

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIV.—No. 2

Sunday, January 9, 1944

Price Threepence

IEWS AND OPINIONS

Collar the Kids

I HOPE that readers will not think I am overdoing the criticism of the Churches, the Government, and the new Education Bill. But the subject is a vital one. The Government has promised to give precedence to the Bill, and behind it all is the organised strength of the religious bodies, and if they cannot get what they want during the lifetime of the present Government, they will stand a poor chance with a Government of a different colour. It may even be that with the present Government playing a prominent part in the settlement after the war, Freethinkers in Europe will find themselves suffering because they have helped to win the war. We ought to remember that we have in this country both a Statute Law and Common Law of blasphemy, and if the Churches achieve their aim of securing a definite cultivation of religion in the schools of this country they will not rest content with that. It can hardly be expected that having won definite Christian teaching in the primary and secondary schools they will tamely see religion ignored in the higher educational institutions. And if this speculation sounds far-fetched, one need only bear in mind that the conquest of Europe by so religious a movement as that developed in Italy and Germany would have seemed just as far-fetched to the world of a brief twenty-five years ago.

That the triumph of the Churches as forecast in the Government Bill means a deterioration of the quality of teachers is already being recognised. It is true that the taking of a religious subject as part of the qualifications for teaching is ostensibly optional. But how many teachers, knowing that unless they have a certificate for religious teaching the chances of even appointment will get slimmer and promotion almost impossible, will forego qualifying in religion? At the moment there are many thousands of teachers in our schools who do not believe in the Christian mythology, but there are very few who dare openly avow their want of belief. What, then, are we to expect when religion becomes a qualifying subject, with the avowed aim to saturate the whole of the school life with belief in definite Christian teaching? The position that is most likely to emerge was put in "The Teachers' World" for December 15. The writer asks:—

"How many training college students will 'opt' for religious knowledge as a subject for the certificate examination? Some believe that teacher trainees are likely to be influenced by the prevailing views on religious dogma and may well hesitate to enter upon 'difficult' studies. 'I disagree entirely with that view,' said a well-known educationalist to whom I put it. 'The majority of intending teachers will realise that the chances are they will have to give religious instruction, so they will take the subject. It may not be an heroic

view, but the teacher trainee is a shrewd young person and may fear that the absence of a pass in religious knowledge may hinder the chances of appointment or promotion.'"

That, of course, is only another way of saying that the teaching staffs will contain a rapidly declining number of men and women with a sense of the real importance and dignity of their profession which, in the long run, spells an inferior class of teachers.

Parents and Children

In considering this new Government proposal—hatched after many private conversations between Church leaders and the Board of Education—it is well to put on one side the alleged interest of parents for a more definite religious education for their children. That is sheer nonsense. Education is not and never was wholly a parents' question. The impudence of those who so present it may be seen when we note that the very people who make this claim also point out that not more than ten per cent. of the adult population attend church. The education question has never been essentially a parents' question. It was always, and still is, a question for propagandist reformers, on the one side, and Church leaders on the other—the first looking for an improved social state and the other looking for increased church attendances. This is admitted, so far as the Churches go, by the Bishop of Wakefield, who is credited with having a long acquaintance with Council and Church schools. He is quoted, in that religious organ "The Week," as saying that parents are not concerned with differences of religious teaching. "Nonconformist parents do not abhor the teaching of the Apostles' Creed and the Catechism; Church parents . . . are not crying out for distinctive denominational teaching." The only conclusion to be drawn from this statement is the admission that all this talk of parents feeling injured because their children are not getting distinctive sectarian teachings is humbug. It is the parsons, on the one side, angling for more and larger church attendances and, on the other, reformers, the latter struggling to create schools where the greatest influence shall be that of the creation of a sense of a common social life, and a clergy who feel that if they cannot capture the child their hold on adults will surely disappear.

It was said by a celebrated French politician that speech was designed to conceal thought. That may not be the truth, but it certainly contains a truth; and both have a tendency to express themselves in unexpected places. And when it is not a truth, then it may be a falsity that throws a truth into unexpected relief. Here, in illustration, is a sentence from a Church of England paper, "The Guardian," December 17, finishing a lengthy article with the categorical conclusion that—

The whole great matter comes back again to the parents, for it is they and nobody else who should decide.

Put in that way the statement is simply nonsense. When a community decides that children shall be educated, it is not the parent that is the main consideration but the child, and the education of the child is broadly dictated by the assumed requirements of the community. The parents may teach a child many things on their own account, but so far as State education is concerned it is the needs and interests of the community that are of consequence. Parents have certain privileges with regard to a choice of instruction in this or that subject or view of life, but even this is a kind of free grant by the community. The State does not say that parents alone shall decide the nature and quality of the education of children. The quality and nature of the education given is a social fact.

Put sentiment on one side and consider a few simple facts. Our existing system of education is laid down by Act of Parliament: Children must go to school at a certain age; they must continue at school until they have reached a prescribed age, and they must be taught certain subjects while at school. And in reaching these decisions it is as individuals living in a group that form laws and enforce them. Parents, as such, have no commanding voice in the matter so far as what is to be taught, at what age children shall come to school, and at what age they may leave it.

Mark that up to the present there is only one thing which may be controlled by parents. That is the selection of the religion their children may be taught. In a mixed country like ours it is the only possible policy. Jews and Mohammedans want only one God. Buddhists and Confucianists can get on without any God. Our Indian subjects have a variety of gods—big and little, good and bad. The Christian wants a God with no wife but with a son who is the same age as his father. And what that God wants of his followers is a subject of such bitter disagreement that were it not for the interference of the secular State decent social life would be next to impossible.

The Mohammedan and the Jew demand a celibate god, and will have nothing to do with a family deity. The African requires his "Mumbo-Jumbo." The Confucian and the Buddhist get along comfortably without any god at all. In the midst of this yelping crowd, the force of circumstances compels the State to a policy of neutrality. It says, in effect: "It is impossible to say which is the true religion. It cannot even be said with any clear evidence in its favour that religious folk are more desirable citizens than those who are irreligious. We must leave the selection of a religion to individuals. If we *knew* which was the right one, the State would feel justified in making that religion an integral part of the education of children. It would indeed be a public duty to enforce it. As it is, the modern State does not care to the value of a brass button what religion you have, or if you decline all. Provided that your religious teaching does not run against the welfare or the laws of the secular State, you can have complete freedom in the matter. You may choose your own religion, and even the religion of your children. Our duty is to insist upon observance of the secular laws of the country. You may choose your religion just as you may choose what kind of flowers you will grow in your back garden."

It is not true, then, to say that the question of what shall be the form of education in the modern State "comes back to the parent." Emphatically it does not. It is not true either in fact or in theory that parents, as parents, are the

best judges of what kind of education, religious or secular, is best fitted for their children. Charles Darwin was intended by his parents to become a clergyman. Think of it—Darwin in the pulpit. Could one imagine a greater waste of human intellectuality and social values! Figures are not available, but it is certain that a very large proportion of children do not profit by the parental selection of ideas, education or training. The vast majority of parents certainly *mean* well, but between meaning well and doing the best there is often a wide and important difference.

Why, then, do the clergy in this education controversy so stress the rights of parents? The correct answer to this is that ninety per cent. of the clergy, counting from the Archbishops downward—or upward—do not care at all for the rights of parents. In this campaign—engineered, we must again remind readers, by the Churches and a Tory Government—the Churches are not fighting for the rights of parents or the social and intellectual rights of the rising generation. They are fighting for a class interest and for the aggrandisement of the Christian Churches, because they know that if they cannot set the brand of religion on the young they can never do it when a better-trained generation approaches maturity. The contest is really not over education so much as it is a struggle for the control of the new generation. That is something that we should all bear in mind.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LLEWELYN POWYS

A Great Freethinker

(The Letters of Llewelyn Powys: Selected and edited by Louis Wilkinson, with an Introduction by Alyse Gregory. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head; price £1 1s.)

HERE are 366 letters written by the late Llewelyn Powys, chosen with no little skill by that Boswell of the Powys family, Mr. Louis Wilkinson, and containing a notable introduction by Miss Alyse Gregory, who writes, as was said of Oliver Goldsmith, like an angel. She was indeed a ministering angel to this genius, who, living throughout their marriage on the very threshold of death, consistently and persistently proclaimed the Gospel of Life—a human irony indeed!

This publication gives the opportunity of estimating the importance of Llewelyn Powys both to English letters and to Freethought. Powys was a disciple of Epicurus and the essence of his doctrine can be put in two words: "Love Life." Many, perhaps most, people fear life, which is not to be wondered at, considering the queer terms on which we hold it. Most English people shrink from its grosser or more painful manifestations. But not Powys. Though an implacable enemy to conventional pseudo-Christianity, he was really saying the same thing as Jesus Christ, for Jesus, in denying the validity of loving one's life, by implication, affirmed it. Life, life more abundantly, eternal life, life everlasting, was Christ's highest reward to whosoever shall lose his life. The pseudo-Christian idea that life in this world is to be disregarded or regarded only as second to a better, is a perversion. Not the least of the merits of Llewelyn Powys both as a writer and a man, was his fearless denunciation of this Christian falsity. Life, here and now, to Powys was the best of things in itself—even to him upon his "mattress-grave."

It is interesting to compare the negative "Ten Commandments" of Judaism and Christianity with seven positive commandments by Powys. Here are the seven:—

1, Be healthy; 2, Be generous; 3, Be free; 4, Be understanding; 5, Be happy; 6, Be brave in life and death; 7, Invent a seventh for yourself.

They are not my seven—possibly not yours! But what have we in life but "our courage, energy and will-power," as Goethe truly wrote? Our first duty, says Powys, is to be happy. Of course it is; but few have the sense or the courage to realise this. In days like the present, when the lunatic gospel of wholesale murder and self-murder for the sake of the State is everywhere proclaimed as the sublimest nobility and necessity, the gospel of Llewelyn Powys is more than ever needed! We have outgrown the folly of mass-murder for the Church's sake, for the King's sake, and even almost for that ridiculous abstraction "the Country" or "Empire," but still we fool ourselves over "Duty," "Freedom," "A Better World After the War," and similar ghosts of illusions that squeak and gibber in current Cloud-Cuckoo-Land. We are no wiser nor better than our fathers; modern bombs on babies for nationalistic reasons will equal old-time burnings at the stake and heretic-torture in the eyes of posterity as silliness and wickedness.

Necessarily in a collection of letters ranging from infancy to death, there is a certain amount of chronicling of small beer. To my mind the book did not become alive until page 65, when the African adventure started. Then indeed it awoke and one beheld a St. Lawrence on his gridiron, tortured by all those flames and scorns of life. What may surprise the reader are the difficulties Llewelyn experienced in getting his literary work published, the paltry sums that he made out of it, and the self-distrust and humility that relative worldly failure, constant and racking illness, caused in such a naturally virile and vivid spirit. Of course, he challenged all the prejudices of his age, like Nietzsche. Yet one would have thought that at least one English publishing house would have had enough acumen to detect and to subsidise a born writer such as this. He could have been puffed and log-rolled into commercial success with ease. But in 1938 he is writing: "Never been praised more highly and never sold less. 'Somerset Essays' not yet 700 copies and 'Rats' not 200. God! what a bloody swindle! But a few years of quiet old age is what I now hunt." Well, it is the way of the world to know nothing of its finest spirits in their lifetime. Llewelyn Powys should have produced machine-guns instead of books, like Sir Hiram Maxim, who cynically recommended murder to me as the path to riches and fame, when I was very young.

Part of Somerset Maugham's verdict on this one of the Powys brothers may be quoted: "I think Llewelyn, by living so long cheek by jowl with death, alone of them learned to be honest." But let us take at random some of the numerous notable things that show the quality of the writer:—

1. "We should live every day as if we had been suddenly let out of our graves where for two centuries our diet had been dust and darkness." (Letter 213.)

2. "Don't for God's sake let that Old Man of Phudd (his adored brother, J. C. Powys) addle your wits into believing in all his gods—innumerable as houseflies in August. He belongs to the age of the cat-headed men, and I go to the age beyond the twilight of the gods where no value is recognised to be of more importance than an impassioned contemplation of the poetry of existence as it sweeps by like a terrible Carthaginian procession." (Letter 184 to Theodore Dreiser.)

3. "To write well it is necessary that one's spirit should be utterly free. . . . There should be no subjects unworthy of discussion. . . . The prerogative of a truly civilised person to have an open mind on every question." (Letter 161. This whole letter is a classic.)

4. "I entered the inner cavern of the Holy Sepulchre with Alyse striking matches and lay down in the grave . . . which I found fitted me well. . . . The Holy Sepulchre was all decked with bands of bunting like a merry-go-round at

Hebchester Fair. . . . The actual grave . . . like a deserted blackbird's nest at Christmas made of imitation moss." (Letters 138 and 139.)

5. Thomas Hardy on Oscar Wilde: "He said he did not like Oscar Wilde, he seemed insincere, and this was long before he knew anything was 'coming along.' He said when he was a boy and used to interfere with cruelty to animals, the answer always given was, 'It was not Christian.' Now he says since Darwin, we are all Christians or all not Christians." (Letter 122.)

6. An oil-drenched sea-bird. "It simply delivered up its intractable spirit as though it knew the great secret that belongs to all life and knew well how to escape." (Letter 119.)

7. On his nephew becoming a clergyman. "Think of this golden youth of whom I am so proud becoming a mincing priest. . . . I would rather he had been a beggar on the road to Framlingham, rather he had manufactured motor-cars than come to this. The news sticks in my gullet. I cannot stomach it. But yet . . . in 100 years what will it matter whether we have a piece of brass marked Clerk in Holy Orders hanging by a loose screw to a coffin six feet underground. It is nothing. Everything cancels everything and naught remains." (Letter 110.)

8. On war politics: "The pretext of playing a deep game for the salvation of the world when in reality it is the old game of Realism and Rascality."

9. "I have been reading Winston Churchill's 'Great Contemporaries' and have been amazed by the limited vision and estimate of life of men of action." (Letter 286.)

10. "We dangle dangerously after ideas as monkeys which snatch at the moon mistaking it to be a mango. The restless commercial-minded men. . . ." (Letter 345.)

11. "Those who are content to frog and frolic in the world of surface-reality without a thought that goes beyond the newspaper-level. . . . I think a lavatory attendant is more conscious of existence. . . . We must live quietly, honestly, simply, without that hurried stream of trivial sensation that most people demand. . . ." (Letter 344.)

12. "The radio is a thoroughly disintegrating influence and the titillating excitement of continual news being put into one's head is unprofitable and worse. It is like having one's brain eaten up by a lunatic adder." (Letter 352.)

There are a hundred things as good or better in this volume, which certainly does not lack readability. The letters are not free from blemishes, hasty grammatical slips, misspellings, and the like, which the editor has allowed to remain; and worst, I think, a public-schoolboy or working-man habit of using obscene words as mere adjectives of emphasis. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the letters is the extreme family affection displayed throughout. Never have I met so many kisses and endearments bestowed upon adults; every sister and brother seems to be the writer's sweetheart, and it is almost embarrassing to the reader accustomed to the reticence of ordinary English people who detest their relations. Was there ever such a loving and over-kissed lot as this Powys family, and yet the affection is not so sentimental that it is free from an admixture of malice and intelligent criticism.

It is to be hoped that since the first instalment makes such good reading, the half-promised second volume will not be too long delayed. The world can do with more of Llewelyn Powys.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

Christianity—What is It?

By CHAPMAN COHEN

Price 2/-

Postage Three halfpence

PIONEER PRESS, 2/3, Furnival St., Holborn, London, E.C.4

ACID DROPS

THE Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man has put his foot in it. It appears to have arisen thusly. The Lord Bishop followed the practice of a number of English preachers, if not in lying for the greater glory of God, at least stretching the truth to breaking point for the benefit of the deity. He gave a sermon on the growth of venereal disease, and as he was preaching in the Isle of Man, he used this as a good reason for having more religion—with himself and his kind doing the preaching. Then the editor of the "Isle of Man Examiner" took a hand and challenged the Bishop to prove that there had been any increase in venereal disease. It had simply been more talked about, but he asserts that doctors and others deny that there has been any increase. And every level-headed person knows that figures of this kind depend very largely on the method of counting.

So the Bishop was asked for evidence, and that ruffled his lordship. After all, the Bishop does not produce evidence for God and the angels and heaven, and so forth; why should he produce evidence for so earthly a thing as venereal disease? And his only evidence is an unnamed "young officer" who said to him: "You are quite right, sir." The Bishop says he has been told the same story by others, but no names are given. So the Bishop asks the editor to apologise, but the editor says he will not unless real evidence is given.

We think that this editor ought to get the sack. It is not a parson's place to tell a truth buttressed by statistics. Evidence never was, never will be, necessary to secure religious conviction. And the duty of the Bishop is that of every other ecclesiastical authority. His evidence is to get converts by hook and by crook. One remembers the stories English Bishops told of children taken from London during the blitz season who had never heard the name of Jesus or the meaning of Christmas Day, etc. These Bishops, too, were called on for evidence, and they said, "I am a Bishop, or an Archbishop, or a servant of God, and to use actual evidence is not needed. We are the servants of the Lord, and that is enough." Did not St. Paul say that if his lie had heightened the glory of God there was no sin? And where is the Church that has ignored that counsel?

Sir James Grigg, War Minister, says that the vast majority of the troops think the Sunday laws which close places of amusement for the troops are ridiculous. Of course they are, and are as ridiculous, and as vicious, during the war as they were before the war. And they are as ridiculous where civilians are concerned as when they touch soldiers.

We hope that when the war is over the soldiers, returned to civilian life, will remember that these superstitious "Sabbaths" are bad for all and will do what they can to end them. We know that a large number who went out at least formally Christians will come back as Freethinkers. They ought to help to see that we get liberty in religion as elsewhere.

The Roman Church, as we have often said, is not pleased with the present good companionship of Britain, the U.S.A. and Russia. Father Heenan, a well-known publicist, is reported, and endorsed by the "Universe," as saying that "the Vatican distrusts the Kremlin." "The vast majority of healthy Catholic opinion is suspicious." American papers—and in America Catholics are very powerful—can be counted upon to wreck any peace-time friendship with Russia if it is possible.

A number of Scottish ministers have sent a letter to the Minister of Labour protesting against employment of men on Sundays. They think it wrong to put national service before the service of God. We understand that the Minister of Labour did not reply that if God had done his job of making the world properly there would be no need to employ millions of men and women on the job of trying to straighten things out.

We are not, as our readers will bear witness, fond of printing the criminal misdeeds of preachers. This was because we would never allow a monopoly of either goodness or badness. We

don't put a freethinking "wrong 'un" up for every Christian scoundrel that is exhibited. Christians have no real monopoly of shady characters. But the Freethinker doesn't grovel before God and rely upon Jesus setting him right as he did the thief on the cross. He has to take his medicine as he can.

So we just note that a Congregational minister of Rhondda was recently charged with writing very indecent letters to various people. But we are sure that if that man, instead of being a parson had been a Freethought lecturer there would be a fine Christian moral in the story, the main tone of which would be that if he believed in God he would have never written indecent letters.

We are almost ashamed to say how many times we have pointed out how very near in likeness and nature is the policy with which Hitlerism was established in Germany and the methods which are adopted by Christians—when they can use them. Thus, the Rev. M. Synge, naval chaplain in one of the Royal Training Establishments, says openly that with him there is no religious question. "All the boys have to take religion without question." They "must have daily prayers, a daily celebration of Holy Communion, full Sunday service," and so forth. We agree that if Christians are to be made, that is the way to "larn 'em." But all the same, it is Hitlerism pure and simple. But what becomes of the "four freedoms" which our Prime Minister has been praising so highly? We have no hesitation in saying that we should object to a boy of ours placing himself in a situation where freedom of thought was taboo.

Here is another Christian who believes in the four freedoms. Listen to the Bishop of Gloucester. In a letter to "The Times" he denounces the Board of Education as follows:—

I have before me a report of a course of lectures, designed to qualify teachers for giving religious instruction and recognised by the Board of Education. In these it was stated that modern scholarship had entirely altered traditional Christianity, that the traditional view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture were disproved; neither the Virgin Birth nor the Resurrection could be accepted.

It seems almost impossible for men of common sense to believe that at any time a virgin birth or a resurrection from the dead could be believed by anyone. If it were really believed by anyone, it would surely be a case of arrested development or downright stupidity. Life and death are uniform in their manifestation—so is the cunning of those who seek to fool those on whose folly their own well-being depends.

The Bishop of Gloucester cannot see why anyone should be against permitting parents to bring up their children to believe as they believe. Well, there are quite a number of reasons, but here are two. First, the parents may be in the wrong. Of course, this is a very sad thing, but it is a very common one, and we do not see how it can be altered. Secondly, a parent has no greater moral right to prevent children discovering that their parents are not infallible—particularly in matters of opinion; it can only be done by crippling their mental development. Children should be encouraged to think for themselves from the very earliest age. And, as a final consideration, children are not so easily fooled as most parents imagine; they often retort to the teaching they have received that in many matters their parents are either knavish or foolish.

One of the proposals in the promised Education Bill—perhaps the only one which will be at once put into operation—is the promise that the prospective Act will permit small Christian denominations to enter schools to attend to the religious instruction of the children whose parents belong to a particular sect. These Christians who are swathed in righteousness cannot trust each other any farther than they can see them. But this privilege being granted to Christians, why is not the same privilege extended to representatives of other religions and also to Freethinkers? We are a democracy—of sorts. But in the name of freedom the children of Freethinkers will be exposed to mis-education concerning the nature of religion and, so far as the schools are concerned, will be shut out of the chance of acquiring interest and knowledge of what modern anthropologists have to say.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,
Telephone No.: Holborn 2801. London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. WHITING.—We agree with what you say concerning the Versailles Mystery. But you are doubtless well aware of the difficulty of a superstition. And that the Brains Trust should treat it seriously is characteristic of that substantially foolish institution, which puts a number of men and women through what is an examination of their understanding of things, an understanding which so often is woefully muddled.

E. LEE.—We agree that the fact of Newcastle-on-Tyne not having entertainment on Sunday is a reflection on the town. But you must remember that we are a democracy—of a very peculiar kind, it is true, but still a British democracy—which, to paraphrase a well-known entertainer, permits every man to do as he likes, so long as he does what he is told.

H. C. WALNER.—We never said that we *doubted* whether Jesus Christ ever existed. What we said was that we *know* he did not exist. And those who run may read how such characters came to be accepted as having existed.

BENEVOLENT FUND.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: H. Williams, 4s.; F. S. B. Lawes, 9s.; G. A. S., 4s.; A. Addison, 10s.; Emily Payne, in memory of Edward Payne, 5s.; H. Hilton, 3s.

B. B. PINDER.—Thanks, compliments (5s.).

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

ON New Year's Eve we listened to a broadcast on the dying year. Naturally a great deal of time was spent on the progress of the war. Due and deserved tribute was paid to the heroism of our fighting forces, and a deserved tribute to the response of the people as a whole. These things were a matter of course. But more than once the very highest tribute was paid to Russia, the skill of the Russian leaders, the unquenchable heroism of "the great Russian people," and so forth. All this was to be expected, and if one could feel that the character of the new Russia was properly appreciated by the people of this country and of the United States, we might regard the somewhat delayed recognition of the new Russia as auguring much that would count well for the future. Not because of the institutions that have been created, the awakening of the Russian people, or even the part it has played in securing victory against Hitlerism, but because Russia has shown that the transformation of a society in a single generation is a demonstrated possibility.

But let us be just in both our praise and blame, and do not let those who are interested, not merely in the winning of the war, but in bringing about the existence of a real democracy and a real transformation of social life, think that it was for a people who had been lifted from the mire of Czarism and crass superstition to the possibility of a better life, but for their strength on the battlefield which cannot be denied, and the tremendous part they have played in bringing about the downfall of Hitlerism. It is Russia the warlike that has led to our avowed Christian leaders trumpeting the greatness of Russia.

What we are waiting for is to see our leading Conservative politicians and Church leaders—Roman Catholic, Anglican and all the odds-and-ends of the Christian medley—apologise for the sea of lies that were circulated concerning the Russian revolutions, to say openly that they were at least mistaken in their view of the Russian people, and the aims of the leaders of the Revolution. Praise in the absence of that confession is almost mockery. We are asking for this not because we glory in seeing men and women eat humble pie, but because it may prevent an underground crusade developing when the war of force is won, and the war of aims and ideas commences.

The new edition of Mr. Cohen's "Determinism or Free Will" is now ready. It has been out of print for some time, but has been delayed in publishing owing to the paper scarcity. It is a book that has proven itself, one that wipes out all the unnecessary developments that had gathered round the subject, leaving the real features of the controversy plain enough for a schoolboy to recognise. It forms a good companion to the author's "Materialism Restated." The advance orders are now being dispatched. Price, cloth 2s. 6d., paper 2s.; postage 2d.

Owing to the difficulty of travelling the Editor had decided to cease platform work. But Bradford friends are anxious for him to visit that city in February to celebrate the anniversary of his first visit fifty years ago. Fifty years is a long time to look back on, and the wish will, circumstances permitting, be gratified. At any rate, most of those who were present at that first lecture will now be dead, and so cannot be present to "get their own back."

It might be difficult to say categorically what is meant by an indecent book, but it is fairly easy to define what is meant by an indecent mind. No better illustration of the truth of the last sentence could be found than the Christian treatment of sex. It is not true that religious uncleanness sinned only in making a mystery of the relation of the sexes, but it sinned more deeply in casting a cloak of uncleanness round the whole subject. Only within the past few years have a few Christian leaders come forward with a very mild suggestion that it is part of the duty of parents to see their children grow with an informed healthy mind on the subject, thus following at a "respectful" distance what so many Freethinkers had fought hard to establish. A more liberal and generally established truthfulness would long ago have prevented the unclean suggestiveness which informed without instructing, and thus created a cess-pool where a healthy stream should have flowed.

Our welcome contributor to these pages, Mr. F. J. Corina, has succeeded in producing a book that should be of interest to all and useful to many. The title is "We Are Sixteen," and between a boy and girl of that age, and a doctor and his wife, the whole nature and significance of sex is presented in a clear, clean and helpful manner. It is not a book that lends itself to quotations; it is enough that parents who are perplexed as to their duty in such matters should find "We Are Sixteen" helpful. We do not know of another book that does its work so well, and we commend it to our readers. The book may be ordered from "The Freethinker" Office, price 5s., postage 2d. extra. The only fault we have to find is that "sixteen" is a very arbitrary age. "We Are Sixteen" could be read by most boys and girls at a younger age.

Just out is the second edition of Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann's "Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ" (price 4d., postage 1d.). Mr. Du Cann's essay is one that is well fitted to appeal to the more liberally-minded professing Christians, as well as those who are in a more advanced stage. And in cases of propaganda the important thing is to effect a lodgment in the minds of the more open-minded Christians.

The Catholic Archbishop of New York, the Rev. F. Spellman, informs the world that "the Pope thinks, works, prays, and literally dies for peace." This is very touching, but the pity is that the papacy did so much to help the development of Fascism, blessing the Roman Catholic fighters with Franco in the Spanish war, and also in the war of Italy and Germany against Russia,

and to that extent against the Allies. The death of the Pope, we are not concerned with the man, would be very welcome. How the papacy dies is as uninteresting as would be the death of Hitler and his gang.

It must never be forgotten that in all its manœuvring Rome never loses sight of its interests as a religious organisation. Directly after the Russian revolution it was ready to make terms with Russia. But the Soviet would have no trafficking in that direction.

Keighley, Yorks, Freethinkers are bent on getting a local branch of the N.S.S. going as soon as possible. In connection with their efforts a meeting will be held in the I.L.P. Hall, 15, Russell Street, on Sunday afternoon, January 16, when Mr. F. J. Corina will speak on "Youth, Sex—and Religion." The President of the Bradford Branch N.S.S., Mr. Day, will take the chair at 3 o'clock. There is already some very good personnel available, and those wishing to join in are asked to attend and introduce themselves on this occasion.

We poor mortals are not alone in having to face unexpected difficulties. God also has to face difficulties that are quite unexpected. For example. From the "Evening Standard" of January 1 we learn that the meat packers of San Francisco recently applied for an increase of wages. It was refused. So the meat packers failed to turn up to their packing. But they did not go on strike; what they did was to enter upon a continuous prayer to move the hearts of the "bosses" sufficiently to pay up. And ever since December 23 they have continued to lay their needs before God, and prayed diligently, as Christianity teaches them. And they say they will keep on praying till the wages go up.

Here is a great difficulty for the authorities. The local ones are at a loss and are appealing to the President to do something. But the President has just advised a day of national prayer, and he cannot without losing (Christian) face tell the men it is wrong to rely on prayer, and go back to meat packing. The men affirm that they have not gone on strike; they are simply having continuous prayer. Can the United States really afford to say that a day of meat packing is more important than appeals to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost? The situation is a very delicate one. This case of "Timed meat versus Holy Trinity" may shake Churches to their foundations.

ROBERT BLATCHFORD (1851-1943)

THE death of Robert Blatchford last month gives me the opportunity of paying my small tribute to a great journalist, a lover of fine literature and a genuine Humanist.

It is over 40 years ago since I first had his "Clarion" brought to my notice and, young and enthusiastic for "reform" as I was, I soon became an ardent Clarionette. It had everything which attracted me—fighting articles by Robert himself when he was not praising great books, more or less technical expositions of Socialism by Suthers and A. M. Thompson, short stories which often reached high water mark by the inimitable Neil Lyons, a woman's page which always had something interesting by Julia Dawson, excellent literary reviews by Winifred Blatchford, sparkling cycling articles by the "Flying Scotsman" and Tom Groom, and all sorts of other bits and pieces reaching a high standard by Fay, M. Blatchford and many other writers whose names escape me at the moment. The "Clarion" for one penny (or was it twopence?) was a feast indeed.

Its principal object was to promote Socialism, and it can be truly said that Blatchford made more Socialists than any man of his time. His "Merrie England," in those far off days, seemed to me to be unanswerable, while the fighting articles he wrote to back up his position brought joy to my heart. Nothing

in the other Socialist papers or magazines seemed—to me, at least—to blend a revolutionary spirit with a touching Humanism quite like Blatchford's articles. And his love for fine books and great literature endeared his work to me more and more.

If he had left religion alone I might have become and remained as enthusiastic about Socialism as he was himself. But he came to the conclusion that it was Christianity which stood in the way of the complete acceptance of Socialism by everybody. Against the advice of most of his colleagues, he began a series of articles against Christianity, later collected and published under the title of "God and My Neighbour"—and the fat was truly in the fire!

Most Socialists who had followed him with avidity in his campaign against "vested interests," against "out-of-date" Capitalism, against the swindling landlord and grasping employer, drew the line at any attack on the "truths" and "beauty" of Christianity. Jesus was, in their opinion, the greatest Socialist the world had ever seen, and Blatchford himself had always appealed to the Christian Deity as the Great Example against the greed and hypocrisy of modern society. "What would Jesus say if he saw the slums, the misery and heartrending poverty of our great cities?" was one of Robert's most repeated queries. It is only fair to say that even after he had affirmed his conviction that Jesus never lived at all, Blatchford still would appeal to him as the Great Example, the Piteous Heart, which would throb in indignation at our modern infamies. This appealing to Jesus had become so much of a habit that he could not break it off.

The pages of the "Clarion" resounded with the battle between the unbelieving Socialists and their Christian comrades, and I am quite sure in affirming no reader looked for the next number with more fervid interest than I did to see how the great Robert would still wield his battleaxe in a fight which, I think I am right in saying, must have been his greatest delight. He had very little difficulty in disposing of a number of Christian writers, including the great G. K. Chesterton himself, in such a way that they never dared to approach the field of battle again.

For my part I always feel that it was these Christian apologetics which completely confirmed me in my Freethought. Chesterton got such a whacking that he felt obliged to join the Roman Catholic Church so that, like Newman before him, he could always fall back on something "infallible" when beaten in argument.

But the greatest service Blatchford did me, and I expect many others, was in introducing us to the National Secular Society and the Rationalist Press Association and their publications. For me, at least, it meant my getting to know "The Freethinker" and the "Literary Guide" and their writers, and I soon began to see that the Socialism which I thought would usher in the Millennium was by no means accepted by Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, Foote and John M. Robertson. Moreover, there was the Malthusian Law of Population which was brushed aside by the "Clarion," and which logic compelled me to accept—as I do now, of course. It was not Blatchford's fault that I drifted away from Socialism and saw in Freethought a greater promise of what I ardently wished for.

Blatchford himself also got into very hot water with his comrades over Germany. I was entirely and enthusiastically on his side in this question—as I have ever been; and his "General Von Sneak," written in 1916, seems to me as unanswerable now as it was when it first appeared. But it was the last straw. I think I am right in saying that it was his attitude on Germany much more than his attitude on religion which killed the "Clarion" and brought him in high disfavour with his Socialist friends. He was writing as well and as trenchantly as ever long after he had passed his seventieth birthday, but all to no purpose. The dear old "Clarion" had other writers, and somehow, other interests, and gradually it faded away. I can hardly remember its demise.

The final blow came when, after his wife's death, Blatchford was persuaded to see some medium; and convinced that her spirit spoke to him, affirmed his belief in Spiritualism. That the arch-heretic who gloried in being called an "infidel," who had been an enthusiastic Materialist, should go over to such a crude superstition as Spiritualism, upset his admirers more than anything else, I think. We all blamed his old age and his exceeding love for his wife, the beloved companion of his long life. But the fact remained, and he never, as far as I know, retracted, and he will go down in history with Lodge, Crookes, Barrett, Myers and the other famous names evoked so often and so ardently by the Spiritualist Brotherhood.

One of the books which Blatchford wrote which caused considerable controversy was "Not Guilty," a plea for Determinism. He was not quite well enough equipped to deal with such a subject, and I hope its readers will go to Mr. Chapman Cohen's "Determinism or Free Will" for the necessary corrective. Blatchford's heart in this book got the better of his head—not a bad fault in the main, but not of much use when dealing with philosophy.

I am afraid that this short sketch does nothing like the justice I was striving for in dealing with a man and a writer for whom I have always had the greatest possible admiration. It is difficult to put down in cold print the real enthusiasm he provoked in me, and indeed I owe him a great deal in fostering my own love of books as well as because it was through him I got to know Freethought so well. I salute his memory as a fine and brave fighter in the cause of Humanity.

H. CUTNER.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

I SOMETIMES wonder if it is realised how accurately an autobiographer has to work in order to give anything like a living picture of the times in which he lives. Such a book as Mr. Herbert Palmer's "A Mistletoe Child," with its revealing picture of the life of a child in a Methodist manse of the '90's, or Mr. William Plomer's "Double Lives," which has recently appeared, must necessarily entail almost endless research into the near past. To write falsified history of the sort which is soon discovered to be untrue is easy. Many a book, dealing with the early Christian ages, has made its appearance, been greeted with hysterical enthusiasm by Christian critics, and then been laughed out of existence by the scientific historians of a later period.

But to give that tiny slice of recent history which is involved in the personal life of an individual is not so easy. It entails sincerity and lack of humbug—both merits which, in the 20th century of the Christian era, are not as generally possessed as is sometimes supposed.

I suggest, therefore, to anyone who is thinking of writing an autobiography to let his mind lie fallow for some time before he puts pen to paper. Let him get a range which is sufficiently limited, and let him realise that it is only by telling the truth about himself and his friends—not the truth as he thought it should appear in the eyes of a non-existent God, but the truth as it should be seen in the eyes of a friendly critic—can he hope to get anywhere. If all autobiographical writers would do that, we should have less books of dull memoirs and more books which reveal the true heart of man.

S. H.

"THE MOTHER OF GOD." By G. W. FOOTE. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

"BIBLE ROMANCES." By G. W. FOOTE. Witty, Scholarly and Devastating. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

"THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH." By COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—I have just seen the letter of William Gallacher in your issue of December 5. I do not propose to intervene at length in this controversy, but it is necessary to say that Gallacher's representations of I.L.P. decisions are wildly inaccurate. He describes them as "No aid for the Soviet Union; everything for the defeat of the Soviet Union." So far from this being true, the I.L.P. recognises the Socialist economic basis in Soviet Russia without being "yes men." We do not believe that Soviet Russia is fully Socialist, because a Socialist society would have workers' democracy and cultural liberty and economic equality, which have not yet been realised in the U.S.S.R.

We are, of course, not opposed to aid for the Soviet Union, nor do we desire its defeat. We take the view that the Churchill Government cannot be trusted to aid Soviet Russia in any permanent way, and believe that a Socialist Britain is necessary to co-operate fully with Soviet Russia. Our annual conferences have laid down in clear terms that such a Socialist Britain should give aid, including arms if necessary, to Soviet Russia or any other Socialist Government engaged in the struggle for freedom.

—Yours, etc.,
FENNER BROCKWAY.
(Political Secretary, Independent Labour Party.)

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.: "On Intellectuals: Intellectuals are the Salt of the Earth."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute, Bradford).—Sunday, 6-8 p.m. Mr. JAMES FARMER: "What Shall We Put in Its Place?"

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-8 p.m. Mr. CHARLES BRADLAUGH BONNER: "Political Letters from Rome."

Newcastle-on-Tyne (Socialist Cafe, Pilgrim Street Arcade).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

"WE ARE SIXTEEN"

By F. J. CORINA

A Sex Education book that is different because it deals with realities instead of religiosities. Written for young people from 14 years onwards. Fulfills the parents' task of providing instruction in "the facts of life" while telling the story of a boy and girl in search of sex knowledge. 144 pp., six illustrations. Cloth bound, 5s., post free, from Clegg and Son Limited, Publishers, Bradford, Yorks., and Pioneer Press, 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4.

WANTED.—F. J. Gould's "Children's Book of Moral Lessons." Please state condition and price to Box 18, c/o THE FREETHINKER, 2/3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4.

"PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT." By Chapman Cohen. Price 2s., postage 2d.

"MATERIALISM RESTATED." With special chapters on "Emergence" and the "Problem of Personality." By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d., by post 4s. 8½d.

"WHAT IS RELIGION?" By R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d., postage 1d.

"FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST." By J. M. Wheeler. Price 2s. 6d., postage 2½d.

A NATION OF NATIONS

MANY post-war planners who ought to know better are bandying about much glib talk of "sovereignty," attacking or defending without really understanding it. Here is a book which makes short work of schemes whereby states will once more solemnly renounce the "right" to act as judge and jury in their own case, but will be permitted to retain the power to break their pledges at the first opportunity. Lionel Curtis, who has devoted the greater part of a lifetime to the problem, gives us another instalment of his findings in "Faith and Works" (Oxford University Press; 2s., with a foreword by Sir William Beveridge). He declares:—

"That the peace of the world cannot be kept unless national governments surrender 'some part of their sovereignty to an international body,' has become almost a common form in schemes for post-war settlement. With rare exceptions, the people who use this formula mean that the international body is to represent and be created by the national governments or legislatures. They oppose any suggestion that an international body should be made answerable to the peoples themselves and derive its authority from their votes. They condemn the necessary means to the end they propose."

Contradicting the misguided and pernicious doctrine of government of states by states for states, the author preaches instead the gospel of popular sovereignty. "Sovereignty vests in the citizens as a whole, and not in their government." They therefore have the right to divide the powers of government allotting international affairs to an international government responsible to a wide electorate and leaving national affairs to the separate national governments responsible to the national electorates. He hits the nail on the head when he points out that "no transfer of sovereignty to an international body by two or more national commonwealths has been effected unless the international body is directly elected by the peoples of these commonwealths."

It will be a world calamity if such arguments do not prevail when we come to interpret Clause III. of the Atlantic Charter whereby the United Nations declare that "they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

A great deal will depend on the longevity of the sanguinary named "United" Nations. We can never expect all its ties to be of the same strength; they will range from full constitutional union in (let us hope) many instances to some which may be little better than reluctant collaboration bred of necessity. Curtis believes that the British Commonwealth will be expected to act as the backbone of the United Nations organisation, and to be equal to the task it must have a popularly elected parliament for common affairs; not exclusively British, but a nucleus which would eventually develop into world government.

This is a new approach to international government, if only because the author has something new to say about the division of powers into national and international functions. "Having said that some constitutional change is needed . . . I have then tried to show how that change can be confined to the narrowest possible limits." The author argues that security and social reform can only be attained when security is allotted to a new international government, and social reform reserved to the existing national governments. It is interesting to compare this proposal with the plan for international government advocated by Sir William Beveridge in February, 1940 ("Peace by Federation?"—World Order Papers, Royal Institute of International Affairs).

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

BOYCOTT UP-TO-DATE

THE unashamed intolerance of a couple of generations ago is less common to-day, but Freethinkers cannot afford to rest on their laurels because of this. Largely the difference only amounts to a change of tactics on the part of the reactionaries, rather than a change of heart. The local Council that then openly refused to let a public hall for a Freethought lecture has in most cases been replaced by one that achieves the same result by the evasive method. Instead of, "You shall not defile our hall with your blasphemy," they inform the organisers of Freethought meetings that the hall is unfortunately booked up for the whole season or that particular dates required happen to fall on the caretaker's night off. In the press, similarly, the Freethinking side of discussions in the correspondence columns can always be omitted unavoidably owing to "pressure on space." Usually it is difficult for the Freethinker to get at the inside facts when tactics like these are adopted, so he is, if anything, more handicapped to-day than in earlier times of rampant but honest bigotry.

To be able to unmask a flagrant example of evasive and dishonest opposition of this modern kind is, therefore, particularly satisfying. Following a decision to advertise Mr. Cohen's new book, "Christianity—What Is It?" small advertisements were drawn up and sent to a number of journals that were thought to be suitable. One of them was "The Teachers' World." Messrs. Evans Brothers Limited, the publishers, replied that owing to pressure on their space they were not accepting any new advertisements during the war. This seemed a reasonable objection, and the matter might have ended there if a member of the N.S.S. Executive had not smelt a rat.

Having his own reasons for suspecting that the refusal of the advertisement by Evans Brothers was because it referred to a book of a freethinking nature, and was not due to the reason given, he himself sent an advertisement to "The Teachers' World" of some books he was prepared to sell, asking for it to be put in the Miscellaneous column, where the advertisement of "Christianity—What Is It?" would have appeared if it had been accepted. In reply came, not a refusal, not an apology that space wouldn't permit, but a receipt for the payment he had sent; and in due course his advertisement appeared in the paper that a week or so earlier had said it was accepting no new advertisements during the war.

Teachers who are readers of "The Freethinker"—and they are neither a handful nor confined to a small area of the country—will no doubt give this incident wide publicity in their profession. Readers of "The Teachers' World" might inquire of the editor why publishers of religious books are well represented in his paper's advertising columns while, on the other hand, a publisher of freethinking books is put off with an evasive and untrue excuse. The latter practice is as contemptible ethically as the old intolerance was intellectually, and its adoption by "The Teachers' World" puts this journal in a very unfavourable light in comparison with other papers which have accepted and published the advertisement.

P. V. M.

A FLOP

The padre, with some pride, surveyed
The Sunday morning church parade.
Was ever turn-out smarter?
His sermon would be clear and bold;
His subject, sure to knock 'em cold,
Was "The Atlantic Charter."

He spouted instances galore
Of what the troops were fighting for.
Alas! They thought it silly.

"Freedom from fear and want"—and then
"Freedom of worship"—this to men
All present willy-nilly!

P. V. M.