

THE FREETHINKER

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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Here and There

IT can hardly be said with truth that God—or God's Providence—has so far come well out of the war. On the eve of the war we had a non-stop prayer for peace, which for the first time was continued by night as well as by day. In reply, God gave us Munich, which opened a clear road for Nazi Germany to take over several important strategical positions, raised confidence in the minds of German soldiers, and made easy the conquest of Poland—a stronghold of the Roman Catholic Church. Followed many days of national prayer, most of which were succeeded by disasters. The attempt to bring God over to our side was made by assuring him that this was a war for the preservation of Christianity, a theory that was shaken rather badly when Russia—"Atheistic Russia"—came in on our side. The period during which this country was heavily bombed proved up to the hilt that bombs were no respecters of creed or country. Taking the respective numbers into consideration, God seems as careless of his own churches as he is of public houses. In fact, and in proportion to numbers, churches suffered more than pubs, and the holy water of the Catholic was as useless, from a protective point of view, as a barrel of beer. It is not to be wondered at that of late there have been few days of prayer for victory, but people are invited—by the clergy—to continue individual prayer, probably to maintain a habit. It is also probable that Church leaders are awakening to the fact that days of national prayer are little more than an advertisement of the helplessness of God—if he exists—and the folly of man, in any case. Best to wait until decisive victory is gained and then, in the relief of peace, the clergy may rush in with a detailed account of the way in which *they* helped to win the war. That will be the time to thank God for ending a five or six-year war that he might have ended inside of 24 hours or, better still, should never have permitted to occur.

If, to an independent mind, God has not come well out of the war, his representatives on earth have fared worse. With a degree of impudence that can develop only as a consequence of careful training, the clergy had been posing—to the poor—as their only true friends. To the other section of society they were more inclined to stand as the guardians of "keeping things as they are." We remember the late Bishop of London—Winnington Ingram—enforcing a request for subscriptions for the East End poor—that those in the West would not rest so comfortably were it not for the religious influence of the clergy in the East End. The Christian Church has always served as the opium of the poor and a star of life to the rich.

The many, many centuries of Christian rule has done so little to develop communal life that when German bombs devastated areas in the East End the unanimous feeling and

comment of those who saw the hovels in which the people lived was that, if the loss of life could have been avoided, the Germans deserved a vote of thanks for what they had done. The Churches—loyal at least to their friends—countered with thrilling stories of the ignorance of the young people concerning Christianity. This, of course, had nothing whatever to do with the vile conditions under which people were living, but it might distract attention, and was a step towards realising the Government-cum-church plot to reinstate the clergy in the schools. The clergy were not particularly shocked at the way in which people were living, but they were alarmed, or pretended to be, at children who had never heard the name of Jesus, who did not know that he was born on Christmas Day, etc. Challenged over and over again to produce the children, the clergy remained silent.

Now and then, however, the truth timidly asserts itself, as in the case of a Christian lady who had been engaged in welfare work in Sheffield, and who is reported in the "Sheffield Telegraph" for February 2 as saying of young women that "the majority of them are not attracted [to religion]. What the cause of that may be I don't know. They treat religion with great respect, but they have no use for it in their own lives." This young lady might find one key (there are others) to the situation by reflecting on a statement by Ruskin. Someone wrote him protesting against his scathing criticism of the clergy of his day, and said that the only friend of the poor was the clergy. To which came the retort that this was a far more serious indictment of the clergy than ever he had attempted; that after so many centuries of control the people they had taught and encouraged were completely blind to their social obligations and responsibilities. It would be wrong to say that the clergy take up the position of Cain—"Am I my brother's keeper?" It is rather that of "I am my brother's keeper, and my first duty is to keep him content in that state of life in which it has pleased God to place him."

Broken Homes and Empty Churches

Among the problems facing us in the future is that of replacing the homes that have been destroyed—a number that should be increased by the removal of those that *ought* to have been destroyed long ago. There is a Government calculation that it will take at least twelve years to find houses for the people, so we shall be fortunate if, other things equal, we rehouse everyone within the first twenty-five. But we may be certain that an unavowed priority will be given to the rebuilding of churches. The fact that only ten or twelve per cent. of the population use the churches and chapels does not matter. A church serves as an advertisement whether it is filled with worshippers or offers a dreary vista of empty seats. A forecast of things to come is offered in the case of Coventry Cathedral. Here the Bishop of Coventry has launched a plan for rebuilding.

And although not explicitly stated, it looks as though the rebuilding is to be taken in hand at once. The plans are ready, and we may take it for granted that openly or secretly priority will be given it. There is apparently no demand from the people of Coventry that the Cathedral shall take precedence of houses, but the Bishop may well retort that the fewer attendants at church the greater the need for spectacular action. He admits that "eighty per cent. of the people of Coventry are without membership of church or chapel," and there are surely enough chapels and churches to accommodate all who wish to attend divine service. The Bishop has secured the co-operation of the Nonconformists and, in return, there is to be a kind of annexe to the Cathedral in which Nonconformists can carry on private conversation with God. How much this rebuilding will cost we do not know and do not care. The population is about 200,000.

In most matters the question of rebuilding Britain will turn on the question of necessity. Where religion is concerned it is also a question of necessity—the necessity of advertising. For every church is an advertisement for the priesthood, from the Roman Catholic right down to the smallest congregation. And therefore it is not a question of the needs of a people, but the need of keeping religious buildings before the public whether they come to church or not. If the churches were rationed for the next generation, or until the domestic needs of the people are met, it would be one of the heaviest blows that religion has received for some time. To give priority to church buildings will be one of the war-time and after-war scandals. But the wealth of the Established Church and the interests of the Nonconformist chapels, combined with the fear that the Labour Party have of offending religious interests, will probably secure, as we have said, one of the minor—or major—scandals of the after-war period.

Piety and the Press

What we have to face in the near future is an allied army of believers that could easily be defeated if it fought in the open and with clean weapons. But the major part of the efforts of these allied forces are not expressed openly; they are accomplished in stealthy ways, in the use of which religious organisations are usually very adept. As an illustration of this, I may take a report of a speech by Mr. Henry Martin, Editor-in-Chief of the Press Association. It appears in the "Catholic Herald" for February 4, and is a summary of an address delivered to editors on "The Place of Religion in the Post-War Press." Mr. Martin, it may be noted, has for a long time utilised his position to force upon pressmen the necessity for advertising religion—the Christian religion—in the course of their daily work. Mr. Martin complains that pressmen approach religion "with a certain wariness and frequently with contempt." That the bulk of contributors to the Press have no belief in religion one can well believe. But the development of the Press has left, in most cases, far behind the situation when the ordinary pressman expressed his real opinions concerning religion. More or less—putting on one side a small minority—those who write for newspapers write according to orders, or in a way that will not displease their editors. The essential question is: "What is the opinion of the newspaper?" not "What is my opinion

on the subject on which I am writing?" If a clergyman announces publicly that he does not believe in the Bible miracles, that is "news." But if a known Freethinker criticises in a lecture the belief in the inspiration of the Bible, and if he tells honestly the story of Christian fraudulence in the handling of the Bible, that is not news. How many pressmen would dare openly to attack the impudent proclamation of the B.B.C. that while it will introduce Christianity several times each day, it will not permit anything to be said which indicts the "Christian tradition"? There is no open opposition, thanks to the tactics of men such as Mr. Martin. I remember a well-known journalist, well known also as a Freethinker, saying to me in response that he had not said all he ought to have said in an article dealing with religious belief: "You forget that I am a journalist." It is not merely by what they say that pressmen help the churches, it is of far greater consequence that they do not say what they would say if they were honest to themselves and to their readers. One may deceive by silence as well as by speech. So Mr. Martin advocates the setting up, by pressmen, of "a religious technical committee to consider how far they may further the adoption of a policy based upon religious standards," and then Mr. Martin says that he means by religious standards "Christian standards." There is nothing new in this; it has been going on for years; the only new feature is that the revolt against Christianity has become so general that some stronger steps must be taken lest the truth about religion should creep into the Press, and so become the property of the common man.

I have space for but one other item in these somewhat rambling paragraphs. Addressing a mid-day Sunday service in Birmingham, Mr. Hugh Redwood, a pressman who writes on religion, said that the "declining influence of the Church might be stayed if the Churches advertised." Mr. Redwood is rather late. The Churches have always advertised. Perhaps he means that if the Churches combined to pay well enough for the insertion of articles lauding the work and teaching of the Churches, the decay of religion might be slowed down. Candidly, we think that possible. The rate of decay might be slowed down, but not even the Press can prevent a growing number of the best characters, in all sections of society from turning their backs on a creed that is an insult to a man at his best, and has never yet prevented anyone feeling better at his worst.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE STORY OF THE DEAD HAND

VARIOUS invaluable essays and reviews written by Dr. H. C. Lea, the famous historian, have been collected and published in America by the University of Pennsylvania Press. This instructive volume, "The Minor Historical Writings," of H. C. Lea is obtainable in England from Humphrey Milford, Oxford, 1942; 21s. 6d.

The work before us covers an extensive field. Among other interesting themes, it deals with Witchcraft, Spanish History, Church Affairs in the 19th Century, The Bible View of Polygamy, and the amazing anti-Masonic crusade conducted by Leo Taxil and his confederates, whose lying pretences not only deluded the Catholic laity but even imposed on members of the Roman hierarchy itself. That some astute ecclesiastics merely utilised Taxil's audacious mendacities for the purpose of striking a deadly

blow at the hated Masonic Lodges is much more than probable, but that others willingly credited his fantastic assertions seems evident. Indeed, some clerics strove to exonerate Taxil, after his sensational exposure and cynical confession of his wholesale mendacity.

Lea's essay dealing with the Dead Hand was privately printed in Philadelphia in 1900. Copies were sent to Europe and Salomon Reinach promptly translated it into French, and another rendering appeared in Dutch at Amsterdam a little later. As Dr. Lea pertinently states: "The control which the Church exercises over the hopes and fears of the sinner, especially on the deathbed, and the teaching, amply warranted by Scripture, that well-directed almsgiving is the best antidote for sin has given it in all ages an unequalled opportunity for acquisition. Moreover, what it acquired it retained. It held in mortmain—in the dead hand—and its possessions were inalienable."

The religious claimed that not even the Pope himself could sell ecclesiastical property, so secular princes, even at an early date, sought the mitigation of an evil so inimical to social security. Charlemagne, noting the abortive efforts of his predecessors in restraining clerical greed, when he was endeavouring to restore order in his distracted dominions, pointedly asked his bishops "whether renunciation of the world is exhibited by those who are constantly seeking to augment their possessions by exploiting the hope of heaven and the fear of hell and inducing men to disinherit their heirs." But this remonstrance passed unheeded and Charlemagne's son Louis was constrained to decree that the clergy should be deprived of donations that disinherited children.

Yet the clergy increased their landed estates, and for centuries the dead hand strengthened its stranglehold. The evil was intensified by the exemption of the clergy from taxation. This enabled the monastic orders to add to their ill-gotten gains through bequests, by purchasing land at a higher price than its usual market value, for ordinary purchasers were handicapped by the payments in money or services exacted by the State.

Curiously enough, Spain led the way in attempting to remove this clerical privilege by limiting possession of bequeathed property to a term of three years. The Church, of course, protested against this salutary proposal and claimed its possessions as perpetual property. Gregory IX. made determined efforts to nullify the measure, but in the 12th century the State's prohibition was extended to purchased land. Thus, no estates "subject to royal jurisdiction should fall into mortmain, adding significantly that no tricks or devices should protect the purchaser from confiscation. It was one thing, however, to frame such laws and quite another to enforce them. Popular piety on the one hand and ecclesiastical greed on the other conspired to render them nugatory." So, right down to the 16th century, the Cortes of Castile ineffectually endeavoured to find a remedy and the conflict continued till the close of the 18th century when, in 1795, Carlos IV. tried to rescue something from the maws of the clergy by imposing a charge of 15 per cent. on their nefarious transactions. Still, fraudulent devices frustrated the Crown. Indeed, the clergy, aided by the Papacy, so securely safeguarded their ill-gotten gains that they were able to cling to them like leeches.

In 1239, Frederick II. in Sicily was constrained to legislate against clerical encroachments. Edward I. of England dealt with the dead hand in 1279, but the Church constantly evaded his measure's provisions until the enactment of a more comprehensive statute in 1391. In Germany clerical rapacity was so extensive that at the beginning of the Reformation "one-half of the land in Germany was estimated to have belonged to the Church." Then measures curtailing mortmain were adopted, more or less successfully, in both Protestant and Catholic domains.

In Italy, clerical acquisitions of landed estates became so menacing that in 1432, both in Piedmont and Savoy, efforts were imperative to restrain sacerdotal acquisitiveness, and these were ultimately successful in overcoming the bitter opposition of the

clergy. In 1584, ecclesiastical estates were subjected to taxation, despite the vehement protests of the Papacy until, in 1863, Cavour suppressed the monasteries and devoted their property to the better instruction of the clergy. In Tuscany and Florence and in Venice the story was much the same, for clerical rapacity knows no frontiers. The Venetian Senate's anti-clerical policy became one of the chief causes of the bitter quarrel between Paul V. and the Republic in 1606, but despite the Papal interdict, the Signoria refused to give way.

In Portugal also it became urgently necessary to impose restrictions on clerical land-grabbing. Yet, so late as 1635, "the Papal Nuncio and collector, Allesandro Cavalcanti, had the audacity to publish an edict abrogating them." Philip IV. of Spain, the then ruler of Portugal, despite his superstitious fears, keenly resented this high-handed proceeding and an *auto* was published which declared that the Pope's minion had no authority for his action. So the Holy Father yielded, and his nuncio publicly disavowed his impudent edict.

Both in Flanders and France it became urgently necessary to clip the wings of the covetous clergy, but their successive curtailments were astutely evaded. Even the centralised autocracy of Louis XIV. proved powerless in the face of clerical resistance.

For six centuries Catholic States strove with scanty success against the crying evils of mortmain. The ceaseless repetition of measures designed to mitigate this menace to social service clearly proves their ineffectiveness.

As Dr. Lea observes: "By one means or other the Church baffled the lawgivers, heedless of the temptations it was offering and of the risk it might run whenever circumstances should weaken its awful authority over the minds of princes and peoples. It did not anticipate that the time would come when those who might shrink from spoliation would reconcile their consciences to the euphemism of 'secularisation.'"

It is significant that in Germany, amid the turmoil of the Reformation, Romanist and Lutheran princes were practically at one in confiscating Church possessions. Later, Maria Theresa and Joseph II. were perfectly willing to appropriate monastic revenues and estates. Then came the French Revolution and, in 1790, the temporalities of the Church were absorbed and the religious orders were suppressed. Also in 1804, the very opulent archbishoprics of Treves, Mayence, Cologne and Salzburg were secularised by the German authorities, while 18 wealthy bishoprics, including those of Brixen and Lübeck, with their religious houses, experienced the same fate.

Lea's summing up of the matter is brief and to the point: "In the long struggle between Church and State . . . the impressive fact is the unanimous conviction of Catholic statesmen that the dead hand is an evil to be strenuously suppressed, and that the religious orders are an undeniable factor in the body politic. No less noteworthy is their contemptuous disregard of the protests and fulminations of the Holy See." Let us trust that the black army has been permanently beaten and that the Roman hierarchy will never recover its old-time power of unrighteousness.

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

SALISBURY is to have Sunday cinemas, and they may open at 2-15 p.m. This hits the clergy in two places. First, there is a Sunday performance where those who wish may enjoy themselves. Secondly, it cuts right across the hours of church attendance. In the old days something serious would have happened—at least a disease would have struck the city and a few thunderbolts might have appeared. Now the only persons who are hurt are the clergy; which gives rise to a reflection: If the Lord cannot prevent people "desecrating" the Sabbath, or stand against a cinema show, how can we expect him to tackle a world war?

In a letter to the "New Statesman" the Headmaster of Westminster City School asks: "Is the Christian religion, after all these centuries of prestige and privilege, to fall back on the secular support of the State to guarantee it a hearing? Are school prayers to be conducted under the compulsory auspices of the Government? Are members of the teaching profession to feel that promotion to its leading positions is threatened with religious tests?" Well, that is what will happen if this Government carries out its plans to a successful issue. And it means poorer schools than there should be, with a strengthening of a decaying creed and a much poorer type of teachers than would otherwise exist.

There is one point in connection with the Roman Catholics, their schools, and their relations to the general community. They demand the right to teach their children the Roman Catholic religion, to have Roman Catholic teachers only, and for the State to bear the whole of the cost of maintenance on the ground that they, too, are training the children of the future. But there is one serious consideration that arises here that no one has dared to attack—save that there has arisen a few vague protests. But something more important than cost is concerned in the position.

Granted that the children of Roman Catholics have an equal citizenship with other children irrespective of the religious views held by their parents. Does it not follow that the State has a right to control to a very considerable degree what children may and may not be taught? It is clear that some limitations must be placed on the kind of teaching a child receives. The child should be made acquainted as early as possible with things that are matters of opinion, and those that are subjects of a doubtful character, or those that we know to be false or, to put it mildly, are matters of imagination.

Readers will remember that a few weeks back we gave in these columns the kind of thing that is taught children under Roman Catholic control. The first was the Fatima case, where the Virgin Mary was seen to come down from heaven, and in obedience to her wishes the sun left its place in the sky and played a number of tricks in the sight of a multitude of people in a Portuguese village. The second was the appearance of the same lady in a South American State—this time with heart pierced by seven swords. The third story comes from Southern Ireland concerning an earthly lady who, by the grace of God, besides being miraculously cured of a very bad complaint, has neither eaten any food nor drunk any liquid since 1926—this is on the authority of a priest, and presumably with the consent of his superiors.

In the name of all that is fair to the children immediately concerned, and with all citizens who are concerned with the welfare of the State, should these things be subsidised by the State? We leave the question of whether it should be *permitted* as another, and almost a distinct, question. We feel that docile as many Members of Parliament are to headquarters' orders, if these three cases were brought before the House of Commons the case of the Roman Catholics completely controlling the school life of children would soon be smashed.

At a "Rally" in Glasgow of the Baptist Union, an appeal was made for an increase in the incomes of preachers. The treasurer said that at present a street-sweeper's year's wage was only £12 less than that of a married Minister. But there is one thing that ought in justice to be noted. The street-sweeper *removes* rubbish.

The Archbishop of Canterbury says that a great many of the men in this war have "thought about religion as they never did before." We agree, the result is the number of men, privates and officers, who have become subscribers to "The Freethinker," and who write that the paper and our publications have opened their eyes to much they had never before noticed.

It is worth bearing in mind that the Labour Party substantially agreed to the State using the schools to provide customers for the churches. It would have been much more to the point, and have shown greater devotion to principle, if

they had remained true to the position that religion is private property, and while standing for the right of every man and woman to practise whatever religion they please, it is not the business of the State to say when and where this religion is to be taught. Labour men should know by this time that in supporting a measure which is intended to frustrate the creation of a real democracy, they are going over to the side of a very ancient enemy of real freedom. If they do not know this, the sooner their seats are vacant the better.

Mr. A. P. Herbert has just issued a pamphlet for a "reform" of the skies. He wishes to abolish all the present names of the stars and replace them with the names of eminent men, mostly English. We had better take this as an effort in humour, for there is no possibility of it coming into action. They have in their present names a significance that would be lost if Mr. Herbert's suggestion was adopted. That significance was pointed out by Draper many years ago. It was that nearly all the names are classical-heathen names. There is hardly a Christian name among them. They are a standing reminder of the revenge that science has taken—perhaps unconsciously—of the Christian opposition that has been offered to scientific development.

What a monument of wisdom is the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead, of the City Temple! Here is one of his gems which we take from the "Sunday Graphic." He says that if we are going to have a Christian government, we must have Christian governors who must be "trained by the Church, and, if need be, financed by the Church." Parliament is bad enough as it is, but one that is trained and financed by the Churches makes one quiver, or laugh.

In the same article there is a rehash of the story of how St. Telemachus broke up the Gladiatorial games by throwing himself into the arena and so getting killed. Solemnly does Mr. Weatherhead say, "It was the last time that gladiatorial games took place." But there is no evidence that any such scene happened. It is given up by first-class authorities, although a church never drops a lie when it suits its purpose to label it truth, and it is quite certain that the gladiatorial games continued for many, many years after the date given for St. Telemachus. They eventually were discontinued from purely economic reasons.

The war has brought with it many hair-raising or blood-curdling events, but none are of such a blood-curdling character as an incident related by the "Church Times." A young officer "turned up at Christmas for what was given out as a Church of England Communion service, and found that the celebrant was a Methodist chaplain." The "Church Times" says the officer does not question the good intentions of the service; the serious thing appears to be that while the service was all right, the man who administered the dose, or performed the trick, was not of the right order. As to the officer, well, says the "C. T.," "at the very least his confidence in the sacramental ministrations . . . must be severely shaken." We agree, and while bad begins there is worse behind. Suppose that act of Communion is registered by the recording angel as O.K., only to discover that the ceremony was conducted by an outsider? Or suppose God Almighty receives that officer when he goes to heaven as properly "saved" and then finds out that the records are untrustworthy? Or, worst of all, suppose the officer, after finding out the blunder, feels just as he did before and decides that it doesn't matter a damn whether he goes through the ceremony or not? God will have lost one more follower, and at a time when recruits are as scarce as Hitlerian victories.

Another item from the "Church Times": "A school chaplain writes that he was preaching in a large prison in a big city; but he complains that he received no recognition from the Church of England." Now considering how many of the prisoners have been brought up religiously, it seems to be a case of gross ingratitude for the Church of England not to recognise those men who visit the believers in God who are in prison. To use a current phrase, it is a "swindle." And a swindle means apparently something one does not like.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

We are greatly indebted to our readers for their supplying us with items of information that are useful to readers. But we must insist upon the need for stating *the date and source of all communications*. We are unable to use much that we should like as a consequence of this omission.

S. T. WARREN.—Your experience in the Forces of the large number of men that are not satisfied with the Christian religion, but have not yet decided on a complete break is supported by many letters that reach us. It is emphasised by the number that has definitely taken the step to avowed Atheism. One of the casualties in this war is the Church.

ORDERS for "Ruins of Empires" are delayed as this work is being bound in cloth. We hope to have a supply shortly, when these will be dispatched in rotation.

BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary acknowledges a donation of 10s. from Mr. E. Webster to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

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SUGAR PLUMS

WE have so often protested against the Christian claim that every parent has a right to bring up a child in his own opinions on religion that we reprint with great pleasure the following excellent letter which appears in the "Schoolmaster" for February 3:—

"SIR,—Much play has recently been made with the 'right' of parents to have their children taught the religious doctrines in which they happen to believe. I notice that a resolution supporting this 'right' is being submitted by the Manchester Branch of the N.U.T. to the Annual Conference of our Union. May I therefore be permitted to make the following comments:—

1. In the matter of intellectual belief, be it religious, political, or any other kind, there is only one person with any right, i.e., the child.

2. That right is to have presented to him in an objective and unbiased manner all the ascertained facts and then to be allowed to draw his own conclusions. Should the subject be a controversial one (and all religious and political beliefs are) he must be given all the points of view on it. To give him only one is propaganda, not education.

3. Any view of education which denies him this right regards the child as a piece of personal property instead of an eventual adult with his own individuality and faculties for seeking the truth. It is a contemptible form of spiritual rape.

4. I know of one child who is being brought up with no beliefs except the very bigoted (and ill-informed) ones of his parents, e.g., he is not allowed to go to the cinema because it is considered 'worldly.' There are many such cases, and others less extreme. Can nothing be done to protect these helpless children from such vicious parental totalitarianism?

5. The issue is of practical importance since, as future citizens, our children will be called upon to make decisions on matters of great moment affecting the welfare and happiness not only of themselves and their descendants, but of all humanity. How can they do this if they approach these problems with minds warped by one-sided propaganda, minds not carefully trained to examine all the facts before arriving at decisions?

6. Can any intelligent person conceive of its being a 'right' for a Fascist parent or State to inculcate into children the unscientific, barbaric, nonsensical doctrines of Fascism? But if it is right for the Christian parent (of whatever sect) to do so, why not for the Fascist one? One would like to hear the views of our advocates of 'parental rights' on the subject of re-educating German youth.

7. The virtues of honesty, kindness, etc., are not the property of any one religious faith, and can be taught without having to be tied up with controversial theories.

I realise that the issue I am raising is perhaps not 'practical politics' as far as the new Education Bill is concerned. But I trust that no such appalling resolutions will be passed by Conference. I would like to suggest that we teachers make a cult of professional idealism in the matter, remembering always the great words of Milton: 'We do unwisely by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt the strength of truth; let truth and falsehood grapple. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue.' J. W. (R.A.F.).

P.S.—I am neither a bachelor nor childless!"

It is a pity that the newspapers in referring to Bertrand Russell do not refrain from speaking of him as "Earl Russell." Although he may use that title, he has openly declined to accept it, and Professor Russell has gained credit in the world of science and philosophy, and therefore stands high above titles that so often have very discreditable antecedents, and when hereditary titles are a slur on a country that is trumpeting the claim that it is a democracy. There may be a deal said in favour of a Second Chamber, but nothing at all in favour of a hereditary one. In any case, its membership should not make a title necessary. Professor Russell has set a good example. And there are others.

We see that a book has just been issued with the title "I Believe in One God." At first glance it looks as though one god should be enough for anyone. But, on the other hand, gods are so common that one sees no reason for rationing the number one should have. It will be remembered that Paul saw in Athens a monument to the "Unknown God." It has suited Christian preachers to make that read as referring to the Christian god, who had not then developed. It was an invite to a party to "bring as many friends as you can."

A religious journal puts a heading to a book, "An Eclectic Bible." Not at all a bad title, for the Christian Bible is very eclectic in the degree to which it is made up from other—unacknowledged—writings.

We see that one clergyman, the Vicar of St. Jude's Church, Hexthorpe, objects to the new Education Bill because it is intended "to foster the growth and development of a new type of Christianity, a type that has no foundation in the teaching of the Bible of the early Church." What we should like to know is how many of the clergy really do stand by the teachings of the Bible and the early Church? Of course, they ought to do so, but there are not many of the clergy, from the Archbishops downwards, who dare preach that kind of sermon. They are nearly all taking their salaries under false pretences. They proclaim one thing, teach another, and get paid for work they do not perform.

THE SABBATH QUESTION

II.

THEOLOGIANS have had very great difficulty in explaining why, after the Fourth Commandment was given, we get no allusion in the Bible to the Sabbath Day—the most holy day in Israel—for something like 500 years; and when we do get it mentioned again (in 1 Chron. ix. 32) it seems to be a very passing reference. Actually, there is no mention again of the Sabbath for another 150 years—the text is found in 2 Kings iv. 23, and that also seems to be only incidental. The day is further mentioned in Amos and in Isaiah (Is. lvi. 1-8).

But it is difficult to gather from "Holy Writ" whether the Israelites kept the Sabbath at all until very late in their history, for the very simple reason that the Old Testament in the form we have it is a comparatively late production. We do not know who wrote the various books, or when they were written; and allusions to the Sabbath Day may have been deliberately put in—or left out—at the fancy of the compilers.

The Israelites are made out to be by their own "prophets," rebellious and stiff-necked, ever ready to throw over the one true God, and eagerly to acclaim all sorts of other Gods; and they seem to have taken special pleasure to "defile" God's sanctuary and "profane" his Sabbaths, as well as to slay their children to their idols. At least, that is what Ezekiel testifies and this is looked upon as genuine history by modern Jews. For my part, I feel a great deal of scepticism in some of the charges made by the prophets—I have the gravest doubts about their fulminations having been written at the time Bible chronology gives them.

There is one point which I have not seen discussed in the many books I have read on the Sabbath. Who settled which day should be called Saturday and who continued the reckoning?

We know that the calendar has been in the past in the most hopeless confusion. Owing to inaccurate calculations, it has had to be reformed time after time. In fact, among other changes, we in this country had to lose eleven days in 1752 to get our time by the sun correct—that year being, in fact, minus September 3-13 inclusive.

Moreover, some of the special days kept by the Jews are admittedly uncertain, simply because time must vary in different parts of the world—as readers of that entertaining romance, "Round the World in Eighty Days," by Jules Verne, know, even if they did not learn it at school. The time occupied by Saturday in England is not quite the same time occupied by Saturday in Australia or America. How do those Jews who occupy themselves with the calendar know which day is really the seventh day, the day upon which God rested?

The truth is that we don't know. Some day was arbitrarily selected at some time in Jewish history and called Saturday, the seventh day; or what is far more likely, the day devoted to Saturn by the Egyptians or Babylonians was taken over by some Jews and made to serve the same purpose—that is, to be a holy day on which their own God was to be specially worshipped. And all the regulations surrounding it were added in the course of centuries.

From this it can be seen that neither Jews nor Christians know which day was the Sabbath—which day was devoted to the Sun or to Saturn. For it would be absurd to suppose that there has never been a break in the reckoning for thousands of years, apart altogether from the difficulties made by faulty calculations.

The Jewish Sabbath, like almost all Jewish history in all probability, came into being some time after the Captivity when Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and re-formed the Jewish nation. They felt, no doubt, that if the "pagans" had a Sabbath day, the new nation, the Jews, should have one also, and they not only made it the holiest of all days, but surrounded it with many rigorous commands. And one must give most of the believers in Judaism credit for faithfully following these

commands until very recently. At all events, they obstinately refused to give up Saturday for Sunday, no matter how these days were first reckoned.

When Christianity began to make headway, the question of the Sabbath Day became a very acute one, and it is easy to see from the Gospels that it had to be faced. But there is not a line to show that the Jewish Sabbath was ever abrogated as far as the New Testament is concerned.

Here we Freethinkers must be on our guard. The Gospels as we have them were quite unknown before the year A.D. 150, and a great deal had happened to the Jews since what we call the beginning of our era. There had been the wars with the Romans and the fearful destruction of the Jewish people both at the hands of Titus and at the insurrection of Bar Cocheba. We really know very little of what happened, for the accounts from both the Romans and the Jews are very suspect. Even the recital of Josephus is by no means free from grave suspicion—at least, it has always been repudiated by many Jews, and is most difficult to check.

The point I wish to make is that the "history" of the Gospels is not history at all. Their point of view is not that of a (more or less) contemporary of a Jesus "ministering" in the year A.D. 30, but that of some writers or editors of the years just preceding or following A.D. 150. They may, of course, be giving a faithful picture of what was happening in the year A.D. 30 or thereabouts, but I do not for a moment believe it.

There can be no reasonable doubt that the Gospel writers were *haters* of the Jews and Judaism; for they set out to do their utmost to blacken the character of all the Jews, even of many of the best of those in authority. They falsified many things, but it is curious they did not dare to falsify one thing in any way, and that was the Sabbath. They were forced to show the Sabbath Day holy, and there is not a line, as I have already pointed out, in the whole of the New Testament which shows the early Christians making the first day of the week their Sabbath Day. Even the well-known text "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" proves that there was no question of giving it up for the day of the Sun. So strong was the attachment to the Sabbath among the Jews that the Gospel writer actually made Jesus declare that he was the "Lord of the Sabbath"—next to being called the Son of God, the highest honour that could be given to Jesus.

There is, however, no doubt that the early converts to Christianity—whenever they appeared, for we really know very little about them—kept both the Sabbath Day, and what they called the Lord's Day, in honour of the Resurrection of Jesus. In a well-known passage (Col. ii. 14-17) Paul defiantly throws overboard most of the Jewish restrictions, including the holy days, the days in honour of the new moon, and the Sabbath Days. He probably found this necessary in order to admit proselytes from paganism who did not want to be bothered with Jewish ritual laws and prohibitions; and once it got to be admitted that these special laws were quite unnecessary, it is easy to understand how the Jewish Sabbath Day became less and less holy, and how much more reasonable it was for Christians to have a Sabbath Day of their own—especially when it was seen that the Lord's Day actually coincided with the pagan Day of the Sun, a day already holy with Sun worshippers.

We shall see what part the Church Fathers had in the switching over, in a further article.

H. CUTNER.

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

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CATHOLIC ARROGANCE

DURING its long and chequered history the Roman Church has made many arrogant claims. In the prosperous days of the Spanish Inquisition it boldly decided that it was the sole arbiter of man's future destiny, material and spiritual, and it consequently took to itself the right to torture and to kill. In these days its power is fortunately circumscribed. It still shows the bad temper and arrogance of old, however, and its discreditable manoeuvres over the Government's new Education Bill are quite in the old tradition.

Our newspapers have, for the most part, not shown this in its proper light. How could they, indeed? They have Roman Catholic readers and (which is, of course, far more important) Roman Catholic advertisers. But there is on occasion a newspaper a little more honest than the majority, and a letter is permitted to slip into its correspondence columns which reveals that all is not well with the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The "Daily Telegraph," for example, published recently a letter from a young officer in the R.A.F., which, though it was very meek and mild to Freethinking eyes, nevertheless annoyed the noisy company of the pious. This young man suggested that the majority of people had now no use for the Churches because the average parson no longer believed in the message he was paid to preach, and drew the conclusion (which has, after all, something to be said for it) that youth, if it desired to worship God, could do so without its self-appointed mentors in clerical attire.

This drew the response that would have been anticipated. A letter, written more in sorrow than in anger, from a Church of England parson, a few notes of expostulation from old-fashioned laymen. The correspondence appeared to be petering out when there suddenly was printed, in the "Daily Telegraph" for January 19, 1944, a letter from Mr. Thomas M. Conlan, S.J., of Chipping Norton. This is my reason for bringing the matter to the attention of readers of these columns, for I feel that it is so typical of everything that is evil about the Roman Church that Freethinkers should be warned once more.

First of all, he claims that there is no third possibility in the religious world than those presented from organised religion and organised idolatry. One wonders to which of these cults Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Julian Huxley (at both of whom there is a cheap sneer towards the end of Mr. Conlan's letter), Mr. Eden Phillpotts, Llewelyn Powys, J. M. Robertson and all the other supporters, past and present, of the Secularist and Rationalist Movements in this country are supposed to be adhering.

But the most striking thing in the letter has reference to the young airman's reference to empty churches. This is too priceless to be summarised, and must be read in full in order that its arrogant temper can be appreciated to the full:—

"As for 'empty churches,' your correspondent's argument is as empty as the churches he has attended. Like so many others, he argues as one who has never had the uncomfortable experience of squeezing into the overcrowded benches of Roman Catholic churches, of the breakfastless queues edging their way to the altar for Holy Communion, of the Saturday night rush-hour for confession."

Neither, one might add, has he had experience of the crowd trying to force its way into the hut of a native witch-doctor in Central Africa. One sight would be about as edifying as the other.

That we are not all thus impelled to attend these sinister ceremonies is only due to the fact that hell-fire is not so compelling as the material fire which the Church could dispense in her days of prosperity.

Such revelations of the ideas of Roman Catholics as are to be found in Mr. Conlan's letter will only impress on the minds of all who love freedom the vital necessity of opposition. The Roman Catholic Church is in every way possible to be fought, and until

the fight is brought to a victorious conclusion, and these Jesuit gentlemen pulled off their superior perches, we shall never know a peaceful and a happy world.

S. H.

CORRESPONDENCE

RIGHT AND WRONG.

SIR,—Your correspondent Mr. C. G. Du Cann applauds the release of Sir Oswald Mosley, while Mr. Archibald Robertson disputes the right of Britain's No. 1 Fascist to be at large during this crucial period in our history. Perhaps you will permit me to add my say to this vexed question, as few discussions have had greater significance for Freethinkers.

Mr. Du Cann's argument has the support of such people as numerous "captains" of industry, the "Daily Express," "Daily Telegraph," "Daily Mail," and the Society of Individualists. Also such Members of Parliament as Commander Bower, Admiral Beamish, Lady Astor, Sir A. Southby, Sir P. Hannon and Captain McEwen; whilst the Nazi-controlled Press and radio are frankly jubilant about the release, and in complete agreement with Mr. Du Cann's views regarding the "right" of Fascists to fair trial. If for no other reason than this, I should feel disinclined to agree with Mr. Du Cann's case (for I mistrust the motives of anti-democrats when they thunder against prohibitive regulations like 18B), but when I realise that supporting Mr. Robertson's, to me, unanswerable case are such public-spirited individuals as H. G. Wells, Sean O'Casey, Tom Driberg, Emanuel Shinwell, Professor Haldane and Aneurin Bevan, the bulk of working-class organisations throughout the country, the "News Chronicle" and "Reynolds News," as well as a reasoned *legal* argument by D. N. Pritt, K. C. ("The Mosley Case," by D. N. Pritt, K.C.), I throw my "layman's" knowledge of Law to the wind, and am encouraged to inquire of Mr. Du Cann just what sort of indictment could have been drawn up against such creatures as Laval, Quisling, Seyss Inquart, Darlan and Henlein prior to their open acts of treachery? To the average democrat, detention without trial is quite repugnant, but can there be any doubt that by this time most democrats in conquered countries realise—alas, too late!—that their "quislings," like ours, should have been dealt with apart from formal legal proceedings? Can the Home Secretary himself doubt that when an opportunity occurs, if occur it should, Mosley, who has so far avoided any overt action *but who has not repudiated his Fascism*, will behave in just such a fashion as his Fascist friends abroad? Mr. Morrison would be hard put to deny it. Dare Mr. Du Cann?—Yours, etc.,

PETER NORTHCOTE

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. Professor G. E. G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D.: "Imperialism, Communism and Humanism."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. F. Boddy: "Education—Past, Present and Future."

Failsworth Secular Sunday School (Pole Lane, Failsworth).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. C. McCall: "Freethought and Education."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m. GEORGE SCOTT, J.P.: "Freethought and Music."

Keighley (I.L.P. Committee Room, 15, Russell Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Business meeting for members and intending members.

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. J. W. H. BROWN, M.A.: "A Lecture."

"PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT." By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

ROCAMBOLIC RELIGION

SOMEBODY ought to tell the truth about "undenominational" religious teaching in schools. Neither the Church, nor statesmen, nor politicians, nor bureaucrats, nor schoolmasters dare do this for fear of being driven out of office by the others. Therefore, I thought I would tell some of it myself.

The word "undenominational" is a snake-word. It will twist, turn and coil, lie flat or stand erect upon its tail at the bidding of the snake-charmer's pipe.

In the sense it is used it has the exact meaning of the word "elementary," and is used instead, with sinister and mean motives.

Everything taught or learned throughout our lives has, of sheer necessity, its own particular and peculiar "elementary" stages. So with religion. To cover this stage with the word "undenominational" is mere fustian.

To say plainly "elementary religion in schools" is too straightforward. It would "let the cat out of the bag." It would expose "the nigger in the woodpile." It would be as the peeling of a strong onion, and our weeping might, perchance, clear the vision to what is really meant and intended.

To use the clumsy word "undenominational" is to use another onion of different virtue. It only sets up an evil stink, yet leaves the vision blurred, murky, unclear. Both onions rest in the same cooked dish, ready to be devoured with the fork of one denomination, or the spoon of another.

Thus, all "religious teaching" is sheerly denominational in essence. No such teaching would be forced upon the schools were this not so. Religion is not so altruistic as all that. It never gave anything for nothing. It has secured all it has by giving nothing for anything.

The Churches want conscripts—not converts, and the statesmen want slaves—not real scholars. Religion is their "last weapon."

Religion itself is a guess, and a bad guess to boot. Its base is ignorance, and its essence is superstition. Because its base is ignorance it must for ever seek its foundations in the ignorant minds of man. In the children. Child life is the most innocent ignorance of life.

Religion has been built upon "fear," and it is well that it should now be made afraid in its own turn. It should be told the truth, that if it will persist in forcing the school doors open and implanting itself therein, then will it die of its own poison. In its vile endeavour to enslave the minds of children with its own absurd beliefs, its superstition and ignorance, then will it put the clock back to the stage of time where the child will take from it what it took from them in religion's heyday.

The child will sink into barbarism and will take back its wealth, its power, and its freedom which it has been robbed of in the name of religion. Religion breeds revolution. It is time—it is high time—that statesmen realised this fact.

The base of school is knowledge, and its essence is fact. There is no stage at which a sheer guess joins hands with a sheer fact. Religion has no moral place in school; and school has no moral connection with religion. The child whose father is a fact and whose mother is a guess, is itself a hybrid; a pervert. It will act as is the nature of perverts and hybrids. It either has no future or destroys that future. Religion breeds revolution. Statesmen please note. Note that and tremble, for, "as ye sow so shall ye reap." Reap, yes! "with knobs on"; and in that day, bewildered, bemused, doped and daft, you will turn and blame the Freethinkers, the Agnostics, the Atheists and Philosophers generally, who had but sought to guide you and to show you the real dangers of your blind progressions.

You see, this must be so, for, "thanks" to religion, mankind has not yet risen to the height of blaming himself for his own

mistakes. Statesmen make their colossal blunders and then blame innocent parties. Religion makes its own special colossal blunders and then blames the result upon the "wickedness" of the people. They are immoral; they go to the cinema on Sunday; they play hockey on holy days. War rips the male and female of the species apart, and the sexes run irregularly. Yet wars always have the support of religion.

It is well that religion should be told that it has created far more crime in any one age than it has prevented in the totality of all ages. It has created more poverty than it ever could prevent. It has builded itself more wealth than ever it could have made.

Now it would enter the school door. No school should rest upon its guess-work. Logic, morality and imagination can only be correctly and successfully developed when religion and its guesses are out of the way.

Would that someone—a Freethinker for preference—with a mathematical turn of mind, might work out the total of "child-hours" that will be wasted in ten years upon the "guesses" of religion, and the equivalent loss of hours that "fact" has minus. If not ten years, try ten seconds; the result will be both interesting and awful.

Whoso says that religion is not mad guesswork should show what God wants the minds of children for. What will He do with them when they are all "twisted, turned and coiled" in his direction? He, even now, either cannot, will not, or does not protect their frail bodies from bombs, their welfare from war, or their innocence from the insanity of religion.

I do not know why, but I know that the Churches do not know, and that they know that I know they don't know.

Why should taxes be gathered in order that the withered hand of superstition should lay its bony, fleshless, ghastly grip upon the unprotected and undefended citadels of children's minds. Vampires do no worse. Empires are not much better.

To-day we know how gods and devils, heavens and hells have been made. We know the history of inspired books. We know the origins of religion. We know the close connection between creed and crime, we know the difference 'twixt science and superstition, 'twixt reason and religion, and we want no further religious teaching on this matter after many thousands of weary years of it, whether it be "undenominationally" denominational or no. Science can tell the child the facts. Reason can deduce the implications of science without any aid whatsoever from all the religions put together.

Teach the children that the world is natural, not supernatural, and that the pulpit is poisonous. Teach them that the chain of cause and effect is unbroken and unbreakable. That no miracle ever happened or could happen.

Teach the children that religion is solemnly silly, that, as any onion, it only makes one weep with its stinks of sulphur and hell fire, and that at best, "Religion is Rocambolic."

B. B. B.

SLAVERY IN SCOTLAND

It may surprise many people to learn that while slavery among the colliers was abolished in 1775 by Act of Parliament, it existed for many years after that date. Hugh Miller, in his "My Schools and Schoolmasters," published in 1854, says: "Curious as the fact may seem, all the older men of that village (Nidry Mill), though situated little more than four miles from Edinburgh, had been born slaves. Nay, eighteen years later (1842), when Parliament issued a Commission to inquire into the nature and results of female labour in the coal pits of Scotland, there was a collier still living who had never been twenty miles from the Scottish capital, and could state to the Commissioners that both his father and grandfather had been slaves, and that he had wrought for years in a pit in the neighbourhood of Musselburgh ere the colliers got their freedom."