.

The Roman Catholic Church is working as hard as it can on its latest miracle, the Fatima fraud, which we exposed some time back in these columns. The "Catholic Herald" boasts it as having the sanction of the Pope, and gives as "evidence" that "Our Lady" appeared to three young children, and after several reappearances before a multitude of people. As proof of the genuineness of the miracle, "the sun began to spin round just like a wheel of fire, casting in every direction like a gigantic magic lantern. . . . For four minutes the sun stood still, and then performed for a third time the same whirling dance in a fairy-like maze of light."

And our astronomers have made no record of it. They do not appear to have seen any disturbance of the solar system. But the Pope has sanctified it and no Roman Catholic dare say it nay. That seems to justify Mr. Butler doing all he can to see that the Roman Catholics have their way with children. Perhaps "Our Lady" has appeared to him and other members of the Cabinet. That would justify a Government—which cannot even consider the nationalisation of mines before a new election—finishing their deal with the Churches and the schools before they leave office.

This is Christianity up to date as presented by an answer by an expert in the "Catholic Herald" for October 29: "The Church teaches that the first three chapters of Genesis contain real history about the origin of the visible universe. . . . It also believes in the formation of the first woman from the first man." That settles a much-discussed question. The rib theory still holds the ground—in the Roman Catholic Church. Other things that the Catholic Church believes, and other Christian Churches believed until very recent times, will be found in our latest publication, "Christianity: What is it?"

An example of the brotherhood established by Christianity comes from Edinburgh. Sir William Darling, the Lord Provost, decided to officially attend Pontifical High Mass with attendant magistrates and councillors. The procession was met from the public with cheers from some and "No Popery" from others. There was much disturbance, and the sacred Sunday air was laden with undecorous remarks and behaviour. There is nothing like Christianity for bringing Christians together. What follows often depends upon the police.

But, to be candid, Sir William Darling deserved all he got. He was appointed to his post not for his religion, but for other reasons—at least, we hope that was the case. Having got the post, it was a gross betrayal of his trust to use it for other purposes; as dishonest as it is for a man to take money given to him to hand to a hospital fund and spending it for his own benefit. Of course, Sir William is not alone in behaving as he did. It is a common practice all over the country. Here and there a non-Christian refuses to lend himself to take part in a performance that has no legal standing with his office, but few are able to resist the corroding influence of being a public official. There are, indeed, very few who can resist; and we see the results in the fact that from Parliament down to a village council complete honesty is the last consideration.

If there is one party that is uneasy at the closer relations between England, America and Russia, it is the Roman Catholic Church. The Rev. J. C. Heenan, one of its spokesmen, in a couple of articles in the "Universe" (we intend dealing with them later), says: "The plain fact is that the Vatican does not trust the Kremlin." The world hardly needed that information, for no organisation worked harder than the Roman Catholic Church to keep Russia isolated. The influence of the Vatican may thus be counted as one of the factors that

made for the world war. And we must still reckon on it doing what it can, both directly and through its agents in this country and the U.S.A., to poison the relationship with Russia that has been established, so far it can be done.

We quite agree with the plea of Mr. H. Tremeer, Headmaster of Exeter Episcopal School. He argues that if we have specialists in science and other subjects in the schools, why not have a specialist in religion. That would be sound reasoning if Mr. Tremeer meant what he says. But that is not the case. When he says "religion" he means the Christian religion; and when he says the "Christian religion" he means that branch of the Christian religion in which he believes; whereas a specialist would mean an anthropologist who is able to instruct his pupils in the rise of religion in the mind of primitive man and the misinterpretation of natural phenomena that led to these beliefs, and the numerous developments and attempts to reconcile religion to the facts. That would be a consummation greatly to be wished, but there is no religious teacher in any school who would dare to tell the truth to his pupils. If he did he would get the sack.

We are not at all annoyed when the B.B.C. preachers give us fairy tales as facts and lie with a gravity worthy of a Roman Catholic priest banishing an evil spirit from a man after he has confessed his sins. But there are times when we feel we should enjoy horsewhipping the one who figures in the B.B.C. Children's Hour and tells them the more ridiculous miracles in the New Testament—such as the miracle of the loaves and fishes—exaggerated rather than clipped, and with the assurance that they are absolutely true. For this man presumes that he is talking to children; and no man can, in our judgment, do to a child in that situation without deserving a thrashing.

For example, on one evening he chipped in to tell the children the meaning of "the cross." He informed his listeners that the cross was an instrument for the punishment of Roman prisoners. And that was a deliberate lie, since there is not a man living with any knowledge of Bible symbols or origins who is not aware that the cross was a religious symbol centuries and centuries before the Christian era. We think that, in the interests of decency, he should retain his foolish lies for adults. To lie to children in that way is to break the bounds of all that is decent.

Christians in India are but a handful in relation to the whole of the population, but the native gods not having saved parts of India from starvation, the British god—to be correct, the god that officially represents all the English people who believe in him—is to have another day of prayer thrown at him to save the Hindoos from starvation. We must expect this kind of tomfoolery to be kept going just so long as people are stupid enough not to realise that these periodical famines are always more or less artificial. The evil is many-sided in its manifestation, but there is no question that the major part of it is preventable. One piece of evidence in support of this is the raising of funds to provide food. Starving people cannot eat the money; they can only use the food that money will buy. But the food exists. If people will reflect on that simple fact—that the food must be somewhere or the money would be of no use—common sense and a more effective humanity might get into operation.

The Secretary of the Church Social Union, Rev. P. McLaughlan, is not satisfied with the state of affairs. He laments that much which goes under "the name of Christian Social Action" is doubtfully moral and hardly Christian." Mr. McLaughlan must be very simple-minded to speak in this manner. He should know that if what is given to people was a really sound ethic they would naturally wonder what was the need of Christianity. And if men can be saved only by Jesus Christ, what is the need of ethics as an independent factor? The preacher concludes that the Churches must rest on "the faithful few." Perhaps a better way to put it—certainly a more accurate one—is that Christianity must rest on the faithful fools and the more wideawake ones who exploit them.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

**RADFORD.**—Thanks for letter. There is nothing new in "very advanced" people and papers fighting shy of a direct attack on the religious strongholds. The greater the need for a paper such as "The Freethinker." It is the only paper of its kind in this country.

**SEY.**—Thanks for cutting. We dealt with Dr. Singer's "The Christian Failure" some weeks ago. It is a very good bit of work.

**M. S.**—We are always pleased to have newspaper items sent us, even when not immediately used.

**S. H.** Thanks. A little out of our line, but will get it in soon. But we are very full up just now.

**N. PEATE.**—We have no figures by us of how many children are baptised. We doubt if any reliable figures exist.

**H. GILMORE.**—Thanks for letter. It is good to keep an eye on the manoeuvres of the enemy.

**STEWART (E.10).**—We have taken up the matter with your wholesalers; kindly report if the service does not improve.

*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

HERE is something worth noting from the "New Statesman":

"Do we want the new system of universal secondary education from 11 plus to grow up largely on denominational lines, or do we want most of the modern schools . . . to be built and owned by the public? If we want the latter, we must not make it too easy for the Catholics, or for anyone else, to build new denominational secondary schools at the public expense. It will be much easier to insist on high standards if the great majority of these schools are publicly owned; and high standards will of themselves do something to mitigate denominational zeal. If we must make concessions to the denominations, let us make them fairly between sect and sect; but let us not make them too generous or we shall have our new secondary system torn fatally asunder by religious fanaticism."

We admit there is something to be said on behalf of this view, but it is that of making the best of terms with a victorious enemy. But the position is not that; nor can it be proved to be that, short of a General Election with the educational question one that is placed before the general public. At present what we have is a Tory Government, the life of which has been prolonged to win the war, and which is taking advantage of its position—after semi-private conversations with different religious sects—to rush an Education Bill through before a new Parliament is elected because it knows it is highly probable that the plan of placing the Churches in control of the schools would be condemned. It is an insult to the word "democracy," which

dribbles from the mouths of the heads of the Government with a persistence that invites a real democrat to find another name that has been less abused.

Two new pamphlets issued by the Rationalist Association and Sunday Freedom League (315, Victoria Arcade Buildings, Shortland Street, Auckland, New Zealand) have just reached us. Both are full of meat. The first is "Free Speech Challenged: A Review of the Professor Anderson Case," by James O. Hanlon. This deals with the intolerance displayed towards Professor Anderson (Australia) for his comments on adults teaching children as true that "which the majority of educated adults know full well to be false. We reviewed this case in "The Freethinker" some time ago, and all that need be said is that it is a document and an indictment that should take a place in the history of Freethought. Intolerance is not confined to Fascism. Perhaps all that need be said is that Fascism indulges in intolerance on principle, whereas others manifest the same quality in the name of "Christ and him Conquered."

The second pamphlet is cast in a different mould and is written by Mr. M. B. Gittos. His pamphlet takes a wider scope; its title, "Is Progress Possible?" and carries the sub-title "An Examination of the Claims of Christianity." The only fault we have to find with Mr. Gittos's essay is that he has crammed so much in a comparatively small space. But it is full of meat, and would serve well for a "brains trust" as subjects for discussion. Religion, politics, morals: all are brought under review, and just the right amount is said to awaken interest and invite discussion, while suggesting the right kind of answers to the questions that are raised. We congratulate Mr. Gittos on his pamphlet. The price of each of these pamphlets is sixpence.

The law concerning an affirmation wherever an oath is usually required is quite plain. Anyone may insist on his legal rights in this matter in a Court of any description, or in any of the armed Services. A very large number of men and women have availed themselves of an affirmation, which may be on the ground of having no religion or of having a conscientious objection to taking an oath. Any further questioning is quite out of order.

It is curious, however, that the attempts to frustrate this law should turn up in so many cases when men join the Army, the Air Force or the Navy. The worst offenders in this matter are found in the Navy. A great many cases have been set right in these Services when proper complaints are made to the National Secular Society. Here is a case that reached us the other day. A young man is rated as an engine-room mechanic. He refrained from joining in a religious service, and an officer said that he had never heard of a man not attending a religious service and he would have to go. But the man was firm in his refusal, and he tells us he finished the morning doing some washing; Whether the washing was his own or a kind of penalty inflicted by the officer we do not know. But it is disgraceful that any kind of pressure should be brought on men for acting up to their legal rights. We may say, in passing, that we have never heard of any of the chaplains attached to the Services raising an objection to men or women being forced to attend a service or protesting against a man being robbed of his legal rights.

We were pleased to see in the Hanley "Evening Sentinel" a well-written and able letter by Mr. J. H. Charles, Secretary of the North Staffordshire Branch of the National Secular Society, in reply to Roman Catholics who are advocating the drenching of the State schools with Christian religious doctrines. The letter had that force and dignity which should have some effect on those who, when they speak in praise of democracy and fair dealing, really mean what they say. The local branch of the N.S.S. is doing some very useful work.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch has just concluded one of the most successful open-air seasons in the history of the branch. Regular meetings have been held throughout the season, and the local secretary, Mr. J. W. Barker, never lacks energy and enthusiasm where Freethought is concerned. We are confident he has given much towards the success of the season just closed.

## FIFTY MILLION BOOKS

THE other day, Mr. F. Grisewood introduced to the microphone of the B.B.C. one of the gentlemen responsible for the collection of millions of books in the Government's great salvage drive for paper. I have no doubt whatever that the paper shortage is extremely grave, and that some such drive was necessary; and as far as it went, both the collectors and the public must be congratulated on its tremendous success.

For it certainly was a tremendous success. The mind can hardly grasp what such a huge number as 50,000,000 books mean, and the pulp resulting from the salvage will, I am sure, be of the greatest value to our armament factories. But listening to the two speakers, I could not help feeling sad at the destruction of so many books—and, indeed, rather surprised that the sadness was not seemingly shared by their triumphant collector.

To be strictly just, not all the 50,000,000 went to be pulped. About 1,500,000 went to a number of blitzed libraries, and over 8,000,000 to the troops. But 40,000,000 at least were destroyed.

We were told of the way in which the books had been collected, and the hard work some 50,000 helpers put in to sort out which were the valueless ones; and here again I could not help wondering what were the qualifications for such a task which these people possessed.

One does not know all about the value of books merely because one has gone through a course of English literature at school. You must live with books, select and buy them yourself, take as much joy in those marvels of book knowledge, second-hand booksellers' catalogues, as you do in handling each precious volume, before you can call yourself a book-lover, or know when a book is so valueless as to be fit only for pulping.

How many of the estimable ladies and gentlemen who—perhaps cheerfully—condemned so many millions of books ever made a point of studying bibliographical works? Of course, I here exclude the number of librarians who ungrudgingly gave their services, but I cannot help but think that among the 40,000,000 books there must have been thousands—I mean thousands—of very rare items known only to those who have studied the wide and almost limitless pathway of literature with loving care and fidelity.

In my own district there was a shop begging for all the books we could spare, and among those in the window were what appeared to me to be rare works on botany illustrated with wonderful coloured reproductions of flowers, whole sets of standard authors like Marryat, and a number of volumes of the Cambridge History of English Literature. Near by were some large shells with the caption: "These books will make this number of shells." I pass this shop now without having the heart to look in again.

Those 40,000,000 books intrigue me. I find it difficult to believe that they were all so bad as to have been rightly condemned.

What were they? There must have been millions of old and dirty school books; old directories and out-of-date furniture catalogues; cheap, badly-printed old novels with their paper backs long ago lost, as well as huge numbers of the kind of goody-goody Christian novelettes so beloved of our grandparents—you know the kind I mean. They were written by Protestant ladies—by A. L. O. E., "Pansy," Emma Jane Worboise, Hestia Stretton, Mrs. Sherwood and many other once well-known names, and their whole objective was to bring you to Christ with harrowing stories of what *would* happen to you, what *did* happen to you, if you rejected his Divine Love. I cannot shed a tear at their loss, though I, for one, must admit that as far as they went, many were well written and must have given great happiness to thousands of people.

Perhaps the books contained many old "juvenile" works.

These would become, in the nature of things, exceptionally rare, for children were never respecters of books—or, at least, very rarely. Children's books of long ago are in their way fascinating, and all the more so because of their extreme rarity. A first edition of say "Robinson Crusoe," or "Gulliver's Travels," or the "Swiss Family Robinson," or some of the productions of those famous 18th century old booksellers, the Newberrys, are literally worth their weight in gold. As an example of the scarcity of old children's books let me cite the once famous story, attributed to Oliver Goldsmith, "Goody Two Shoes," of which no first or second edition copies exist. The fourth edition (1767), with a copy of the first American edition (1787) were recently valued at more than £1,000. How many of such rarities were found in the 50,000,000 salvage collection I do not know. Possibly none at all; possibly they or similar ones were spotted by some of the better informed librarians, and rescued. But I am pretty certain few of the other 50,000 helpers have made any intense study of such rare "juvenile" items in the book-collecting world.

How have some of the minor Victorian novelists fared? Would Charles Reade be sent to be pulped, or Whyte-Melville, or Henry Kingsley? What would happen to such a book as "Tough Yarns," by "The Old Sailor," that is, by Matthew Henry Barker? Would J. F. Smith, or G. W. M. Reynolds be reprieved? Would old volumes of the "Family Herald" or the "London Journal" be pitilessly condemned? I expect they have all gone, for 40,000,000 books take some gathering together.

I regret this slaughter of our old, even if second-rate literature. If Charles Reade's "Griffith Gaunt" does not quite equal "David Copperfield" it is nevertheless a fine novel, and I tremble to think that one day it may be quite unprocurable; and that goes for dozens of other almost forgotten books by our "minor" novelists.

Even that bugbear of the booksellers, the theological work, was often the product of great, if misapplied, scholarship. Perhaps they are best out of the way, and perhaps it is with them that the selectors have been ruthless.

As for the books destined for the Army, I cannot help recollecting what happened to those sent to the unit I was with in the last war. We had about 100 of what was then called the "Camp Library," and my mouth watered when I caught a glimpse of the titles. There were first editions of Lever, G. P. R. James and Hawthorne, and I revelled in what I could borrow for a few weeks. When the camp was struck I asked what was going to happen to the books, and with a grin the Q.M.S. said they were all going to the incinerator. I was unable to save a single one. Needless to say, the only reading that Q.M.S. ever indulged in was Army Orders.

There is to be another intensive drive for 50,000,000 books. I hope that Freethinkers, however intensely patriotic they are, will think twice before sending any Freethought books to the troops. Those "in authority" may hate other things, but nothing more than the works of such people as Foote, Bradlaugh or Ingersoll. We know what their fate would be.

The necessity for destroying so many books must be great, but how terrible to think it has to be. The slaughter of men, women and children, the ruthless destruction of towns and historical monuments, and now that of our books—is there a fouler scourge than war?

H. CUTNER.

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## ROMAN CATHOLICS AND EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

MR. R. H. BUTLER'S White Paper on the future of education in this country has now been in circulation long enough to show who are its enemies. The noisiest and most vehement are, of course, the Catholics, who are now organising a series of meetings in all centres where there is any Catholic population, and who are passing a carefully prepared resolution, identical in working, at all these meetings, and most obviously edited and supplied by some higher authority. These meetings all follow the same pattern; there is the same talk of injustice to the Catholic Faith, the financial penalties imposed on the Catholic population; and the White Paper is denounced as an attempt to wipe out the Catholic schools. Let us examine these objections. First, that the White Paper is unjust to the Catholic fraternity. The Catholics provide their own buildings to teach their own faith, and further, what is important, to secure the right to appoint their own teaching staff. The salaries of the staff, along with the whole cost of the provision of educational supplies, falls on the ratepayers in general, be they Catholics or no. Five-sevenths of the running expenses (lighting, heating, etc.) are also provided out of the ordinary ratepayer. So that, apart from the provision of the actual building, the general citizen finds all the cost and has no say in the appointment of the staff. If he happens to be a non-Catholic teacher, he need not waste his time in applying for a post in a Catholic school.

Next, the Catholic cry of financial penalty. Actually the proposals in the White paper are more generous to the Catholic community than what is now provided. Under the new proposals the Government undertakes to provide 50 per cent. of funds for new buildings or the re-building of old schools to bring them up to present-day standards. How does this generosity square with the story of the Government trying to wipe out the Catholic schools? Actually, Mr. Butler has probably gone further in this direction than the majority of his countrymen would go.

Now notice the wily attitude adopted by the Catholics in order to secure some measure of support from non-Catholics. They, with unctuous acclamation, assent that every faith should be allowed to teach its own doctrines in its own fashion in schools provided out of public funds. What a glorious educational system we should have if all the several scores of religious bodies

(Continued on next page)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FOOD

Sir,—Your correspondent R. B. Kerr has a superficial outlook. He is merely accepting things as they are allowed to exist.

I maintain that man has science enough to counter-balance natural famine on the one hand and to properly distribute nature's products on the other.

R. B. Kerr's information on agriculture, etc., is obsolete. For several years in the U.S.S.R. the crossing of wheat with a couch-grass has, in some areas, produced a perennial wheat. Also, in the Soviet Union artificial insemination with cattle has been used for years, the serum being transported by air to remote areas, thus producing herds where it was impossible before owing to lack of sires.

The earth can be made to produce enough. Steamships, railways, refrigerators, etc., are the scientific devices which make proper distribution possible; but profit-making being given priority, their real use is lost.

Would-be economists always play on production, but it is real-distribution which is the cause of want in this age.

Refrigerator-equipped cargo vessels could solve the milk shortage in any zone, but vested interests in the frozen meat trade need such ships. Milk would not be profitable cargo.

It is quite wrong to base one's deductions on what is consumed. People only consume what they can afford to consume. During the slump years in Britain, for instance, bootless children of Northampton boot operatives could gaze into the boot-filled window of a big store. The plenty was there. Where was the freedom to enjoy it?

The fact, as your correspondent quotes, that Britain is the only country wealthy enough to buy unlimited quantities exposes to the full the idiocy of the social system and the root cause of war.—Yours, etc.,

G. L. C.

### RANCOUR

Sir.—In Vol. No. 2000 of the Tauchnitz Collection of English Literature, published in 1881 and written by Henry Morley, Professor of English Literature, appears the following comment: "Robert Chambers would have been made Lord Provost of Edinburgh in 1848 if rancorous feeling had not been stirred against the supposed author of a work inconsistent with a literal faith in the Book of Genesis." Robert Chambers, with his brother William, founded the firm of W. and R. Chambers.

What was the work to which reference is made?—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

[The writer referred to is Robert Chambers. The book referred to is "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation," published in 1844. But before this a series of articles in the *Atheistic Oracle of Reason*, edited by Charles Southwell under the title "Theory of Natural Gradation," gave a complete evolutionary outline of animal development. This was in 1842.—EDITOR.]

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## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: A Lecture.

### 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.: "On Intellectuals."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute, Bradford).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. E. LAWABT: "Venereal Disease."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK: "Freethought, Religion and Politics."

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Cafe, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

## ROMAN CATHOLICS AND EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

(Continued from previous page)

in this country should each have its own type of school taught by teachers of its own particular (and often peculiar) faith, and all provided out of the simple taxpayer, who would only have the simple job of "shelling out" without the worry of seeing how the money was spent. What a bedlam there would be! But let us beware, our Catholic fraternity is in deadly earnest. In spite of their platitudinous welcome of the educational sections of the White Paper, they are out to their get their wishes or to wreck any chance of a Bill. Actually they care very little about the educational provisions, and they are busy now with their destructive tactics. They have friends in high places—the same people who organised the wonderful non-intervention plan in the Spanish War—and unless we bestir ourselves we shall be beaten. Democracy in Britain will suffer under the dictatorial bullying of the Hierarchy of the Catholic Church if we are too lazy to assert our wishes. It is not generally known that the Catholic is forbidden ever to set foot in any other place of worship. In Keighley the Catholic Army Cadets are not allowed to attend for training at the Alice Street Centre because this was once a Non-Conformist chapel. They are told not to attend dances in a church or chapel Sunday school. This is religion gone sour.

Let Mr. Butler cut the whole controversy by the simple solution of making all education secular. The Board of Education should take over all necessary school buildings and proceed with its plans for organisation. Control and finance would in this case be simplified. It is generally agreed that if the secular solution were adopted two-thirds of the present school buildings only would be needed; the resulting saving could be used in the building of new schools and the re-building of old and out-of-date premises. Those parents desirous of having their children taught in any particular faith could send them outside the secular time-table—to buildings and teachers provided by the sect concerned. This scheme would be a test both of the Catholics' enthusiasms for their own faith and of the priests who desire to show their own zeal, instead of allowing a Government-paid staff to do it for them.

A second enemy to the White Paper proposals, not perhaps as vociferous as the Catholics but certainly as dangerous in Parliamentary lobbying are certain representatives of the small urban areas (known in administrative circles as Part III. authorities). These Part III. authorities have now the control of primary education in their own areas, but post-primary (i.e., secondary and technical) education is under the control of the bigger county authorities. These small bodies have become thoroughly alarmed, and are putting forward the plea that local education must be under local authority. Under the county, they say, the authority will be too far away, too unapproachable, and too unsympathetic to local conditions. These objections, until analysed, sound pretty genuine. Actually, of course, one finds that these petty local authorities have neither the financial backing nor the administrative experience to cope with modern educational developments.

Generally speaking, the populations of these areas are too small to allow of adequate encouragement of educational reforms, and their politics savour to it much of the parish pump to make their committee first-class educationists, such as are needed at the present time. My own experience as a councillor, first in a rural district where primary education was under the county authority, and later in a Part III. area, has proved to me that there is nothing in the arguments put forward by the protagonists of the Part III. areas. Indeed, from the school point of view, I have been told by more than one headmaster that the schools they serve in were much better administered under the county

authority than ever they have been under the Part III. Committee of which they now form a part.

So I would ask all parents, and indeed all who have genuine interest in the development of sound educational methods: Do you want a progressive, equitable advance, or are you content to see all your ambitions in this field wrecked? The wreckers are busy; it is up to the taxpayer in general to say: "Hands off! We want the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill."

HERMANN CLARK SHACKLETON.

(A member of Keighley Borough Education Committee.)

## THE CHARM OF WAR

OF all the great moral movements the one that seems most plainly doomed to failure is that which looks to the abolition of food blockades in war time. The idea behind it is that such blockades bear cruelly upon innocent women and children, and are thus immoral and against God. But the plain fact is that they give much more pleasure to the common run of patriots than any other device of war, and so there is not much chance that they will ever be abolished. Certainly no one can forget the thrill which ran through the United States after the last war, when the post-bellum blockade was clapped on Germany, and news began to come out that millions of children were coming down with rickets and hundreds of thousands of helpless old people were starving to death. It was the most inspiring subject that Christian pastors had encountered in years, and they did not let it go to waste. Their sermons deserved to be exhumed and reprinted. In no other literature that I know of is there a more eloquent exposition of the moral jurisprudence of Yahweh.

So after the Civil War. The war itself was a poor show for the North. The enemy, instead of being 3,000 miles away, was directly at the door, and often showed signs of breaking in. After Gettysburg there was a frantic peace movement, and if the opportune fall of Vicksburg had not abated the general alarm, it would have succeeded. But once the war was over and Reconstruction was under way, the whole country above the Potomac settled down to enjoy itself. There has probably never been a happier time in the history of American patriotism. Day by day, as news poured in of the appalling sufferings of the South, the North gave itself over to gaudy gloating and rejoicing. Johnson, because he tried to halt the saturnalia of outrage and oppression, came near being heaved out of the Presidency; Grant, because he first yielded to it and then joined in it, was rewarded with two terms. And, as always, the clergy roared for more confiscations, more attainders, more blood.

To the psychologist, if psychology had been invented in that innocent day, there would have been nothing mysterious in all this. It was, indeed, no more than a fresh proof of the obvious fact that human beings are not naturally humane—that they take a keen delight in cruelty whenever it seems to be safe. Those whose delight is the greatest are simply those whose suppressions have been the most onerous. That explains, on the one hand, why soldiers, after the first few months of war, are seldom cruel, and on the other hand, why the Christian clergy, doomed to preach from such texts as John xv. 12, day in and day out, cut loose with such ghastly ferocity whenever patriotism liberates them. It explains, too, why such a people as the Americans, who labor under extraordinary inhibitions in normal times, surpass all other peoples in frenzy when the band begins to play.

H. L. MENCKEN.

(From "American Mercury," 1930)