

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### In Defence of Christianity

A FEW figures repeated for a special purpose. The population of Russia is placed at about 200,000,000; that of China over 400,000,000; that of Turkey, say, 35,000,000. That gives us a total of nearly 700,000,000 people with no religion in their national constitution. I might include France, but she is in exile for the time being; and when things settle, and the Roman Church has its way, she may replace a god in its constitution. So, also, I might annex the United States, for actually they also are without a god in their constitution. But we will let it rest in the fact that these 700,000,000 get along, constitutionally, without a god. As national entities, they do not say that they must have a god of some sort if they are to get anywhere in particular and achieve a degree of individual or collective decency. They claim that social and individual qualities may reach a high level without a god. They say, constitutionally, that whether a man has one god or three that are merged into one, or half a dozen gods collected as the hunter of rarities runs down a scarce "item," is entirely an individual matter of taste and judgment. And with that, if we may use an American phrase, "the case rests."

Per contra, we have the claim, repeated by an every morning broadcast and emphasised every night before bedtime, the lesson that we inhabitants of Britain must have a god. Other people may be strong enough and good enough to get along without divine help, but England must have supernatural help if we are to be what we ought to be. Without God we can do nothing; with God we can accomplish anything.

It is noticeable that it is not a particular kind of a god that is required nowadays. The insistence is that man must have a god of some sort; and there are certainly enough gods in the world to meet every variety of taste. So numerous are these gods that every mosque, synagogue, church or tabernacle might well put outside their building the notice, "If you haven't got the kind of god that satisfies you, stop and see what we have." Taking a bird's eye view of the situation, there seem enough variety of gods in existence to gratify the most wayward of tastes. Gods are as plentiful as blackberries in autumn—and just as prickly to handle. But as is the case with many prickly things, handle them with firmness and understanding and they cease to sting.

If there are always doubts as to the right kind of god to have, there are equal difficulties in finding out what the gods do. In the case of this country the old historical weather-controlling, plague-sending, miracle-working, thunder-and-lightning god appears to have gone completely out of fashion. Just before the present war, God's representatives on earth seemed quite sure that God would look

after "us"; but with the fall of France, America—which is without a God in its constitution—and, worst of all, Russia, the Government of which had deliberately tried to banish God altogether, became our allies. There could be no longer a pretence that complete dependence upon God was possible or reasonable. The British God had to be kept in the background, and it was plain that the chief dependence was being placed upon guns, aeroplanes, submarines and the fighting strength of the armed Forces. Even the British Sunday, which had been set aside for the worship of God, had to be cancelled to the extent of having Sunday labour and Sunday entertainments. Finally, the Common Law provided that anyone who wished to do so could legally dispense with the religious oath. A good Christian might still use the "G help me God" formula, but any who wished to dispense with God could do so. God has retired as an essential part of the picture. In action, God is being set aside.

### Man and God

To come back to man's alleged dependence upon God and the need for that dependence to be kept constantly before the public. As an Englishman, I do not believe in the theory, and I resent the implied insult to our manhood and womanhood. I believe it is a slander on the youth of the country. If the Russians, the Chinese, the Turks and many other human groups all over the world can get along without God, why cannot we also remove this slander on our youth, our men and our women? I do not believe that the British people are inferior to any people. They have their differences. There are differences with one group of people against other groups; but when we put aside these differences and come down to the fundamental quality of the human needs of each group—the Greeks, the Russians, the Chinese, the British and the Americans—the likeness is one that brings together Mrs. O'Grady and the Colonel's lady. Human vices and human virtues differ only in their forms of expression. I have before now met with Freethinkers so foolish that I have marvelled they ever left the Church, and I have found Christians to be so sensible in general matters, and so decent in their behaviour, that I have wondered that they ever belonged to one.

I find also that human nature is not nearly so bad and so weak that it requires supernatural help to be good neighbours, good citizens and good friends. Consider! Right and left, back and front of where I reside there are people the vast majority of whom I suspect to be believers in a god or do not bother about one. Now I have a habit—a mild one—of going out and either leaving the key on the outside of the door or leaving the door open; but in all cases someone has been good enough to save the key until I returned, or has shut the door—and favoured me with some good advice which I sooner or later ignore. I think that specimen of decent neighbourly feeling is common with the British people, as with the people of

other countries, and I am quite certain that it has nothing at all to do with the belief in God. It is part and parcel of the social instincts of mankind. If it were not so we should require a much larger police force than we have. More than that, we should require a policeman to watch every house, a detective to watch every policeman, and so on, stage by stage, until we reached the Prime Minister: and we should have to depend upon his account to be settled by a guard of citizens, and so complete the circle. The Christian theory of man's dependence upon God is the greatest insult that can be offered to human nature. Man is not all he ought to be—not even all he might be—but he is certainly not the helpless, foolish thing that Church teaching would have him be.

### Atheists and Christians

Now, I would beg any Christian reader I may have please to bear in mind that I am not arguing that Freethinkers are better than Christians or that Christians are worse than Freethinkers. I am really putting in a plea for the equality of human nature. By that I do not mean that man is fundamentally good or that he is fundamentally bad. This last theory was once very common with Christians; but neither theory is of any scientific value. The theory that human nature is essentially good was, historically, a reaction to the Christian theory that human nature is essentially and naturally bad; and both are wrong. The truth here is that the essential quality of human nature lies in its plasticity. As we have always insisted, the important feature of the Russian Revolution—and, it may be added, of the development of Nazism in Germany—is not what has been done, but the fact that it should have been done in so short a space of time. The quality of the change in each case is beside the point; it is, in fact, irrelevant. The important fact is the demonstration that the direction of human development is dependent upon the social environment. The use we make of that fact is a matter of wisdom. Russia has used it in one direction, Germany in another; and our leaders have made a hash of things by a perpetual clinging to the Christian teaching that man is a poor helpless thing, unable to save himself but by a perpetual grovel before an imaginary deity. A Christian preaches the littleness of man, where I am insisting upon his potential greatness. He is preaching that man cannot of himself achieve anything superior to the animal world, where I am insisting that, despite man's blunders and evil doings, yet all that is great and admirable in our nature is due to the accumulation of human knowledge applied to human betterment. The Christian builds on the irremovable littleness of man and insists upon a perpetual grovel to a God whose ancestry leads us straight back to the ignorance of primitive humanity.

I would quite seriously point out that my main theme in what has been said is not that Atheists are better humans than Christians. I am insisting only that a Christian may be as good as an Atheist if he will cease to grovel before an imaginary God and exert whatever intelligence he possesses. I insist that if a Freethinker can be a good citizen without supernatural assistance so can the Christian. I do not like a thesis which holds that Atheists are made of superior stuff and that Christians must always be under the surveillance of a heavenly policeman. I do not even believe that sound social laws

are responsible for good citizens. My thesis is that good laws are the products of good men and women.

In order to clear away all confusion, it should be said that I am not setting forth a plea for the essential goodness of man. That theory was a product of the reaction to the Christian theory of the essential badness of humanity. My plea is that, as a mere human, man is neither good nor bad. He may be one or the other; but, pathological and atavistic specimens aside, human nature is plastic, and its reactions are determined by the social structure to which he belongs.

A final, semi-irrelevant consideration. When I came into the Freethought movement the beloved Christian theory of the "wicked Atheist" was prominent. It was the Indian summer period of real Christianity in its relation to unbelief. The Darwinian dawn was only 30 years old, and the framing of a scientific theory of anthropology was hardly 20 years behind me. Christians were still being fed by their leaders with thrilling stories of the wickedness of Atheism and Atheists, and death-bed repentances were going strong. The wicked Atheist was then a very valuable asset in all Christian campaigns. The rank and file of the Christian world shuddered at the sight of an Atheist, but the leaders—in secret—loved him. He was their great fall-back. He was a gift from God even though he arrived via Satan.

But we are now over 80 years after Darwin and 70 years after Tylor. We know the origin and history of man. More, we know the origin and the history of the gods. Atheists are now as common as leaves in autumn, even though many may still shrink from so honourable and so honest a term. Is it not time that the implied insult to decent men and women in the teaching that we cannot achieve our best without the help of some kind of a god be dropped? Surely, if the Atheist can lead a useful life without a god the Christian may also reach the same point with equal profit? Christians for long enough held that Atheists were worse than they appeared to be. With greater civility—and, I am sure, with greater common sense—I return good for evil by saying that Christians are made of better fundamental stuff than they appear to realise.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### PAUL PRYS AND PICCADILLY

SINCE the Radio Doctor and the Radio Padre discovered a place in London called Piccadilly, reputed to be the national headquarters of the Underworld of Sexual Vice (my phrase, but no copyright claimed, so reporters please copy), thousands of lines of pornographic piffle have been written in newspapers in this country.

I say "pornographic" because most of the stuff I have read was written with both eyes on the main chance, which, to a newspaper, is a spicy story. Following up the radio sensation with a relish for detail, imaginative as well as actual, made a spicy story, but a pornographic one just the same, for stories of sex problems that leave untouched the causes, while dabbling daringly in details, are as pornographic as any trashy novel, and are probably written for the same purpose—to excite emotion but not thought.

One bright reporter, "investigating" for his newspaper, actually saw a soldier offer a £5 note to a girl. She shook her head and walked on, we are told. Really, the black-out seems to have no difficulties for some people—although, of course, there is such a thing as "seeing with the mind's eye," isn't there?

However, some brilliant suggestions for dealing with the "vice racket" arose out of this rather sordid sensation of the Paul Prys of Piccadilly, and it is these suggestions that concern me most, for the ideas put forward for dealing with the trouble are much more alarming than the facts that were so salaciously discussed. Not only do they show a complete ignorance of the youth and sex problem, but they reflect the Christian influence that dominates the mind of those who make them.

We were breathlessly informed by more than one newspaper that clergy, doctors, social workers and even publicans were combining to deal with "the open cult of vice which is causing scandal in London and other places," and that "campaigners are urging parents to tighten up supervision at home (upon soldiers?), demanding more policewomen, legislation to ban treating, but chiefly creating a strong public opinion to put a stop to the orgy of promiscuity."

The chief proposal puzzles me somewhat. As sexual promiscuity is usually carried out in secrecy or in privacy, and certainly not under the noses of the rest of the public, I fail to see how public opinion can help.

You will also notice that more policewomen are demanded. Why not more policemen as well? Because, as always with Christian moralists, the implication is that only women are guilty of the "cult of vice." But why police at all? If the Christian moral outlook on sex questions needs police to enforce it, then it must be fundamentally wrong to start with. Are we, in this Christian country, so mentally and morally bankrupt that we have nothing better to offer than police interference in our young people's private lives, or legislation, or the closing down of this, and the banning of that?

There is but one remedy for sexual promiscuity. It is not suppression by legislation, nor persecution by the police. It is freedom; a form of freedom that has never yet been granted to young people in this country. Freedom for the first time to understand themselves as human beings, organically, biologically and psychologically. In the endeavour to secure this freedom for youth, public opinion might usefully be employed.

Our youngsters are torn from the security of their homes and families during the dangerous years of adolescence, and thrown into the war-time molting-pot created by a half-insane adult society. Left ignorant of the facts of life, so far as responsible tuition is concerned, unaware of the dangers that are companion to the pleasures of irresponsible sex behaviour, loosened up ethically by a social instability that is not of their making, some of them are bound to come "unstuck" in this great turmoil. The wonder is that there are not more of them. Then Christians sit back in pious humbug and condemn them for errors that are largely traceable to the Christian outlook on sex.

It is time to cry "Enough!" Our young people are actually better than we have tried to make them, on the whole. What failures there are, are our failures, speaking socially. If we will but remove the dead hand of our Christian past from their shoulders they will get along very well, and having pulled us out of the mess that we have made, they will make a better job of their adulthood than we have done.

So away with the dead hand of Christianity; away with the taboo on discussion of sex with the young. Away with those parsons, parents, teachers, politicians, and especially those education authorities who obstruct the introduction of sex teaching in our schools, coupled with the science of citizenship. For it is in the schools where the sex character begins to take shape. Away with those who think that the ancient superstition of Christianity can provide the moral sustenance needed for a scientific age.

Bring along those who will teach children the real facts of life—their own form of life, not merely about un sentient plants and seeds, which are no true parallel to human sex. Bring along, not those who are warped by their own past teaching and are

ashamed of the human body, but those who are proud of it, and who will teach young people to know it, to honour and respect it as something to be won by merit and love, not to be given for a fleeting moment's pleasure, fraught with danger.

This is the way to cure the "cult of vice," which is not a cult of vice at all, but a cult of ignorance, inherited from Christianity because that creed denied young people what they needed to know.

F. J. CORINA.

[Editor's note: This is a suitable occasion to mention that Mr. F. J. Corina has written a book on the question of youth and sex. The book, which is primarily to help young people, is entitled "We are Sixteen," and deals with a boy and girl in search of sex knowledge. We shall refer to the book again in these columns, but we should point out that, owing to paper shortage, the edition is necessarily limited.]

## RELIGION IN RUSSIA

POSSIBLY no two subjects have ever occasioned so many nonsensical, stupid and lying statements as Religion and Soviet Russia. One writer quotes "The News Review" as stating, "In 1937 Yaroslavski, of the Atheist sheet 'Bezbozhnik,' admitted defeat . . . (and) Stalin banned it." I had just read the above when I picked up the new book, "Moscow Dateline," by Henry C. Cassidy (for two years Moscow correspondent of the Associated Press of America), and on pages 241-2 he says that godless sheet ceased publication not earlier than the end of 1941, and the official reason given was shortage of paper. Cassidy's opinion is that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union favours anti-religious propaganda and, under its leadership, Russia will be predominantly Atheistic; there is no persecution of religion.

Some men try to frighten us again with bogeys of dead bogeys. The Communists always try to be realists and dispense with institutions that cease to serve a useful purpose. The existence of the Communist International was used by Goebbels and certain Labour leaders to scare the timid. Back in 1940 the Communist Party of the United States withdrew from the Comintern largely for this reason, as did the Communist parties of two or three other countries, but I don't think anybody suggested then that Stalin had told them to do so. The "Soviet War News" explained the reason for reversing the co-educational policy. The matter was thrashed out on the basis of experience, and a new decision was taken. I do not think that the word "permission" was used when the establishment of a Holy Synod was discussed with Stalin. Stalin merely indicated that he had no objections. If Stalin had objected, then, of course, in the eyes of our bogey purveyors he would have become once more the "intolerant, tyrannical dictator in the Kremlin," etc.

Another point is interesting. It is a difficult thing at first for people in capitalist countries to understand a one-party system. Under capitalism, Whigs, Tories, Liberal, Labour, etc., represent the interests of certain groups or classes of people, e.g., feudalism, capitalism, free trade, imperialism, working class. The ruling class in the Soviet Union is the working class; one class only; no exploiting class; there is no capitalism or capitalist class. If someone would seriously indicate in whose interests a party organised in opposition to the C.P.S.U., which is the party of the Working Class, would work, then it would be interesting. Fortunately for us all, the last attempt to organise a party against working class power was nipped in the bud (Trotsky, etc., plus Hess, in the interests of Trotsky, etc., and German and Japanese Imperialism).

In the famous interview granted to Roy Howard in 1936, Stalin said: "You are puzzled by the fact that only one party will come forward at elections. You cannot see how election contests can take place under these conditions. Evidently candidates will

be put forward not only by the Communist Party, but by all sorts of public, non-party organisations; and we have hundreds of these. We have no contending parties any more than we have a capitalist class contending against a working class which is exploited by the capitalists. Our society consists exclusively of free toilers of town and country—workers, peasants, intellectuals. Each of these strata may have its special interests and express them by means of the numerous public organisations that exist. But since there are no classes, since the dividing lines between classes have been obliterated, since only a slight, but not a fundamental, difference between various strata in socialist society has remained, there can be no soil for the creation of contending parties. Where there are not several classes there cannot be several parties, for a party is part of a class."

C. A. MORRISON.

## MOSES AND EXCAVATION

CONTINUING his proof that the Bible is literally true in his book "The Bible Comes Alive," Sir Charles Marston, who has set himself the task of doing so by appealing to the wonderful results of excavation in Palestine and the surrounding countries, is obliged to deal with Moses. He gives the dates 1520-1400 B.C. for this "man of God," as he calls him, and then proceeds to look round and find if possible some famous people who lived also about this time as veritable proof that Moses was a real personage.

This is easy. It appears that about 17 years before the birth of Moses "the most remarkable woman in all Egyptian history," Queen Hatshepsut, was born. She is, contends Sir Charles—without, of course, adducing the slightest proof—the famous princess who discovered Moses in the bulrushes. One reason given is that Josephus calls her Thermuthis because "herein we see an echo of the name of Thotmes," who was her father. This is indeed marvellous proof. Another reason given is that "many of the sentiments, and some of the language, of the Old Testament Prophets and of the Psalms, were already written down in Egypt when Moses was a young man, and had been written down there for a thousand years and more before he was born." I cannot quite see the relevancy of this, though I know the religious mind is always so very mysterious. But we must be thankful for small mercies, and when Sir Charles admits that parts of the Old Testament were in existence so long before the date given by Ussher, and admits also that they could not therefore have been revealed by God, we ought to be thankful. It is a great victory, not for the excavators, but for those infidels who have said the same thing centuries perhaps before Sir Charles was born.

And here is another admission: "So the Christian Church did not invent the Moral Laws; they were already in existence before Christ. Moses did not make them; they were already in existence before Moses. Archæology already teaches us that they have come down from the very dawn of civilisation."

Why does Sir Charles say this? Because excavations have proved beyond the shadow of doubt, not that the Bible is true, but that a good deal of its ethics has been taken from the moral codes of ancient races, and has no more to do with "revelation" than my old tin hat. In fact, excavations have proved that the Bible is *not* true.

But to return to Moses. According to Sir Charles, he received a "spiritual Revelation" when he was nearly 80 years old. This was after he had spent 40 years or so in Midian. The command came from Jehovah to go and free his people, and Sir Charles makes another admission. The name of this deity was, he says, really YHWH and, according to the Ras Shamra Tablets, it was YH or Jah. We are bound to admit that any name for a god makes but little difference to the species. Nowadays, it is not Jah who is so reverently invoked but the "Lord Jesus." In

Germany the deity for many is called Hitler. But what, after all, is a mere name?

Further to strengthen his case for Moses, Sir Charles gives us a picture of the ruins of Hatshepsut's temple which, he says, was rebuilt when Moses was under her protection—again, it need hardly be said, no evidence whatever is produced for this remarkable piece of information. Nor are we told what in the world it has to do with proving from excavations that Moses ever existed.

Sir Charles, however, does emphasise his belief in miracles, particularly those known as the Ten Plagues. These certainly happened because, he tells us, as if there could be no possible doubt whatever for the assertion, "so-called miracles are being recognised by Science." The Fall of Jericho—as described in the Bible—and the Ten Plagues "constitute the real miracle, and point to the Ultimate Cause." In any case, Sir Charles insists that the Plagues (except the last) have occurred in Egypt at other times. As to this last, there is a monument in Egypt which "seems" to confirm the account of the unexpected death of Pharaoh's eldest son. Sir Charles is very modest—why does he not insist it *does* confirm it? After all, dare anyone deny it?

He tries to reconcile the conflicting accounts of the length of the stay in Egypt by the Israelites, but appears to leave the problem in the air in spite of the Bible being true; and he sadly admits that the exact place where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea has not yet been identified. Nor are we quite certain—from excavations—where it was exactly that Israel wandered about for forty years.

However, Sir Charles, just to show how very exact he can be, as well as tolerant, does admit that the institution of the Sabbath "seems to have been of Babylonian origin." So smash goes the command given by the Lord himself to Moses—in two different forms, by the way, and for two different reasons. I find it rather puzzling to reconcile a lot of these admissions with the emphatic declaration so often made by Sir Charles that the Bible is true.

He goes on to a discussion of the discoveries made at Ras Shamra, and admits that the tablets found there deal with a host of gods, the chief of whom was El—the deity known to the Jews as Elohim; and he also admits that many Jewish rituals were just taken over bodily from the ancient Canaanites. So that as the tablets are dated about 1400-1360 B.C., they are rather later than Moses. If God gave the Jewish laws and ritual to Moses, it is rather difficult to explain how they came to be written by pagan priests in Canaan as part of an ancient religious code among themselves.

This does not trouble Sir Charles at all. All we are entitled to do, he insists, is to enter these "deep questions with profound reverence and humility." The narrative of the "Giving of the Law from Mount Sinai must be regarded as a unique Experience of a direct Manifestation from the Unseen." That should settle the matter for all who have profound religious faith. Unfortunately, I have not, and all this seems to me not merely begging the question, but to be a lot of definite religious humbug.

But, you may ask me, does Sir Charles prove from excavation the truth of the Biblical story of Moses? Not in one solitary incident. There is no proof from excavation that Moses ever lived at all. We get many interesting pages of speculation in the "Bible Comes Alive" about many things in the chapter on Moses which remind me very much of W. S. Gilbert's famous "Flowers in the Spring." But Sir Charles produces nothing whatever to show the truth of the Moses story or the truth of the story of Israel in Egypt and their subsequent wanderings. The Bible may be alive; it may even reflect what primitive peoples thought about their gods.

But the excavations have so far brought precious little to light of the slightest real use even to Fundamentalists like Sir Charles Marston.

H. CUTNER.

## RELIGION AND HATRED

HITLER'S speech to the Nazi veterans of November 9, 1943, contains the passage: "I am a profoundly religious man." It was a surprise to most people and not a few have doubted the sincerity of such a statement and considered it as only another trick of the "Super-trickster." For them he remains a neo-Pagan, "the Antichrist," "the Monster of Immorality"—in short, the Devil Incarnate. May I be allowed to play the (perhaps premature) part of the Devil's Advocate and try to prove that the different religions—now united against "the Evil One" for the first time in their millennial quarrel—have no reason whatsoever of complaint against him?

Take first the Jews. How can they complain, when the idea of the Chosen People, *their* idea, when their demand for Race Purity (enforced upon them during their return from the Babylonian captivity by Ezra and Nehemia) is now imitated by the Nazis and turned against their original inventors? "Can there be two Chosen People in the world?" Hitler once asked Rauschnig (see p. 234 of Hermann Rauschnig's "Hitler Speaks"), and then answered himself: "Now we are God's People."

Then take the Catholics. Is not their Church the Church of Authority? A Church from which the Nazis have learnt much, as Hitler himself gratefully acknowledges in "Mein Kampf"? Here the following sentence may be found: "Though the body of its doctrine clashes with exact science and research in many parts—unnecessarily in many respects—the Church is not prepared to sacrifice a single syllable of its doctrine." On another page of the same book Hitler writes: "Christianity was not content with merely erecting its own altar, it was forced to proceed to destroy those of the heathen. Such fanatical intolerance alone made it possible to build that adamantine creed. . . . Political parties are always ready to compromise, world theories never are."

This explains much of the deliberate praxis of Nazism, which also destroyed—had to destroy—the venerable altars of other creeds; and it did and does so at the demand of an infallible Pope—be it Hitler or Mussolini. The latter (no more infallible, but fallen) "ha sempre ragione" (is, or was, always right).

And now the Protestants. What objections could they raise against "the Devil"? That the German Church is not a Christian Church? That a Christian Church should be universal, open to all races and classes, but not national and exclusive? But that is the Catholic idea which follows the teaching of St. Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles. But it is not that of Luther, nor that of Christ Himself, who considered non-Jews as dogs, and would not heal of its unclean spirit the daughter of a foreign woman (see Matthew xv. 22-28).

The same hatred of foreigners (this time including the Jews) is to be found in Luther, the leading spirit of the German Reformation, who is, shorn of the theology of his time, also the acknowledged Patron Saint of the German Revolution. Acknowledged as such by the Nazi "philosopher" Rosenberg in his "Myth of the 20th Century." Acknowledged as such by Hitler himself in one of his speeches, reported in the official publication "Hitler's Speeches" (1922-1939), edited by Norman H. Bagner, p. 319. "Yes"—Hitler said here—"The German Church without a Pope, without a Bible—and Luther, if he could be with us, would give us his Blessing." Of course he would.

Pope Benedict XV., after the first world war, had stated: "This is the defeat of Luther." He said so, without suspecting that Luther would find another "Reformer" and successor in Hitler.

And Dr. Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has said during this war: "There is Luther behind Hitler."

Why then, I repeat, should Protestants, even those of non-German Churches, complain? The Germans have simply done

honour to their name and protested against conditions around them. But they protested not as an irreligious, but as a religious people. They have found a Messiah in Adolf Hitler, who has "Faith in Providence" that "could not allow a people to cut off the thread of its own life" (p. 404 of above mentioned book, "Hitler's Speeches"). For so "willeth it the Moral Order of the Universe," of which Hitler is the defender. He, whom his enemies still consider as the "Evil One," as that "abominable wretch" and as a man belonging to the "scum of humanity."

But this "abominable wretch" only draws the consequences of religious logic.

Yet I doubt whether that will help him and whether the "Moral Order of the Universe" will be confirmed by the victory of Germany. Just this logic (Logic with a capital L) may cause his downfall. As that last of the Freethinkers and ablest critic of the 19th century (and after!), Samuel Butler, has it: "Logic is like the Sword: those who appeal to it shall perish by it."

OSCAR LEVY

(Editor of the authorised English translation of Nietzsche's works).

## ACID DROPS

SOME lies die very slowly. Others never die at all. But there is one that was born in the early part of the war. In order to drown to some extent the terrible conditions in which so many people lived in this country and, so far as the clergy were concerned, to boost the need for more religion, the tale went forth that children were so ignorant of Christianity that many of them had never heard of Jesus or of God. This was used also to commend the plot that was hatched by the Government and the Churches to demand a complete theologising of the schools. It was a miserable lie and a dastardly agreement between the Government and the Churches.

The latest voice to raise this story of the children is that of one of the reporters in a recent issue of the "Catholic Herald." He writes that

Hundreds of children coming into the reception areas had never heard of God except as a swear-word. Many of their teachers were Atheists, and they had been taught nothing about God at home.

And this, it must be remembered, of schoolchildren who every day in their school life had listened to prayers to Jesus and God! That shocked the good Christians. The conditions in which they lived did not shock them. There is a good moral in the situation if anyone cares to work it out.

Sir H. Milford, who is, we believe, connected with the Bible-distributing game, laments that the shortage of paper is cutting down the Bible supply. He says they could print 100,000 copies of the Bible if the paper was available. He might as easily have said one hundred million. The assumption is that there is a clamour for the Bible, and that the clamour comes from the religious quality of the Bible. And that is simply not true. The number of believers in the Bible shrink year by year. The sale is kept up by artificial means. If anyone cares to ask questions they will soon discover this is true.

In proof of this, we may note that our "Bible Handbook," still selling steadily after many years of issue, proves to be an eye-opener to those who make a formal profession of belief in it. The reading often cures them of their belief in *Holy Bible*, and leads to an interest in it as a collection of folklore and primitive superstitions.

There is a curious comment on Sir H. Milford's bunkum about the Bible in the paper which contains the statement made. It says that the manager of Hatchard's finds there is a great demand for "classics and other books." But no mention is made of the Bible. We need only add that we also could sell a much larger number of books if only more paper were available.

The Bishop of Chelmsford says: "I sometimes think that the Christian religion is dying out." His reason for "sometimes" so thinking is the "landslide" the Churches are experiencing. We are not given to soothe the ailments of parsons, but if it is the alleged landslide of morals, we would ask him to reflect the "landslide" is largely imaginary, and also what is occurring will occur whenever morbid social conditions exist. War demoralises as well as inspires. Next, the Bishop may cheer himself with the reflection that never in the whole of its history has the Christian Church been injured by outbreaks of genuine immorality. On the contrary, the Churches have flourished in such circumstances.

But we do not think that the major trouble of the Bishop is the alleged growth of "immorality." His real concern is that "Christianity is hanging by a thread. It has been abandoned by the majority of people in this country." If people were but wicked and pious the clergy would feel quite at home and would sing lustily the praises of God. But to find the majority giving up Christianity! That is the thing that hurts, particularly when, from the Prime Minister downwards, we are praising ourselves as being the very salt of the earth. It is this situation that makes the Bishop tremble.

When the Roman Church in this country is not threatening the authorities if they will not give it more financial support, it takes to whining. In the matter of a revised—partly for the worse—Education Act, some of the Catholic leaders are "pinning their hopes that the Prime Minister will see justice is done to Catholic schools." "Justice" means here that the total cost of the schools will be met by the State, and the Catholic Church will "boss" the school. Of course, how much the Government gives will depend upon how the voting is likely to run. Politics, as Meredith once said, is like climbing the greasy-pole—mutton or no mutton you get the grease. It is not difficult to stampede the majority of Members of Parliament.

It is a great pity that every now and again one of our generals makes himself a laughing stock for "Christ's sake." Speaking in Bristol Cathedral, General Sir Frederick Pile told the audience—not the congregation—that he and his wife had visited Palestine "many times and never left without the conviction that a man named Jesus Christ did live and preach." Let us hope that the General's contribution to his military duties was of a more intelligent character than his efforts on behalf of Christianity.

Mark Twain puts the same idea in a much more forcible way. He said that when in the "Holy Land" he was shown the grave of Adam. And what convinced him of the authenticity of the grave was that in all the years that have passed no one has ever been able to prove that Adam was not buried on that spot. Perhaps General Pile cribbed the idea from the American humorist, but failed to see the point.

Edinburgh Christians are still in arms against the Lord Provost for having, in his official capacity, attended High Mass in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Of course, the Lord Provost was not morally justified in making use of a mere accident to advertise Roman Catholicism, but his critics would have said nothing if he had attended a Protestant church. In fact, they would have gone for him if he had not attended. It is a purely sectarian row, and illustrates nothing more than the fact that where religion is concerned, and particularly where Christianity is before the public, fair play and intellectual honesty are likely to go by the board.

The Lord Provost, who believes he has a sense of humour—at least when on the Brains Trust—says that there was no justification for objection because the service was held "to pray for the success of the Allies," which proves that while he may be witty he is not overburdened with wisdom. For did not God know there was a war on? Did he not know that we were fighting against the Nazis? A really witty man would have bethought himself that God might be offended by being told what to do, as though he

could not manage a war without advice being given him in public. A private prayer might be, on the part of the Provost, excused. But publicly to advertise God as to what he should do is enough to make him delay victory for a year or two.

For many years we have been trying to induce men who are not religious, but who have been elected as Mayor, to decline to join in the Sunday parade to church. In only three instances have we succeeded. They lacked the courage to defy the custom. It would spoil their standing, and so forth. Public office is a great bait to many, but those who are most fitted for it either do not get elected or they will not sink their opinions for the sake of votes.

This is a great war. Our very existence may depend on it. Everything must give way to war-needs. No, not everything. The interests of the Churches must come first. For this is God's war, and unless he helps us to clear up some of the mess for which, as the creator, he is responsible, then ruin stares us in the face. So it is cheering to learn that Miss K. Curtell, Director of the National Association of Training Corps, assured a meeting at Wandsworth that "it has been made clear that attendance at parade must not be allowed to interfere with attendance at church." Working men have no right to consider how far what they are doing now will influence their position when the war is over. To do so would be downright disloyalty. But at all costs we must see that the privileges of the God industry are not threatened in any way. What would England be minus its pickings for the clergy?

Crocodile tears—Roman Catholic ones—are being shed over alleged unfairness to the Roman Catholic men in the Forces. This has nothing to do with food, pay or general treatment; it is entirely connected with the Government proposed Education Bill. What the Roman Catholic Church is asking for is not merely the liberty to run their own schools—provided a minimum of real education is given—but for the entire upkeep of the buildings, etc. We have no doubt that many of the men in the Forces will be surprised that they are being treated unfairly, but they must discover that they are so treated when the priests tell them so.

But the complaint is based, as usual, on a suggested falsehood. Roman Catholics are being treated exactly as are other religious bodies. They may have whatever religion taught they please, provided the educational part of their schools reaches a minimum of effectiveness. On the other hand, it is the case with all these sectarian bodies that they wish to keep the educational part of their work as low as possible. And with all these religious groups it is not education they are concerned about, but the control of the child in the interests of this or that Church. One day, perhaps, the people will awaken to the fact; then there will be an end to this elicit subsidising of the Churches by the Government.

By the way, it might be useful if some Member in the House of Commons were to risk losing a "job" by asking for a return of the amount of land that has been purchased by the Roman Churches, say during this century. We imagine that the general body of the public would have a surprise. Opposition would be offered by such a proposition by the Church of England, for the inquiry mentioned might lead to a further inquiry into the whole question of Church property. It is a case of the English and Roman Church hanging together in order to guard against them being hung separately.

In a recent article on Hitler's great friend and diplomat, Von Papen, the "Observer" remarked that he was a sincere practising Catholic and also the biggest mischief-maker in Europe. The combination is quite intriguing and by no means incompatible—though it is doubtful if either our religious press or the B.B.C. would cite Von Papen as a glorious example of what religion can do for a man. Still, it is as well to remember him in these days of short memories as just that—a mixture of real fervent religion and villainous mischief-making, a combination found perhaps more in Roman Catholicism than in any other religion in the world.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

**J. EFFEL.**—Pleased to hear from you. Hope you are keeping well. Yes, we are very proud of being what you call "Captain of 'The Freethinker,'" far prouder than we should be as editor of any paper in the country. Ordinary magazines may be duplicated indefinitely. There is but one "Freethinker."

**W. LEE (Wigan)**—The Secretary of the N.S.S. is writing you. **ALERT.**—Next week; crowded out from this issue.

**N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.**—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges donations of 6s. 9d. from Mr. S. B. Whitfield and 3s. from Mr. T. Dixon.

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*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.*

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*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

**MR. COHEN'S** book on Determinism has been out of print for some time. It is always in demand, and only the paper shortage has prevented the book being constantly on sale. That difficulty is now overcome and the book will be on sale very soon. This is the fifth edition.

There is a story connected with the book which has its moral. Soon after the first edition appeared, a well-known authority on psychology wrote to the author complimenting him on "having written the clearest and simplest book on the subject that had yet appeared." In reply to this, Mr. Cohen said that he laid claim to no originality, as there was probably not a single original idea in the whole of the work. All he had done was to eject the irrelevant matter with which the discussion had been loaded with the effect of preventing a clear understanding of the issue. Properly stated, the case for Determinism leaves no room for serious dispute.

We have received a parcel of children books and toys for an East London hospital. This was in response to an appeal made some time ago. We believe that many others of our readers have already replied direct to the advertiser. We are sending on the parcel received.

One of our readers suggests that Freethinkers might avail themselves of the old pagan custom of giving presents at the period we know as Christmas to give to suitable Christian friends a copy of our "Christianity: What Is It?" or other suitable publications of the Pioneer Press. Naturally, we think the suggestion a good one. It would certainly make an interesting present.

Another reader asks whether the creed of Fascism will be permitted to be advocated openly after the war. It is difficult to answer that question, but we do not see that with any respect for freedom of opinion, and without a new Act of Parliament, how it can be prevented. After all, Fascism is a political theory, and it must not be confused with the bestial and criminal

teachings of both Hitler and Mussolini. Its chief aspect is presented by the Roman Church in the political-religious world, where only the Pope is elected and all other officials of the Church are appointed.

We do not believe in that theory because in practice it places too much power in single, or a few, hands, and sooner or later leads, although not necessarily, to bloodshed and planned degradation, but still to tyranny and a long train of other offences. Probably for a generation or two the very term "Fascism" will be so deservedly hated that no one will find it profitable to preach it. The position before the lover of liberty is something like the retort said to have been made by a Roman priest to a Freethinker—"I demand freedom on your principles and deny it to you on your own." If the Brains Trust would fairly discuss topics of this somewhat puzzling kind, instead of sitting round a table, for the most part, like a gang of garrulous old women or an over-developed crowd of schoolboys, it might do some good.

We are indebted to the "Chorley Guardian" of recent date for the following narrative of fact. It is written by one of the newspaper's staff.

"This is a true tale of a Chorley man and his bike. He left home in the morning and placed his bike outside some business premises while he made several calls. Becoming preoccupied, he forgot the bike and eventually arrived home by bus some hours later. His wife asked him about the bike, and he suddenly remembered where he left it. He dashed off, fearing it might have been stolen, but on arriving at the premises, there it was still resting against the wall. Overjoyed, he went to the nearest church to place coins in the poor-box as a thank-offering for recovering his bike. He left it against the church wall whilst he went inside, and on coming out he found to his dismay that his bike had been pinched."

We have received the following from the Rationalist Association and Sunday Freedom League of 315, Victoria Arcade Buildings, Shortland Street, Auckland, New Zealand:—

"In view of import restrictions and the resultant difficulty in obtaining supplies of books, publications and pamphlets to keep abreast of an ever-growing movement, the Rationalist Association would be glad if Freethinkers and Rationalists in the British Isles (or elsewhere) would donate to the Association any books or publications of Rationalist or Freethought nature."

We need only add to this that the society appears to be doing excellent work and making many converts. They are worthy of any help that may be given.

We think it well to remind everybody interested in the reforms promised by the Government that these are to be brought into being as soon after the war as we can afford it—which may be somewhere about the next century if the people in power have their way. The statement just made is not quite correct. There is one innovation that is to be brought into operation so soon as the Bill becomes law. That exception is to give more religion in the schools with the clergy to decide whether the teaching is satisfactory or not. The Churches cannot wait. Every real advance is a threat to their position and a check to their domination.

We note an excellent letter by "Josephus" in a recent issue of the "Durham County Advertiser." The matter of the letter is "Religion in Schools." It ends with the telling message: "If the people were a little more ignorant, astrology would flourish. If a little more educated, Christianity would perish." We congratulate the writer on his skill and the Editor on his broadmindedness.

Most of our readers will be familiar with the name of Professor Bertrand Russell. Scientist and philosopher, he had the courage to allow his heresies, social, political and religious, to be known to the world. We have a good solid row of his books on our shelves and, agree or disagree as one may, his books are always healthy and stimulating reading. His enemies in this country treated him with respect, but they never forget the fragrance of

his heresies. And the great sin in the country is not that of being a heretic, but of being honest enough to let the world know it.

Some time back Russell went to the U.S.A. to take up a position of lecturer at Barnes Foundation College, Pennsylvania, on a salary of £2,000 a year for five years. But Russell was a heretic in religion and in many social matters. So last December he was dismissed from his office. In reply, Russell brought an action claiming £6,000, payment for the unexpired term of his engagement. The case dragged on, but we see now that he has won, so far as getting a verdict for £5,000. So far, so good.

In a way, this comes as a reminder for us and for Americans that if they wish to win the peace by establishing a greater measure of freedom of thought and speech, both British and Americans will have to keep their eyes wide open. Vested interests will fight hard for their existence. These interests will shriek for Freedom. We have been shrieking for it ever since the war started, and our Government has shown how fully it means this by introducing a measure to give the clergy practical control of the schools, while steadily refusing to proceed to much-needed social and economical reforms on the ground that this Government has lost its authority for such reforms owing to there not having been a General Election for many years. The moral is brief and plain. If we are really to get genuine reforms we must have them now or stop the Government planning; that where the schools are concerned the clergy must remain outside. And, with a change of terms, this holds good for the United States. Reforms never come gratuitously, they must be fought for; and for blocking the essence of reform our "rulers" are amongst the most wide-awake of all "wide-awakers."

## THE SLEEP OF DEATH

"Death, not armed with any dart,  
But crowned with poppies."

—JULIAN FANE.

"And the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes and idle fears, to sink to final repose, and forget the troubled dream of life."

—WILLIAM HAZLITT.

SHAKESPEARE, the supreme genius of literature, has told us that "our little life is rounded with a sleep." The materialistic similitude of death to sleep is a thought which appears to have possessed a peculiar fascination for great writers, ancient and modern, but more particularly for Shakespeare, whom it always prompts to utterances of unusual sublimity. With this lofty thought is mingled a touch of simple pathos that strikes home to every heart as, for example, in the saying, "Tired we sleep, and life's poor play is o'er."

Sleep! All that the human fancy can conceive of refreshing and delightful things is comprised in that gentle word. Poets in all ages and in all countries have sung its praises; but of all tributes uttered on this theme, the most striking, probably, is that which Cervantes puts in the mouth of Sancho Panza: "Sleep! It covers a man all over, thoughts and all, like a cloak. It is meat for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, heat for the cold, and cold for the hot."

Priests, on the other hand, have ever sought advantage from the fact that man is mortal. They have taught men that death was the most dreadful evil. All the terrors that theology could gather from savage nations were added to increase the horrors, and they invariably tried to paralyse reason with the clutch of fear.

The advent of Christianity deepened this terror. Never has death been the cause of such craven timidity as in the Christian world. To visionaries like Catherine of Siena or Emanuel Swedenborg it may have been different, but to the masses death has been, and is, the king of terrors, from whose approach they

cower in an agony which Marcus Aurelius and Socrates would have scorned. These great pagans invested death with dignity, but Christians fear death as children fear the dark. St. Paul tells us, since by man came death, the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; but Marcus Aurelius bids us regard death as a friend:—

"What is it to die? If we view it by itself, and stripped of those imaginary terrors in which our fears have dressed it, we shall find it to be nothing more than the mere work of Nature; but it is a childish folly to be afraid of what is natural. Nay, it is not only the work of Nature, but is conducive to the good of the universe, which subsists by change."

Lucretius, the greatest Roman poet, writing, be it remembered, twenty centuries ago, tells us that death is dreamless rest:—

"Thou not again shall see thy dear home's door,  
Nor thy dear wife and children come to throw  
Their arms round thee, and ask for kisses more,  
And through thy heart make quiet comfort go.  
Out of thy hands hath slipped the precious store.  
Thou hoardest for thine own, men say, and lo!  
All thou desired is gone. But never say  
All the desire as well hath passed away."

Omar Khayyam, the most splendid singer whose lyre sounded under the Mohammedan crescent, was as emphatic:—

"Oh, threats of hell and hopes of paradise!  
One thing at least is certain—This life flies;  
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies,  
The flower that once has blown for ever dies."

Most of the great poets have been Freethinkers, and it is gratifying to turn for a few moments from the paltry paradises and horrible hells of the priests to the sublime ideas of the poets. Shelley, in the opening lines of his "Queen Mab," sings of death and sleep being brothers. Most of all, this great poet looks on death with longing and audacity in his immortal dirge, "Adonais." Matthew Arnold introduces pure Secularism into his language concerning death. In his monody on Arthur Hugh Clough he tells us:—

"Bear it from thy loved, sweet Arno Vale,  
For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep  
Their morningless and unawakening sleep  
Under the flowery oleanders pale."

This feeling assumes at times tones of irony, as in his fine lines on the death of a favourite dog, entitled "Geist's Grave"

"Stern law of every mortal lot,  
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,  
And builds himself I know not what  
Of second life I know not where.  
But thou, when struck thine hour to go,  
On us, who stood, dependant by,  
A meek last glance of love did throw,  
And humbly lay thee down to die.  
Thy memory lasts both here and there,  
And thou shalt love as long as we,  
And after that thou dost not care!  
In us was all the world to thee."

Byron did not believe in immortality. How finely he apostrophised the longing for a future life:—

"Still wilt thou dream on future joy and woe,  
Regard and weigh yon dust before it flies.  
That little word saith more than thousand homilies."

In his letters, Byron noticed the deep-rooted Secularism in people which is for ever bubbling up and asserting itself in the most unexpected places. He mentions two touching epitaphs

which he saw at Ferrara: "Martini Luigi implora pace," and "Lucrezia Picini implora eterna quietà." Small wonder they struck a responsive chord in the heart of the English Catullus. Swinburne, who wore the imperial mantle of the great poets, has quite a materialistic view of death. In his superb "Ave Atque Vale," in memory of Charles Baudelaire, he strikes the keynote:—

"Thou are too far for wings of words to follow,  
Far, too far, for thought or any prayer;  
What ails us with thee, who art wind and air?  
What ails us gazing where all seen is hollow?  
Yet with some fancy, yet with some desire,  
Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire;  
Our dreams pursue our dead, and do not find.  
Still and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,  
The low light fails us in elusive skies;  
Still the foiled, earnest ear is deaf, and blind  
Are still the clouded eyes."

And again in the same splendid poem:—

"Content thee, howsoe'er, whose days are done;  
There lies not any troublous thing before.  
Nor sight nor sound to war against thee more,  
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,  
All waters as the shore."

It is of Prospero's metaphor of this sleep-rounded life of ours that Andrew Lang sings in his poem on Omar Khayyam:—

"So still were we before the months began  
That rounded us and shaped us into man.  
So still we shall be, surely, at the last,  
Dreamless, untouched of blessing or of ban."

George Meredith was contented with an earthly paradise, and asks us with a fine touch of Stoicism:—

"Into the breast that gives the rose  
Shall I with shuddering fall?"

But no poet peers with such audacity as Walt Whitman into the "superb vistas of death." He has treated this eternal theme of death with power and significance. The awful dreams that priests say may come in that sleep of death have no terror for this tan-faced poet of the West. The dead are made one with Nature, and death is presented as a friend, is "lovely and soothing," is always "gliding near with soft feet," and the body, weary with life, turns, like a tired child, and nestles close in the bosom of the eternal mother.

Great minds jump together, and the prose writers are not far behind the poets. William Hazlitt, in his essay on "The Fear of Death," tells us that to die is only to be as we were before we were born, yet no one feels any repugnance in the last idea:

"It seems to have been holiday-time with us then. We were not called to appear on the stage of life, to wear robes and tatters, to laugh or cry, be toasted or applauded. We had lain snug, out of harm's way, and had slept out our thousands of centuries without wanting to be waked up; at peace and free from care in a long nonage, in a sleep deeper and calmer than that of infancy, wrapped in the softest and finest dust."

Thomas De Quincey, in treating of this subject, reaches the same splendour of imagination. What is life? he asks, and answers: Darkness and formless vacancy for a beginning, then a dim lotus of human consciousness afloat upon the waters, then a few smiles and tears, a little love and infinite strife, dust and ashes, and once more darkness circling round, making an island of our fantastic existence.

"Rounded with a sleep!" "These words created whole volumes in me," said Jean Paul Richter, acknowledging the power of the master mind of Shakespeare. Is it not a superb tribute, remembering that the highest minds have ever been

fortified by the same thought? Freethought everywhere destroys the terror of death. For thousands of years priests have chanted the old, sad refrain of death as an enemy, but the Freethinker listens to far other strains. The contemplation of death as a deliverer, dis severed from terrors of the imagination, comforts him. Living without hypocrisy, he dies without fear:—

"Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

"MIMNERMUS."

(Reprinted)

## THE BIBLE IN RETIREMENT

IN a recent issue of "Nature" the Rev. J. C. Hardwick reviewed Mr. A. D. Howell Smith's book, "In Search of the Real Bible." The review leaves one with an impression that the reviewer was a trifle hot and bothered over his task in hand. That is quite understandable. Making something out of nothing—with the help of a dictionary—is a familiar clerical feature in religious controversy, but here we have a clergyman trying to make nothing out of something and unable to get rid of the something. However, to Freethinkers, the chief interest in the review are the admissions made by the Rev. J. C. Hardwick. They reveal a story of victories won in the name of truth, the tearing away of priestly camouflage, and the exposure of clerical trickery; admissions—without acknowledgment—that Freethinkers were right in their attitude to the Bible, and that it is no longer safe for clergymen to preach the old Bible teachings outside the pulpit and the B.B.C.

The Rev. Hardwick frankly admits deception, obscenities and barbarities of various kinds in the Bible, and he describes them as "unpleasant elements." Primitive remains and varying conceptions of the deity are also there, whilst Bible cosmology and science are no longer tenable. Those admissions show how well Freethinkers have done their work. The Churches have had to surrender their strongholds in breadth and depth. The truth of the Bible, its inspiration, authority, miracles, hell, etc., are all back numbers, again except in the pulpit and B.B.C.

It would be a doubtful compliment to congratulate the Rev. Hardwick for being frank and honest in religion, but it is a cutting reflection on the Churches that a minister possessing those qualities is a subject for comment.

The Rev. Hardwick excuses the "unpleasant elements" in the Bible on the ground that one would expect such things "from the fairly complete record of a development of religious ideas, which is what the Bible is." "O what a fall was there, my countrymen." The Bible, divinely inspired word of God, the Book of God, holy, sacred and infallible, now turns out to be merely a fairly complete record of a development of religious ideas, just ordinary paper and printer's ink. What an ignominious retirement and old age pension after centuries of service enormously profitable to the Churches. But it will not do. The Bible deserves better treatment. The Bible is not a fairly complete record, etc. It was never intended as such, and the Churches never used it in that way.

Men and nations did not fight and bleed, butcher and torture each other over a fairly complete record of a development of religious ideas. Royalty, politicians, the upper ten and common people did not and do not fall on their knees to grovel and groan over a fairly complete record, etc. The Bible did not become the fetish book of the Churches and Christians because it was a fairly complete record of a development of religious ideas, but because it was the divinely inspired word of God, infallible, holy and sacred, containing miracle stuff, and publicly acclaimed even to-day in high places by otherwise intelligent men as the only genuine supernatural ointment on the market able to cure all the sores of this world.

The Bible is a collection of writings concerning the tribal god of a wandering band of barbarians, and in 1943 the Bible is still the same collection of writings. If civilised Christians want a civilised god they must get a new god and a new Bible. The tribal god of the Bible does not become civilised by Christians carrying the book under their arms.

Centuries separate the earliest writings in the Bible from the latest, and one does not expect the mentality of the writers to remain stagnant, but because the Bible contains evidences of the development of religious ideas, it cannot, when the original purpose of the book becomes obsolete, be pitchforked into the company of works portraying the evolution of thoughts on the supernatural. The Bible concerns one of the many gods figured out by a primitive, ignorant people, and in that lies the value of the Bible. It is an anthropological value, it places before us to-day one of man's conceptions of the supernatural during a period of primitive ignorance, and for that reason it will always retain an anthropological value and should be preserved in our museums.

R. H. ROSETTI.

## TRAINING

THE word "trained" is one of the most loosely used words in the English language. We speak of a man as having been trained at So-and-So's when, as likely as not, all that happened was that, as a young man, he entered the employ of So-and-So, and while there picked up, largely of his own accord, a certain amount of information as to the way to do his particular job of work. No one actually took him by the hand, so to speak, and by careful personal instruction, taught him to do whatever he went there to learn. The chances are that if he went there to learn a trade or profession—engineering, joinery, accountancy or whatever it may be—he had to depend almost entirely upon himself, his ability to observe what was going on around him, and to undertake some private study in order to acquire that knowledge which was necessary to him in his adult life.

We are greatly influenced in whatever we set our hands to by a variety of causes—first of all by the very stuff of which we are composed. In his book, "Man the Unknown," Dr. Alexis Carrel puts it in this way: "The uniqueness of each man has a double origin. It comes simultaneously from the constitution of the ovum, from which he originates, and from his development and his history. . . . The value of each individual is determined in a large measure by his hereditary dispositions. . . . The destiny of certain individuals is inexorably determined." And Mark Graubard, in "Man, the Slave and Master," tells us that: "Human conduct begins with sensory perception, emotional reactions, reflex responses and conditioned behaviour patterns. Hence, action or conduct forms man's animal heritage. The long formative period of the human infant and its tendencies to imitate the behaviour of others create an organism equipped with a multitude of habits, customs and traditions as well as language. . . . Automatically, then, we are confronted with human beings who behave in definite ways and who transmit their behaviour along with their language from generation to generation."

Put shortly, this means that each and every one of us is turned out of nature's mould constitutionally predisposed to act in a certain way—which way may be good, bad or indifferent, according to our pre-natal influences—and what we do, once we are born, is governed in a large measure by our hereditary tendencies and, after that, by the environment in which we are born and brought up.

What is familiarly known as our "training" begins in our mother's arms, and that training depends, of course, upon the character of our mother. If she is of a loving and gentle disposition, with a good biological and social background, she will do her utmost to transmit to us some of her excellent qualities and

so prepare us for what is to follow when we leave her care; if, on the other hand, she has not had such a good inheritance and upbringing, she is incapable, through no fault of her own, of giving us such a good start.

What happens within the four walls of our home affects us mightily—far more than the majority of us ever realise. We are greatly influenced, too, by the class of school which we attend and the type of teacher it may be our good (or bad) fortune to meet. In spite of his calling and position our schoolteacher may be as narrow-minded and bigoted as the veriest clodhopper, if so we shall suffer in consequence. On the other hand, he may be—as so many teachers are—a well-educated, broadminded man and yet unable to train us in the way he would like to train us—by telling us the truth instead of conventional and convenient fiction—simply because he is bound by certain rules and regulations to follow a different course of instruction, in which case we shall also suffer, but not to the same extent. Every school has its traditions, prejudices, and the minds of the scholars who attend those schools are affected little or much by those subtle influences.

Our youth is probably the most formative period of our lives, and by the time we leave school our minds are pretty well set in one direction or another. If we have had the good fortune to be born of the right parents, who helped to set our future course, and we go to a school where there is a fairly liberal outlook, so much the better; if not—well, so much the worse. We are now, generally speaking, on the way—uphill or downhill, as the case may be.

Whatever our background, it is there—fixed and unalterable. Which is not for one moment to say that no one can throw off at least some of the shackles of the past, or prove himself to be superior to his surroundings—using that word "superior" in its best and widest sense.

By taking stock of his position and making up his mind to follow his own inclinations—which presupposes that, in spite of everything, he has developed a will of his own—a man can lift himself out of his environment and go his own way. But his task will be difficult, and such cases are, comparatively, few and far between.

Training is, in other words, a lifelong matter. It commences long before we know anything about it, and with most of us it goes on, from birth to burial, in a thousand and one ways without our being conscious of the process or its ultimate effect upon our character and calling.

GEO. B. LISSENDEN.

## THE B.B.C.

TO-DAY, broadcasting in Britain is the prodigiously active servant of the State, the mouthpiece of orthodoxy in every sphere of life. Its resources have been untiringly harnessed to war. It cannot become as valuable for peace unless it finds such liberty as was fought for in the struggle for the freedom of the printed word. That freedom is curtailed; yet it is still far greater than anything the makers of B.B.C. policy have ever claimed on its behalf. If the early traditions of the B.B.C. continued it will look dubiously on what the Shaws and Wells of to-morrow will say. It would close the studio door on a new Harvey or a Lister. It would think twice about any second Galileo who might appear. Another Lenin would be hustled to the stairs. The tradition must expand, and that is a people's affair which should not wait upon the sanctions of Governments. There is little likelihood that broadcasting in this country will ever revert to competitive enterprise. It must struggle for freedom with the worst of disabilities—with its fetters still on. Of their necessity democrats should pray for the soul of the B.B.C.

(From "Cavalcade," November 20.)

## WITCHES AND BOMBS

ONE can imagine the historian of the future devoting a chapter of his work to "Christianity—What Was It?" Mr. Chapman Cohen is not so fortunate in that respect, because he is obliged to ask "Christianity—What Is It?": the disease being still with us but with lessening virulence.

Mr. Cohen deals with the subject in a clear and concise manner. In his book, so named, there is a long chapter about "God and the Witches." Combining scathing irony with merciless and devastating logic, Mr. Cohen exposes the sickening hypocrisy, barbarity and vindictiveness of those zealous bigots who obeyed the Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Thousands of hapless women—and children—were hounded and tortured to death in propitiation of a brutal and vengeful God. The senses are appalled by the descriptions of the horrors perpetrated "in the name of the Lord." "Thank heaven that sort of thing cannot happen now," says one, and sighs with relief. But let us see.

Among the many instruments designed by misguided man for the purpose of torturing his fellow creatures were the thumb-screws and the rack. These faithful, diligent and, alas! over-worked servants of the Inquisition exercised their ingenuity on all those unhappy wretches who were accused of witchcraft. Another method was to thrust a long pin into different parts of the body, and another atrocity—a variation of the bastinado—was to burn the soles of the feet. Many witches were burnt alive. Victor Hugo gives an instance of a woman, bearing a child in her arms, being led to the stake. The guards repel a bystander who attempts to save the child, and throw it on the pile. Other methods of torture which may be cited include a form of garrotting, and subjecting the body to pressure against a spiked surface. The ordeal by water, a common occurrence, consisted in tying hands and feet together and throwing the victim into a pond or river. No, they did not suffer a witch to live in those days. It was believed by the people generally that persons accused of witchcraft merited punishment. God ordained it, and God is Love.

The motive which acquiesced in the persecution of witches is not the same as that which permits the bombing of women and children, but the results are the same. Once upon a time most people believed in witches and of the necessity for their extermination. Nowadays, most people believe in bombing and the necessity of exterminating their "enemies." If we recoil with horror on reading of the tortures inflicted upon innocent women and children during the witch hunt, what should be the reaction to the horror wrought by exploding bombs on civilian houses, which crush, mutilate, dismember, burn and cause asphyxiation to the unfortunate inmates? Are we less culpable than the zealous and misguided bigots of a bygone age? Observe how man reflects man by the everlasting presence of the past! The torture chamber of the past becomes the bomb-wrecked home of the present. The iron pin which was thrust into the witch's body is now a sliver of wood which pierces the body of a woman who lies writhing on the ground. The stake becomes a burning building and incinerates the inmates, the spiked surface is now a mass of jagged masonry which crushes the victim lying underneath. The garrote is a heavy beam which pins down another victim at the neck, whilst the hot iron at the soles of the feet becomes a burning ember. The poor witch who was compelled to watch her child being tortured has her counterpart in the mother who, lying seriously injured, is unable to help her child who screams in an agonising manner for aid.

Is the comparison overdrawn? Let those who have witnessed such horrors be the judges. And let those who justify such barbarities by the plea of total war take heed lest they perish by their own abominations.

S. GORDON HOGG.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FIFTY MILLION BOOKS.

SIR,—Mr. Cutner can have a little consolation in the thought that the figure given by him a few weeks ago must have been somewhat inflated. A librarian told me that the books were weighed, not counted. When there were fears the target—numerically speaking—would not be reached, a circular was sent round intimating that henceforth more books could be reckoned to the ton. My informant added that librarians were requested to mention any amusing incident that had occurred in connection with the salvage campaign. He replied by mentioning the circular!

It seems that cooked statistics are not the monopoly of religious bodies.—Yours, etc.,  
W. KENT.

## OBITUARY

### THOMAS WILLIAM BIRTLEY

On Wednesday, December 1, 1943, was laid to rest in Chester-le-Street Cemetery the remains of Thomas William Birtley, an old stalwart and highly respected Freethinker from the far-off days of the Northern Federation. He was associated with Samuel Peacock, Joseph Brown, John Bartram and Andrew Shiel. For upwards of 50 years he advocated the rights of man in its various phases and ably upheld the Freethought flag. He had no use for gods, ghosts, devils or hells, which he looked upon as superstition and a figment of the imagination. He was often heard to say, "Priests of all denominations were parasites and should have no existence in a civilised state of society." He lived a long, laborious, useful life in trying to uplift his fellow men. At the age of 80 years death touched his tired heart. He died in the land he ever defended, under the quiet stars.

As a true Freethinker he lived, as a Freethinker he died, and met the night of death as tranquil as a star meets morning. It may be aptly said of him: "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well."

A very touching address was delivered before an assembly of many friends and admirers of the deceased by John T. Brighton, the well-known secular missionary of the North.

JOSEPH CLOSE.

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Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY.

### LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. JOHN KATZ, B.A.: "Comparative Religion."

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. C. H. BURDEN: "The Problem of the Far East."

Burnley (Co-operative Men's Guild, Hammorton Street).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: "Religion and Life."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Open meeting.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30. Mr. PAT DOOLEY. "Whither Ireland?"

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