

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIV.—No. 18

Sunday, April 30, 1944

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Our Spiritual Leaders

MANY years opening of "Letters to the Editor" endows one with a kind of second sense which enables one to tell at a glance the character of the writer and therefore to decide whether the writer is (a) just ignorant or (b) merely impudent; (c) a mixture of the two; (d) writing with some understanding of our names, but considers that we are not working along the right lines to secure our aims; and (e) writing with insufficient understanding of our aims. The first three, (a), (b) and (c), are quickly disposed of, although they occasionally serve the purpose of a chopping-block; (d) deserves to receive all reasonable attention, and gets it, often resulting in the advent of a useful recruit to what Meredith called "the greatest of all causes." A further reason for dealing carefully with this class is that he is often the unrecognised mouthpiece of many who remain silent.

The letter we are now dealing with falls into class (e) and comes from a lady. She asks: "Why do you write of clergymen as though they were either fools or rogues? I do not agree with a deal that clergymen say or do, but I do recognise that many of them are striving to help people in a world where a helping hand is often sadly needed; and all are the better for kindly meant counsel, even when the aim and the method adopted is not without value."

Now, I think we are entitled first of all to put in a plea of "Not guilty." We have never said, or even thought, that our huge army of clergymen—Established and Unestablished, to say nothing of the reserves of semi-clergymen—are either rogues or fools. This view of the clergy owes more to novelists and playwrights for its existence than to those who offer a reasoned criticism of the Lord's anointed. But it is significant that playwrights and novelists should be so fond of portraying clergymen as simple-minded, humbugs or downright rogues. Even "Punch" is found depicting the clergy as more or less ridiculous figures. There must be some sort of truth in the background.

Nor is this a modern feature. So far as we can trace the history of Christian preachers the picture of them is anything but complimentary. The New Testament shows them as being largely composed of a quarrelsome, narrow-minded crowd for ever denouncing each other. Later we have the unsavoury figure of the monk, homeless and ignorant, with attacks on their character by brother believers, each group practising a savage intolerance, with tolerant Romans looking upon them with a mixture of amazement and contempt. That picture is even more definitely drawn by the writers of the 16th and later centuries. Erasmus in his "Praise of Folly" and "Familiar Dialogues," and Luther with his accounts of the clergy

in his day, each shows that no improvement had taken place. We follow on to the 17th century, and the Puritans and the Cavaliers give us ample evidence that little improvement in God's representatives on earth has taken place. If we pass to a later period, and take the seven volumes of Lecky's "History of the Eighteenth Century"—a work that will always repay reading—the quality of the clergy displayed is anything but flattering to God's representatives. From the second half of the 19th century until to-day we have the clergy more circumspect in their behaviour, but still struggling for power and advancement, grasping at any social teaching that is fashionable, throwing over doctrine after doctrine, but with a readiness to return to the earlier and more primitive ones whenever occasion favours their so doing.

Established or Nonconformist, the lesson is the same. To say that the clergy lead, or even welcome, advanced thought in any direction is simply not true; and if the warfare of the sects is less violent than it was it is because a common danger drives them into some form of comradeship. To repeat an old saw, Christian sects hang together only because the choice lies between that and hanging separately.

Looking at the matter generally, there seems no reason for assuming that the priesthood, in all its phases and degrees from the papist priest to the street-corner preacher, commands or deserves special praise for their truthfulness. They are certainly not better morally; they are decidedly worse intellectually than other educated classes. If they are freer from bad phases, they display other forms of misdemeanour. They have what a scientific sociologist would call "occupational disorders," one of the foremost of which is a disregard of truth where their professional interests are concerned. Consider a few well-known facts. The place of honour should here be given to the Roman Catholic Church. I pass by the historic record of that Church, with such historic frauds as the famous papal "Decretals" and the like, and merely call the Protestants into the witness-box to bring their charges. On the other hand, no body of Christians protest more violently concerning the lies told by Protestants against it than does the Catholic Church. Passing over the charges brought by Christian sects against each other, we halt at a perfect riot of lying by all the Christian sects collectively against the Freethinker. There we have the lies of the evil living of non-Christians or anti-Christians, the elaborate tales of the death-beds of unbelievers, their looseness of life, etc. Finally, for the moment at least I need only note the lying religious legends that were circulated concerning Thomas Paine, his drunkenness, his loose living, etc., and his final orthodox dying, with shrieks to Jesus Christ to save him.

Now, I am neither surprised nor angry at professional preachers of Christianity; I refrain from mentioning laymen because they repeat in the main what their respective religious leaders give them. They are "lying for the greater

glory of God." I will even grant that "all men are liars," as the Bible somewhere tells us. What I am concerned about is a feature that is peculiarly Christian in its operation; and I will illustrate that by using an incident that nearly all Freethinkers, and large numbers of Christians, will remember.

One of the things that the United States sent us some years ago was an evangelist named Torrey — or "Doctor Torrey," as he called himself. Torrey was received with rapture by the English Churches, particularly the non-Established section. After a time he developed a story concerning Colonel Ingersoll, America's best-known Freethinker. Torrey travelled all over the country, to all sorts of churches and chapels, and preached in the Albert Hall, London. But Ingersoll's vileness formed a never-dull theme. The audiences appeared to like it. They were having exhibited to them the villainy of the Freethinker of whom they had heard so much.

Then G. W. Foote took a hand in the game. He issued a pamphlet exposing this lying preacher, and many thousands of copies were circulated. But the clergy who backed "Dr." Torrey—I believe his title was as "phony" as his tales—went on lying for the greater glory of God, and his piety atoned for his character. Torrey was a great draw—for the already "saved."

Foote's pamphlet fell into the hands of William Stead, a prominent journalist and a sincere Christian. Only once did we stand on the same platform with Stead, and then he explained his presence by saying that he had come to claim the right of every man and woman to blaspheme as much and as frequently as they pleased, and wherever they were. We could not pick out a single Christian leader to-day who would say that. Stead was astounded that a man of the character of Torrey could be on a Christian platform without protests from responsible clergymen.

Stead got into touch with G. W. Foote, the founder of this journal, who received twelve months' imprisonment for the "crime" of blasphemy and came out of prison to continue to blaspheme for another thirty-three years. Stead was so indignant that he determined to send a personal letter to the leaders of the various Christian bodies, laying bare the character of Torrey. He expected that this exposure would at once lead to Torrey's expulsion by the clergy; but, as Foote had warned him, nothing happened. In the ecclesiastical list of offences, lying for the glory of God is not one of them. Hardly any of the "dignified" clergy replied. The archbishops and bishops and the heads of the dissenting bodies were not shocked; probably they were surprised that another Christian would consider lying in the interests of religion an offence. But Stead received from those who did reply that, while they thought publicity would injure the Churches, they would do their best to see that Torrey did not return to this country. He never did, but we believe he continued to flourish in the land of wide-open spaces. It was in America that the cousin of the present President achieved some fame by describing Thomas Paine—a man who gave his life to benefit others, and who contributed so greatly to the creation of the "United States of America"—as a "dirty little Atheist." Three lies in three words, for Paine was neither little, dirty, nor an Atheist. But he had written the "Age of Reason"; and where the Christian world is concerned that secured a free pass for any religious lie—and liar.

I have dwelt upon this case of Torrey because it well illustrates what I have in mind when I say that the clergy suffer from "occupational disorders"; just as miners, cotton workers and others show a proneness to exaggerated forms of complaints that attack outsiders but slightly. Liars are not confined to the pulpit; but in the pulpit falsehoods against opponents are commoner than in ordinary life, and discovery brings small adverse comment from specific congregations. When, during the last war, the miracle of the Angels of Mons was staged, and was taken up by the ex-Bishop of London and some eminent Nonconformist preachers, no Christian appeared to think that anything out of the way had been said or done, even after the exposure was complete. Even when the writer of the story told the world that he had written it without any thought that it would be taken seriously he was treated with abuse by those who preferred the real angel.

The point is that, generally, Christians feel no shame when the clergy circulate these lies; nor does the preacher hesitate to behave in a way that in ordinary life would lead to his being cold-shouldered. In politics the lie is in constant use, but everyone expects it, so that it probably does the minimum of damage; and, in any case, when the liar is exposed he loses status. But can anyone point to a preacher, a leader, who lost status because he was detected in a lie? Falsity is with the clergy a truly occupational disease.

Now, I think I have made it plain that I do not regard the clergy only as rogues and fools, although one cannot help feeling that when, in these times, educated (perhaps "trained" would be the best word here) men repeat the folk-lore of the Old Testament and the mythology of the New Testament as literal, natural and historic facts one cannot help feeling that there must be a certain degree of deliberate deception. My correspondent would probably bring forward as a kind of contra consideration that the clergyman is often the source of giving help to the distressed, etc., where they could not get it elsewhere. If that were wholly and unconditionally true, it would be not something in favour of the clergy but rather against them. It means, on analysis, that the Churches have had so little influence on the humanising of life that no one but them can be trusted to lend a helping hand when necessary.

But it is not true. Human sympathy is not dependent upon mythology, or upon any religion. It is embedded in the gregarious nature of the most primitive group of human beings and develops step by step with social development. In the bombing of our towns and cities, when men and women risked their lives to help others, there was no thought of religion, and no principle of religion involved. Of course, in this work many of their clergy did what they could; but so did others: laymen with all sorts of religious beliefs or no religious beliefs at all, or men and women who were strongly opposed to all the Churches and their beliefs. And perhaps in saying that much I have embodied my greatest objection to Christianity: it belittles man and insults human nature.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SALVATION

Man is intellectually saved not by what he knows, but by the way in which he knows it. A learned fool is quite a familiar spectacle, but he, at the same time, gives a warm welcome to any kind of nonsense.

AN ANCIENT INDIAN CIVILISATION

THE Maurya Empire was apparently the earliest paramount State to be established in Hindustan. The antecedent invasion of the Indus area by the Greek Alexander and the introduction into that region of Hellenic culture aroused many activities that smoothed the path for the subsequent ascendancy of the Maurya dynasty over a widespread territory.

The grandfather of the celebrated Emperor Asoka, Chandragupta, was the founder of the Maurya State about 321 B.C. Apart, however, from Asoka's illuminating inscriptions, little light is thrown on this period in Indian records, but Greek writers of the time penned their Eastern experiences, and their records have enabled modern Orientalists to restore a detailed picture of the past.

With his sensational victories, the great Alexander had swiftly overthrown the defenders of India, and Seleucus, one of the Greek conqueror's successors, sought to extend his Eastern domains to the Indus Valley. But the Greek commander was confronted with a powerful Indian army led by Chandragupta in person. In the words of Dr. F. W. Thomas, Librarian to the India Office ("Cambridge History of India," Vol. 1, 1922): "For Seleucus the task proved too great: he crossed the Indus, but either no battle ensued, or an indecisive one. Seleucus was content to secure a safe retirement and a gift of 500 elephants and by the surrender of all the Greek dominions as far as the Kabul valley."

Chandragupta, who began his career as an upstart adventurer, ended as a powerful ruler over the greater part of the Indian peninsula. He remained on friendly terms with the adjoining Greeks and to Megasthenes, the literary Greek envoy who resided at the court of Chandragupta, the historians of ancient India are deeply indebted for their knowledge of the age.

In addition to the details recorded by Hellenic scribes, the Indian Arthashastra contains confirmatory information concerning the political and social conditions of the State.

The Mauryan population included tribes in various stages of culture, some of which preserved a semi-independence in their woodland and hilly retreats, and the forests were far more extensive than in our day. Hunters and trappers scoured the ranches, domesticated animals grazed on the pastures and much of the soil was cultivated for crops.

The State's ruler was the supreme landowner, who was entitled to a revenue from the fruits of the earth, and a defaulting farmer could be deprived of his holding. Then as now, irrigation proved vital to agrarian success. The authorities regulated the water supply, for whose use they charged the cultivator. Indeed, so tied were the land labourers to their appointed task under the caste system that Megasthenes assures us "that they might be seen peacefully pursuing it in the sight of contending armies."

At specified distances signboards were displayed along the roads which guided the way to hamlets and villages, while the larger centres of population were furnished with fortifications in case of enemy invasion. The houses were constructed chiefly of wood. There were regal residences, arsenals, workshops and prisons in the greater urban settlements. "The streets," Dr. Thomas observes, "were provided with watercourses draining the houses and issuing into a moat: against misuse of them, or of the cemeteries outside, by deposit of rubbish or dead bodies, or for loosing animals, by conveyances not under proper control . . . penalties are laid down. The precautions against fire included the provision of vessels of water 'in the thousands' in the streets; every householder must sleep in the forepart of his dwelling, and he is under obligation of rendering assistance in case of fire, while arson is punished by burning alive. The trumpet sounds the beginning and end of the nocturnal interval, during which, except on special occasions, none must stir abroad. . . . The city chief reports all incidents and takes charge of lost and ownerless property."

The ruins of the ancient Imperial capital which repose beneath the present-day city of Patna-Bankipore to the south of the Ganges River have been partly excavated in situ.

Although there were industrial occupations such as mining, the agrarian community predominated. There were many handicrafts embracing pottery and textile products. Doctors, actors, dancers, singers, soothsayers, blacksmiths and barbers all flourished in India in these remote centuries. There were also merchants' and trades' guilds, as well as combinations of craftsmen and others for the fulfilment of contracts under corporate surveillance, but collective obstruction constituted a penal offence.

Commerce in the precious metals and their products, in silks, cottons and muslins from Cathay, skins, cosmetics, spices and other commodities were all under minute regulation. One gathers that "The merchant was mulcted in dues at the frontier, by road taxes and tolls, and octroi at the gates of the cities, where the royal officials maintained a douane and watch-house; he is required to be armed with a passport, and severe penalties were attached to malpractices in connection therewith."

The officials entered in writing every particular with meticulous care concerning the merchant's place of abode and the nature of his goods. Home produced products were also subjected to a severe scrutiny. Sales were by auction of agricultural commodities, and any excess of the prescribed price became the perquisite of the treasury. An inspection to prevent any infringement of official rules never ceased. Combinations to advance prices were illegal, and the legitimate charges for ordinary commodities were fixed daily by the market authorities. Import and export duties enriched the royal exchequer, and the king reserved the right of minting the coinage and of converting the plain gold and silver of his subjects into jewels and other ornaments.

The people of this period did not lead Puritan lives. The taverns and hostleries were popular resorts; the gaming houses were well patronised, while entertainments provided a livelihood for actors, dancers and vocalists. Festivals were frequent when the rigid rules enforced in normal times were relaxed.

Divorce was obtainable by mere mutual consent or prolonged desertion. Women were well protected by law and a widow was eligible for remarriage. The ill-treatment of females was a penal offence, but a shrewish or rebellious wife might be chastised. Moreover, the aged and indigent, especially the dependants of soldiers and workmen who had fallen during service, were entitled to the sovereign's benevolent care. All this tends to prove how little the world has changed since the era of this interesting Indian civilisation which flourished more than 2,000 years ago.

Education seems to have been general. As Dr. Thomas notes: "That writing was in common use not only for literary purposes, but also in public business, the edicts of Asoka exist to prove. But this is by no means all. Epistolary correspondence was perfectly usual, and written documents were employed in the courts of law: moreover, the administration was versed in book-keeping and registration on a large scale was systematically arranged. And we have already the beginning of the study of style and a vocabulary of exegesis."

Apparently, the Maurya monarchy arose at a time of reaction against the teachings of the Buddha. Still, Buddhism and Jainism maintained their integrity, despite Brahman resentment. Nevertheless, the Maurya State treated the Brahman as a privileged personality encircled with holiness. As a priest it appears, "He was exempt from taxation and confiscation, from corporal chastisement and the death penalty, branding and banishment being in his case the ultima ratio." Yet it had become customary to condemn a man who neglected his civic duties in order to secure personal salvation in solitary meditation, as an unworthy member of the community.

Trials by means of ordeal survived and those deemed guilty were fined, scourged, mutilated or suffered death according to the nature of their offence. Civil law administered in courts by an official trio assisted by three Brahman legal luminaries was adjudicated according to established rules with plea, counterplea and rejoinder.

All the crimes enumerated in the Newgate Calendar came before the Indian Courts in that far distant day. Homicide, theft, burglary, coining, poisoning, fraudulent trading, false weights and measures, even boycotting cases appeared. The Government itself was not immune. For in times of financial stringency, Dr. Thomas tells us, it employed agents "to adopt the most reprehensible expedients for squeezing the well to do. If the Greek writers are to be trusted when they report a variety of offences among the Indians, this was plainly not due to a state of innocence even as regards elaborate criminal acts."

T. F. PALMER.

RELIGIOUS REFLECTIONS

IT is amusing to reflect that all those English Christians who are professed believers in "democracy," parliaments, committees, and "anti-Fascism," worship a God who is an Absolute Monarch and Dictator of the universe and whose laws are his mere will. What is Hitler (even as portrayed in our popular Press) compared to the bloodthirsty, capricious Almighty (as portrayed in our Old Testament)?

"Resist not him that is evil": Jesus Christ applied this rule of non-resistance to Judas Iscariot, and to the Roman tyranny. Ask the Archbishop of Canterbury and Christian England to apply it to Hitler or the German or Japanese Governments! The Christianity of Christ and the Christianity of Dr. Temple and our nation are clearly very different things. Dr. Temple would have "called up" the angels to prevent the Crucifixion!

* * *

Human love and human wedlock were not good enough to account for the birth of Jesus Christ—according to the Church. And he must be born of a virgin—for a further slur on wives and mothers—and not by human copulation! To the modern mind there is something both absurd and repugnant in these ancient and mediæval ideas.

* * *

A young soldier in the Army put his religion down as "My own and no one else's." Asked to explain what he believed in he said: "Myself." His officer said: "That's not a religion; that's a crime. I do not believe merely in myself." The Soldier: "If you did, sir, that would be a blunder." The classification finally appeared among the Methodists, Salvationists, Baptists, etc., as "Egoist."

* * *

A case at the Old Bailey lasted seven days and the Recorder of London observed to the jury: "This case has taken one day longer than it took to create the world." A K.C. leading for the defence observed drily: "His Lordship knows more about theology than geology."

I have a young woman friend who objects to God as "He" and "Him." She says that she believes God is a female, a sort of Mrs. God. I said that I believed Satan was Mrs. Satan—and she, filled with feminist zeal, retorted, "Of course. It is mere masculine impudence to pretend otherwise."

The names people call God when they do not believe in him:

The Life Force: Bernard Shaw.

The Unknowable: Herbert Spencer.

The Cosmic Mathematician: Sir James Jeans.

The Principle of Concretion: Professor A. N. Whitehead.

The Utterly Other: Karl Barth.

The Invisible King: H. G. Wells.

And there are others, worse than these. Winwood Reade, author of the "Martyrdom of Man," said: "Something for which we have no words." I should rather have said: "Something for which we have too many!"

* * *

Of Dr. Temple's recent Holy Week broadcast, a fervent Christian said disgustedly: "There was not enough of the Gospel in it to save a tom-tit. All that war talk must delight the Devil in the week of Christ's defeat."

* * *

What we lawyers call an "Act of God" is always something unpleasant or something disastrous to man.

* * *

Christ prayed before he chose his disciples. And yet Judas Iscariot was one of them. Then, was the betrayal Judas's fault?

* * *

"If anyone saith that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity or celibacy than to be united in matrimony let him be Anathema." So pronounced the Council of Trent. St. Paul previously agreed with that. So do lots of married English folk to-day. But modern psychology teaches us the falsity of early Christian teaching. And modern Christian teaching has to change its tune. Matrimony is "Holy Matrimony" and respectable!

* * *

Why doesn't the modern Church of England give us a new "New Testament" giving us all that Jesus may really have said and done, and leaving out the dubious and the forgeries?

* * *

Jesus never denounced the slavery of his day. Nor did the Apostles. Neither of these said one word in praise of "freedom," "patriotism," "liberation" or any of those ideals the Christian world urges us to "fight for."

* * *

According to Robert Browning, "'Twas a thief who spoke the last kind words to Christ." Well, why not? He was a small-scale thief, and petty thieves often have many virtues. It is the large-scale thieves whose hearts are petrified; and yet even they will give a beggar sixpence while robbing the community and their employees of millions. No one really knows criminals: barristers or solicitors in that type of practice, prison staff, intelligent police officers and the like ever find the ordinary criminal any worse than the righteous—and very often not nearly as bad.

* * *

Milton is magnificent; but it was he who said that God reveals himself "as his manner is, first to his Englishmen." Imagine what English people would say if a German author had said that! It would be denounced as typically German and utterly un-English—as so many Englishisms are!

* * *

A rabid Protestant christened his son "Martin Luther Wycliff Huss Jones." Asked why, he answered sternly that it was to ensure the boy's lifelong fidelity to the Reformation. But the boy became "Father Martin Jones" of the Roman Catholic Church, and everyone thought he had been called after his patron saint, St. Martin, who gave half his cloak to a beggar—instead of Jesus's "all-coat and cloak also," which is what he ought to have given.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

AN AWKWARD CHILD

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!

—“KING LEAR.”

FATHER PRESS was elderly when he married. In his younger days he enjoyed a comparatively honourable reputation as disseminator of news of an impartial and educative character. Although his manner was staid and somewhat pompous, he loyally upheld the traditions of his family, the pedigree of which is lost in the mists of antiquity. He was getting on in years, but had remained a bachelor until about twenty years ago. His vigour and virility remained unimpaired, and yet he felt lonely. Could it be that he was losing his grip on his readers? Possibly. Suddenly a bright and hitherto unknown star appeared in the sphere of the news firmament. He was dazzled as the star increased in brilliance. The star became known as Mistress Radio and was a wonder to behold. Father Press was in danger of being eclipsed, and the possibility caused him to meditate. His rival was a young and buxom wench and her presence made a stir in those days. Everyone flocked to hear her voice, and the dulcet tones fascinated even he. The newcomer was poaching on his news preserves, and it became necessary to control her activities. “We must unite our forces and then I shall be able to wield more power than ever,” he said. He would be master in his own house, the House of News, and competition would be eliminated. So he went a-wooing, and used a method of attack known as guile, thus putting into effect his motto, “Be guiled by me.” The courtship was not without its difficulties. As in marriage, the one solution to the problem of “give and take” is equitable compromise. Mistress Radio could not be permitted a “carte blanche” in news, and Father Press would not abate one iota of the influence he held over his readers. “I’ll hold my sway I swear,” he said, and persuaded her to agree to a news summary, whilst he gave his news in detail, together with certain tit-bits and items which are denied her to this day. A one-sided compromise, it is true, but she could say her piece before he was “out” in the morning and often when he was in bed o’ nights. And so it was arranged, likewise the marriage.

The Reverend Oscar Orthodox officiated, and the happy couple, now Mr. and Mrs. Radio-Press, received the felicitations of countless admirers and friends. The marriage was a happy one, and views and opinions harmonised. This event was followed in due course by an equally happy event—Baby Publick appeared. “Good heavens!” exclaimed papa, “what large eyes he has!” “All the better to see you with, my dear,” said mamma, and added after a pause for further scrutiny, “What large ears he has!” “All the better to hear you with,” answered papa. The abnormality of these organs of receptivity was not surprising in view of the pre-marital activities of the parents, whose assiduity in promoting the development, to their mutual advantage, of these organs had brought a crop after its own kind. Baby Publick’s appetite was a large one, and he cried incessantly for food. He could not be satisfied, and one of his earliest habits was to kick. There came a time when it was necessary to alter his diet. He was given adulterated milk, which made him kick harder than ever. “An ungrateful child. He does not know what is good for him,” said his relatives, Uncle Pelf and Auntie Privilege, who, having connived with his parents in altering his diet, now witnessed his deplorable conduct. Baby Publick scowled and held his—foot. He was bidding his time.

He was baptised by the Reverend Oscar Orthodox and showed his disapproval of the ceremony by kicking. “A knowing child who objects to being imposed upon,” muttered the reverend gentleman, as he turned aside to hide a grin.

At school Master Publick was torn between the duty of submitting to authority and what he thought was his duty in endeavouring to make authority submit to him. Tragic illusion!

He smarted under the punishment inflicted on him. “I’ll teach you to kick,” growled his master. Uncle Pelf and Auntie Privilege were much concerned at his behaviour. “Habits acquired so early in life are apt to persist,” they said, and counter-measures were prepared. “Be reasonable,” admonished his parents. “Repent,” said the Reverend Orthodox. “Obey,” cried Uncle Pelf. “Be satisfied,” said Auntie Privilege. And so he grew up with the realisation that one cannot have everything in this world, but if he was very good he would have everything in the next. Despite this latter prospect, he did not forget how to kick, and to relieve his feelings sometimes, he played football. To the admiration of his colleagues, he never missed kicking the ball. “It is a habit,” he said.

Unfortunately, he was not altogether satisfied with restricting his kicking propensities to the football ground, and he continued when he was off the field. So he was sent to war. He departed, muttering (as did Hamlet, who was not without *his* troubles):

“The time is out of joint: O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right.”

To this couplet he added the lament of Matthew Prior, who said:—

“Who breathes must suffer, and who thinks must mourn.
And he alone is blest who ne’er was born.”

Poor Publick! He must kick harder yet!

S. GORDON HOGG.

ACID DROPS

WE are wondering whether the Archbishop of Westminster (R.C.) is a “jokist” or just one who fails to see the humorous side of his sermons. Thus, in the “Universe” for April 14 he is reported as saying: “We shall not win this war, nor shall we have the slightest hope of establishing a just peace, unless we seek the things that are above.” Well, that is what our advocates of air war have been saying for many years. In these days we all more or less seek the things that are above, and when it is an enemy plane welcome their coming to earth with greater sincerity than ever the people show over the legendary descent of the mythical Jesus. Archbishop Griffin is evidently a humorist.

The “News Chronicle” publishes the news that the Germans and Allies were less than four hundred yards apart at Easter and had the same service for both. Very touching; and it is explained by the operating chaplain that Christ died for Germans and Americans alike. But what comes next? It did not stop the war; nor did it prevent the war breaking out. Century after century wars have become more and more deadly, and it is the Christian nations that have been most responsible for them. The war is bad enough, but the stereotyped lies and humbugging attitudes are enough to make one call for smelling salts.

The Roman Catholics continue their grumbling over the new Education Bill, their complaint being mainly one of money. The Bishop of Leeds asks: “What has happened to the Premier’s promise that controversial legislation would not be taken during the war?” The Bishop is not so innocent as he appears to be; nor would he be denouncing the Bill if his Church could have got greater financial help. As to the Prime Minister’s promise—well, he is the leader of the Conservatives and probably has an eye on the after-the-war election.

“Why is God Silent?” is the displayed title to a “Christian World” article. It is not fair to put the question. God is not more silent than he ever was; and if one wishes to hear God, and have a friendly chat with him, he need only believe hard enough. But what we should like to know is how the deuce the writer knows that God is silent, or whether there is a God to be either silent or talkative? That question should be settled before going any further.

The Papacy has tried more than one plan of trying to get on the soft side of the Soviet. In the early days of the Revolution there were reports that Rome was trying to make terms with the Russian leaders. As, when Russia was Christian, the Church in power was the Greek Church, it was probably thought that the Roman Church, by recognising the new Russia, would establish itself; but that broke down, and the Papacy joined our own clergy and leading politicians in piling lie upon lie concerning the people who, with one move, had dispensed with an hereditary monarchy and also completely disestablished the Church.

Then, when the truth about Russia began to gain ground—and, later, when it looked as though Russia might be ranged against Germany, and finally with Russia and Germany being actually at war—the task before Churchmen and politicians was to revoke the twenty years of systematic lying and see how Christian we could make Russia. It was, at any rate, admitted that Bibles could be had in Russia, and also that people could be Jewish, any kind of Christian they pleased, Mohammedan or other, so long as they as Churches did not mix themselves up in political affairs. Above all, children must be given a fair start and not dosed with religious poison before they were able to defend themselves.

And now Rome saw, or thought it saw, a new opening. For it looks, from the information of recent news from Russia, that the Pope has again been fishing in Russian waters—but without success. The Russian Patriarch denies emphatically the claim of Rome to the title of the Vicar of Christ, and that of course damns any alliance between the two. The Patriarch also denies that there is any divergence of opinion on secular matters between the Soviet and the Church in Russia. There is no longer a Russian Church, and the education of the Russian people, so long as it continues on existing lines, is likely to reduce the number of believers.

All the same, we may look out for the Papacy creating as much trouble as, it can between Russia and other peoples. There are plenty of indications in the Catholic papers published in this country that Rome is not pleased with our present relations with Russia; and it is fairly certain that those who worked so hard for over twenty-five years are not dead—they are merely silent. It is in the years after the war when we may look out for the religious ill-feeling to the very friendly relations existing between England and Atheist Russia. One of the deadly qualities of the Roman Church is that it can wait.

It is quite interesting to note the cock-eyed reasoning of a "distinguished" clergyman on the warpath. At Lichfield the other day the Bishop of Lichfield opened a campaign for the purpose of securing the "City for God." "Restored" implies that God once owned, or controlled, or dwelt in Lichfield. Who, then, was responsible for God losing it? Was it because God failed to look after the city? Or did the people outgrow God, as they have outlived open and declared feudalism? If God once had the people of Lichfield, it was obviously his place to keep them. Re-establishing God in Lichfield reads very much like re-installing the King of Italy when the war is over and the people are given the liberty to choose. In either place the principal character might be successful, but it will be because the people are not sensible enough, or strong enough, to manage their own affairs.

The Bishop did some further floundering in the sentence that "our democratic system rested on belief in God." We should like to know when we had a real working democracy. A democracy with an hereditary king or queen and a second chamber dominated by an hereditary House of Lords is quite remarkable. In sober fact, England never was and is not a real democracy. There are democrats in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales; it even appears prominently in our Prime Minister's speeches—but that form of fooling is bound to lose its power one day.

The Bishop of Bath and Wells says that "without religion teachers have nothing with which to bind together education and make a single whole." It almost looks as though the Church

authorities, as a means of decoying young men into the Church, are ready to allow fools and humbugs to enter the teaching world. Certainly no one but a Christian leader would set down such obvious nonsense. Russia was converted from illiteracy to literacy in a single generation, and without using religion as an implement. What is the truth? Are the Russians made of better stuff than we are that they could do by their own efforts what we cannot do with calling upon God for help. The answer must be found, so far as Christians are concerned, in a "Yes" or "No" to this question. It looks as though God's greatness rests on man's littleness.

Not frequently, but now and again, one meets with a clergyman who has sufficient courage to look facts in the face. But the Rev. E. M. Southwell, of Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, is one of them. Mr. Southwell tells the Christian world plainly that "most people go to the pictures, and those who go on Sunday will not attend church in any case. Do you think that if we tell people they shall not go to cinemas on Sundays that it will bring people to church?" Of course it will not; but the Vicar overlooks one important aspect of the situation. Christianity to-day is more than ever a mass of humbug and imposture. If the Churches tell people that they have no desire to prevent people going to cinemas on Sundays, they have as a background the historic fact of British Christian teaching that to open places of amusement is an evil thing in the sight of God. If they are passive in their attitude towards Sunday amusements, they pronounce themselves as having misled the people for generations. Either way they stand to lose; and whether the clergy adopt one road or the other there is disaster waiting for them.

We wonder whether anyone has noticed, or how many have noticed, that there has been going on for a year a "special drive," a red-hot campaign, which has aimed at bringing back people to Jesus? Not many, we believe, because not many will be affected by it. It is a mere repetition of a very old pious business dodge, each exhibition beginning in the usual way and ending in the usual manner. While these faked spiritual storms are raging, those taking part in them are told of the numbers that are brought back to the "throne"—only for the general public to see that the attendances at church and chapel steadily decline and Church leaders trying dodge after dodge to secure more clients. All we need say is that the campaign which began in the usual manner will end in the same way. The Christian religion is marching towards its end just as surely as Hitler is marching towards his destruction. But, like Hitler, Christian leaders will continue to tell of the ultimate victory awaiting them.

The following is taken from "The Stars and Stripes," an American paper issued in this country:—

"A British reporter assigned to cover air force activities visited an American base to find out what our crewmen do to counteract the strain of combat. He reported to a group whose bombers have been on the most dangerous missions of this war, and one of the answers he received contains a message for all servicemen—a message of particular interest during this season of religious emphasis.

"One of England's historic cathedrals provides the answer to our problem, one of the crew explained. 'When we return from a mission we go to this cathedral and quietly rest. We don't go there to be talked to—just to meditate.'

"There is something about the atmosphere, they explained, that is good for us. When we leave all strain and tenseness are gone. We feel fortunate, they said, in being stationed near this shrine, for it provides us a comfort that we can secure in no other manner.

"The statement of these fighting men who have faced death many times contains a message for us all. They have discovered the value of simple worship."

Anything will pass in this country so long as it is intended to boost religion. It is obvious that the men resting in the cathedral enjoyed the coolness of the building and the opportunity of having a rest. They say as much. The conclusion that they are practising "simple worship" is not borne out by the fact. We expect that after looking at the building, and if the men stayed in the cathedral, their "simple worship" would rise to heaven in a good healthy series of snores.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn,

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

London, E.C.4.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- W. KENT.—Thanks for cutting; it will be useful.
- E. C. HENRY.—The best guide to understand the Bible is to take a good book on anthropology. Then the study is profitable and leads to real understandings. Religious studies of the Bible merely accumulate misunderstanding.
- FOR "THE FREETHINKER" FUND.—C. Hollingham, £1.
- E. HANSON.—Thanks, but we are overloaded with "copy" just at present.
- J. CANNESHUY.—Pleased to have your high opinion of "The Freethinker." We hope it will continue.
- J. FARMER.—Thanks; quite a good story. Will be used. There is an old saying that God is not mocked, but it would appear that he is very often fooled.
- S. WARREN.—Thanks. We have used the story; it seems to crop up with every war. Lying for the glory of God is a very old Christian practice. On the other hand, we do not expect that any but the very foolish believe these parsonic yarns.
- WAR DAMAGE FUND.—A. Comrie, 5s. 8d.
- J. SHARPLES.—Next week.

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

BIRMINGHAM Freethinkers will be pleased to know that Mr. F. A. Hornibrook will speak for the local N.S.S. Branch at 38, John Bright Street, Birmingham, Room 13 (I.L.P.) to-day (April 30), at 3-30 p.m., on "Freethought, Religion and Politics." Mr. Hornibrook is a forceful speaker, leaving none in doubt as to his meaning, and the branch anticipates a full house. Tea may be had after the lecture for those who wish to stay.

It was no "nine days' wonder" that set "all Leeds" a-talking on April 18, when the late Alderman Badlay was cremated with full Secular honours in the presence of one of the most civically representative gatherings ever seen at a Secular funeral. It was a much-needed and thoroughly deserved lesson for many of these leading citizens, amply demonstrating to them the fact that an honest man does not need to be turned into a hypocrite in order to bury or cremate him decently and with dignity. Too great a man in the civic life of Leeds to be ignored (he and Mrs. Badlay had enjoyed the highest civic honour of the Lord Mayor's office), he was also too great a man to die lying false colours—and there was no wriggling out of the Secular ceremony this time, as has so often happened in the past.

So, as the French would say, "all the world was there," overflowing from the crematorium into a huge crowd outside provided with loudspeakers to hear the ceremony. And "all the world" had a sadly needed lesson, listening to and watching for half an hour a Freethought family bidding its loved one good-bye with a pride and a dignity that caused even a Roman Catholic councillor to declare that he had never witnessed anything so impressive. It will be well for Leeds to remember that Atheists were responsible for this farewell to one of their comrades without the aid of a single line or word from the catechism of Christianity. And Freethinkers themselves will respect the memory of the man whose steadfastness of purpose and honesty of conviction, whose defiance of tradition and custom even in death, compelled an assembly representing all sections of society to gather to listen to the voice of Freethought. A fuller account of the proceedings will appear in our next issue.

We are pleased to see that Mr. T. M. Mosley is resuming his Freethought meetings in Nottingham and district. Mr. Mosley has done some excellent work, and he has a good grip of both the history of the N.S.S. and also the philosophy of the Freethought Movement. We suggest that others who are interested might well join Mr. Mosley in his work. There are many ways in which one can give assistance.

We have pointed out times out of number that every person, male or female, joining the armed Forces has an indefeasible legal right to have it placed on record that he is without belief in any form of religion. In spite of that, men and women joining the Forces are told by some petty officer in command that he has no such right and insists upon the new recruit entering his career with a lie. We have just received a rather bad specimen of this policy, and we are waiting for fuller particulars before passing it on to headquarters. The N.S.S. has taken up a number of cases since the war began and the injustice has been remedied.

We were pleased to see the following from the pen of "The Londoner" in the "Evening Standard" of recent date:—

"It was a refreshing half-hour I spent at the art show of the Summerhill School, which is being held at the Arcade Gallery in Old Bond Street. This is the do-as-you-like school, where A. S. ("Dominie's Log") Neill is headmaster.

"He tells me the school, now 23 years old, has been transferred from Suffolk to Festiniog, in North Wales, where it inhabits the mansion of Lord Newborough. There are 75 pupils ranging from five to 17, with a staff of a dozen. 'Better an interesting life than money-making,' says Neill.

"They have no teaching in religion, on morals or manners at Summerhill, 'with the direct result that the boys and girls are sincere, original, mannerly.'

"When they went to Wales first they used to play hockey on Sunday. There was a deputation of protest from the chapel deacons. Like all such problems, this one was referred to the Sunday Evening Community meeting of staff and children. They decided to restrict hockey to week-days.

"'And just to show you that we are not a collection of freaks,' says Neill, 'do you know that among our old boys we have had only one conscientious objector? Our record in the Forces has been as good as most.'

"Miss Ethel Mannin was at the show. She told me her daughter spent six years at the school. Another old girl is Diana Fishwick, former golf champion, who is now the wife of Air Commodore Critchley. 'Quite a handful when she came,' Neill told me."

Mr. Neill has made a good fight for his principles and richly deserves all the success he achieves. To him children are not pawns for the game played by the Churches and politicians, but human beings with valuable possibilities. We should like to see more schools of his kind, but we suspect that the ordinary trained teacher would not fill the bill.

The Manchester Branch of the N.S.S. is resuming its outdoor propaganda to-day (Sunday, April 30), at Platt Fields, at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., with lectures by Mr. Colin McCall, the Secretary. Questions and discussions are invited.

We do not know very much about the Bishop of Southwell. Dr. Barry, so we cannot be sure whether he said recently that there "has never been a greater interest in Christianity than at the present time." One may be interested in Christianity in finding out where such a mass of absurd beliefs came from, and study its origins, etc. And that may be true. And men may be interested also in dealing with Christianity as an anthropological and historic problem, and that, we are sure, Dr. Barry does not mean, for that way lies empty churches. Dr. Barry also says that the voice of God is the only comfort that could reach them. That sounds very much like sarcasm. But Dr. Barry has evidently a fine sense of sarcasm. Perhaps he became a Bishop because it promised so much enjoyment in the exercise of his predominant quality.

COUCHOUD'S "CREATION OF CHRIST"

II.

DR. COUCHOUD takes for granted the existence of Peter and Paul, but I have always felt that Peter, at least, is as big a myth as Jesus. Outside the New Testament, there seems to be not a line about him—except a mass of legend written by Christians centuries afterwards. As for Paul, the most convincing arguments in his favour will be found in one of Gerald Massey's lectures where he shows that Apostle as a firm opponent of "historic" Christianity in favour of the Gnostic conception of "a Christ within you." That Paul was not liked at all by his brother Apostles is a fact that cannot be gainsaid. And Massey insists that his Epistles have been worked over by later editors and give us quite a wrong impression of his teaching.

Paul believed in a Jesus who was a "heavenly being." His opponents certainly looked upon this heavenly being as having come down to earth, taken the "flesh" of man "and dwelt among us." There was a wide difference between their Jesus and Paul's Christ Jesus. Paul did not receive the gospel from a man, "nor," he insists, "was I taught it, but through revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul is generally looked upon as the great advocate of historic Christianity who did more than even Jesus to spread the faith on earth. Well, if his Christ came from "revelation" or from "within," it could not have been the Jesus of Mark, for example. Nor even that of Matthew or Luke, as he advises Titus to reject "Jewish Fables" and "shun foolish questionings and genealogies."

Paul, of course, makes great play with the word "crucifixion," but then, as Couchoud points out, he was himself "a crucified." Also, in Paul's mind, "Jesus was not he who had been crucified" but "he who is always crucified." In other words, the "crucifixion, the burial and the resurrection . . . have not been done once and for ever. They are eternal, neither of yesterday, to-day nor to-morrow." If this interpretation of Paul's teaching is correct, it is hard to credit that he ever believed in a Christ made flesh—no matter what other texts are brought to confound me.

After the death of Paul, it was John who bore the Cross of Christ aloft, and if it was he who wrote Revelation, we have here, contends Couchoud, "the God Hero of a Divine Epic. Jesus is of heaven heavenly, and he is yet to come. He has nought as yet to do with the earth or with history, and is manifested in visions alone." Couchoud has a lot to say on John's conception of Jesus in the Apocalypse, but I never read that mixture of saintly balderdash without seeing in it the solar myth theory at its worst. I feel that those critics who have argued that it was some Jewish writing manipulated in the interests of Christianity are right; but even then the imagery is purely astrological, from the "seven stars" in the first chapter, the seven horns, trumpets or seals, to the great "sign" in the heavens—"a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." These "stars" are those of the Zodiac, and they not only typified the twelve tribes of Israel but also the twelve Apostles. However, the Zodiacal interpretation of Revelation is too long a story to detail here.

According to Couchoud, it was not until we come to Marcion that the real creation of Christ took place—that is, a Christ who really existed. Unfortunately we know very little about him except that he was a Greek born late in the first century, a Christian who became a Gnostic later and ardently wished to reform the Christian Church from all Jewish elements. Couchoud calls him "one of the world's great religious geniuses." He was bitterly attacked by many of the Christian Fathers like Justin and Irenaeus.

Exactly what Marcion did to incur all this Christian hatred is not quite clear, but he certainly started the enmity by "editing" Paul, whose Gnosticism was akin to his own; and

it is perhaps because of this editing that Van Manen and other critics are disposed to believe that the Epistles of Paul are products of the second century and not of the first. In the form we have them, they are no doubt right.

Marcion is also, thinks Couchoud, the author of the life of Paul "which was to form the framework of the Acts of the Apostles." In addition, he insisted that the Jewish Bible must not be allegorised, that the Jewish God was "sanguinary, wrathful and jealous, prone to act as a cruel and ignorant man. . . ." It was impossible for this God to have been the Father of Jesus. It was impossible, therefore, for Jesus to have been predicted in the old Jewish scriptures.

It was when Marcion saw that the death of Christ had been put by Tacitus in the time of Pontius Pilate that he "accepted enthusiastically this popular, pagan idea of Christ's death; its simplicity appealed to him." Couchoud here seems to accept the "Annals" as genuine, though he hastens to qualify this by insisting that the Roman historian "wrote as a polemic and not as historian." And from this acceptance by Marcion "the details of Jesus's life soon developed. Each Church brought its scrap of good news; here all recalled a prophecy, there a parable, formerly inspired by the Spirit of Jesus and now ascribed to Jesus himself."

At all events, while Marcion "left Jesus the cloak of cloud and the seeming body" of Paul's teaching, he also came to the conclusion that Jesus led "an earthly life." He began his own Gospel with the words, "Now, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Jesus, the Son of God, came down from heaven . . ."—which Couchoud thinks was a stroke of genius. This picture of the Lord Jesus, free from prophets, contradictory visions and conflicting evidence, coming down to earth is described by him as "an artless, obvious, touching story" which would have "greater weight than all the dazzling and inflamed fancies of the seers."

We know what the Gospel of Marcion is like, because not only has most of it been included in Luke, but it was quoted so largely by Tertullian and other Christian Fathers that it can be almost wholly reconstituted. Tertullian, however, complained that it was Marcion who took his Gospel from Luke—a claim Couchoud will not admit, of course.

Marcion's Jesus was not born of a Virgin, but came down from heaven fully grown. How could an actual God be born? All he did was to take on the appearance of a man; if he had become a man, he would have ceased to be a God, as Tertullian shows.

This is quite in line with modern thought. Jesus was never a man, but a God. He is, for Christians, still a God, however much they protest that he is a great ethical teacher. He would never have been worshipped in the Christian way had he been a mere man. No, he was a God and he is a God—and Gods for the Freethinker do not exist. The reader can apply the paradox to himself.

H. CUTNER.

CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

NOT one of the Fathers even hints that slavery is unlawful or improper. In the early ages martyrs possessed slaves, and so did abbots, bishops, popes, monasteries and churches; Jews and pagans only were prohibited from acquiring Christian slaves. So little was the abolition of slavery thought of that a Council of Orleans, in the middle of the sixth century, expressly decreed the perpetuity of servitude among the descendants of slaves. On the other hand, the Church showed a zeal to prevent accessions to slavery from capture, but her exertions were restricted to Christian prisoners of war. As late as the 19th century the right of enslaving captives was defended by Bishop Bouvier.

The Apostles reminded slaves of their duty towards their masters and masters of their duties towards their slaves. . . . The clergy sometimes remonstrated against slave-markets, but their indignation never reached the trade in heathen slaves, nor was the master's right of selling his slaves whenever he pleased called in question at all. The assertion made by many writers that the Church exercised an extremely favourable influence on slavery surely involves a great exaggeration. As late as the 13th century the master had practically the right of life and death over the slave. Throughout Christendom the purchase and the sale of men, as property transferred to buyer, was recognised as a legal transaction of the same validity as the sale of other merchandise. Slaves had a title to nothing but subsistence and clothes from their master; and if a master from indulgence gave his slaves any *peculium* or fixed allowance for their subsistence, they had no right of property in what they saved out of that, but all that they accumulated belonged to their master. . . .

The gradual disappearance of slavery in Europe during the latter part of the Middle Ages has also commonly been in the main attributed to the influence of the Church. But this opinion is hardly supported by facts. It is true that the Church to some extent encouraged the manumission of slaves. . . . At the close of the sixth century it was affirmed that as Christ had come to break the chain of our servitude, so it was well for us to imitate Him by freeing those whom the law of nations had reduced to slavery. . . . Too much importance has, however, often been attached to these phrases. . . . And whilst the Church favoured the liberation of the slaves of laymen, she took care to prevent the liberation of her own slaves; like a physician she did not herself swallow the medicine she prescribed to others. . . . The Council of Agatho in 506, considered it unfair to enfranchise the slaves of monasteries, seeing that monks themselves were daily compelled to labour, and as a matter of fact the slaves of monasteries were everywhere the last who were manumitted. In the seventh century a Council of Toledo threatened with damnation any bishop who should liberate a slave belonging to the Church without giving due compensation from his own property. . . . Nay, the Church was anxious not only to prevent a reduction of her slaves, but to increase their number. She zealously encouraged people to give themselves and their posterity to be the slaves of churches and monasteries, to enslave their bodies—as some of the charters put it—in order to procure the liberty of their souls. And in the middle of the seventh century a Council decreed that the children of incontinent priests should become the slaves of the churches where their fathers officiated.

"The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas," by
E. WESTERMARCK, Vol. 1.

A LETTER TO TED

DEAR TED,—Pardon my familiarity in using your first name, but, although I know you only by the letter you wrote to me, criticising my Letter to Isobel on "Beginnings and Endings," it is a nice name. Indeed, from a man with the name of Ted Smith one would expect not only a pleasant personality, but a matter-of-fact outlook on life.

From your letter, however, I gather that I may anticipate the pleasant personality, but not so much of the matter-of-fact in your outlook. First of all, you try to put yourself in Isobel's place by answering my arguments, on her behalf. Now Isobel is only 20, and is still capable of moulding her ideas according to the weight of new evidence, or of throwing off old ideas according to the lack of evidence; but you are presumably much older than she is, and although you may argue your case with her, you cannot argue her case for her. Your mind is made up on many issues which, to her, are yet undecided, and for you to

parody my words by saying, "Silly, isn't he, Isobel?" is likely to hoist you on your own petard.

As an earnest searcher for truth, Isobel might easily turn round and say: "Not half so silly as you are"—especially if she reads your letter.

You say: "I admit we cannot make something from nothing, but I can prove that God can create something out of nothing." Then for ten pages you go on to explain how God managed to create the world out of nothing, and how things are still created by God out of nothing. But my difficulty is that I know nothing about God and his workings; I am totally ignorant on the point, and I must bow to your superior knowledge of God and his ways—if you can prove that your information is reliable and correct. My only knowledge of the meaning of God is an idea—a rather old-fashioned idea—in the mind of man. You, apparently, have actual knowledge of God as an operative being; indeed, you must have some idea of what is in his mind.

You describe his processes so accurately—the way in which the seed grows into a tree, out of nothing (!), the way in which the seed grows into corn, or wheat, out of nothing (!), the way in which the grass grows, out of nothing (!) These are truly the ways of God. All that comes from nothing is a product of the creativeness of God—until we discover that such things come from something. Then God drops out of the picture. But as you have not yet, apparently, discovered that the seed does grow out of something, we can hardly blame you for attributing such things as trees, corn, wheat and grass to God's creativeness, using nothingness for his raw material.

One would have thought, however, that a rural dweller would have managed to notice the presence of soil, if only on the boots on a rainy day.

Then you get yourself all mixed up as to the respective meanings of the words "make" and "create" in English, Greek and Hebrew—a common enough red-herring with people who have to square the Bible with modern facts that cannot be by-passed. But Isobel is an English girl, not so very much interested in the meanings of ancient and foreign words as in the meanings of the words of those who try to impose religious authority upon her to-day, in this country; to try to "blind her with linguistic science" will only serve to make her suspicious of your case. Moreover, she is a Yorkshire girl, and, as you know, Yorkshire people like "a straight tale" if they are to be impressed. The tale you have to tell might have been straight once, when there were no awkward facts to dodge around; but to a modern youngster it sounds as straight as Archimedes' screw.

So if you want to impress Isobel, forget about *Bara* and *Asah*, and the rest of it, and come down to this simple question.

Is it possible to make, create, acquire, manufacture, produce, derive, evolve, emerge, fashion, mould or establish, something out of nothing? Upon the answer to that all else depends, including the possibility of the existence of the God you postulate.

You suggested that your arguments would "take away my legs." But they are worse than that; they take away my breath!

Finally, you claim that your arguments are rational, and that you are a Rationalist as well as a Christian. Maybe. To be rational upon the false assumptions involved in Christianity is as easy for some grown-ups as it is for children to be rational about their fairy tales. The only difference is that the children have the sense to grow up mentally.

In any case, looking around the world from a human point of view, I am inclined to wonder, Ted Smith, what sort of lopsided compliment it is that Christians pay to God by accusing him of being responsible for its creation. He might have done better than you say he did—even out of nothing.

F. J. CORINA.

CONSTRUCTIVE FREETHOUGHT

THE article entitled "Destructive Freethought" that appeared earlier this year in this journal brought me a letter of friendly criticism from a correspondent who, while assuring me of his almost entire agreement with my defence of the militant freethought attitude as against the passive one, asserted that I had concentrated unduly on the need for demolition and had omitted to deal sufficiently with constructive aims. Since, however, I have never conceded that the distinction (usually emphasised by the religious) between "destructive" and "constructive" ideas is a valid one, and as my previous article was mainly a protest against the habit timid unbelievers have of depreciating militant freethought by labelling it as "destructive," I remained unrepentant after reading the letter.

The Editor of this journal has frequently warned readers that the emotional responses evoked by words are an ever-present danger to clear thinking. "Constructive" and "destructive" provide good examples of this type of response. We nearly always use the former approvingly and the latter with a note of condemnation. While we never indulge in any criticism that is not eminently constructive, our own schemes are always being held up by the other fellow's purely destructive objections. Yet experience should have made it quite clear to us that, apart from particular consequences, the two adjectives have no moral significance. On the material plane it is better to blow up a concentration camp than to erect one, and on the spiritual level the exposure of a lie is a worthier achievement than its propagation by repetition or acquiescence.

While showing an inclination to undervalue the destructive work of freethought and some inability to recognise the constructive aspects of our movement, my correspondent was able to include this tribute in his letter: "I honour Chapman Cohen and the other freethinkers, and I am grateful to them for the part their writings played years ago in helping me to get rid of 'the boil on the neck,' but I found it unnecessary to keep taking the medicine they provided. I was completely cured." He admitted, however, that he, "not being built as a propagandist, may have been to blame in not continuing to purchase the medicine and pass it on to others needing it."

This assumes that militant freethought literature, including "The Freethinker," has no other function than the medicinal one of purging minds of the poison of superstition. No regular reader of this journal will, I am sure, endorse so narrow a view. Personally, having had the benefits of parallel religious and freethought teaching throughout my youth, with the natural result that the former never had the slightest chance of infecting my system, any gratitude I feel towards G. W. Foote, Chapman Cohen and the other militant freethinkers, whose writings I have always read with avidity, cannot be due to their having cured me of a disease I never caught. True, "The Freethinker" has been a regular tonic to me for a good many years, but that is rather different from the medicine to which my correspondent referred, which is intended for those on whom the religious disease has a powerful grip.

I suggest, therefore, that my critic looks again at "The Freethinker" through the eyes of its regular readers, and he will recognise it as the organ of a cause, bringing to those who have that cause at heart news of the fight, ammunition for their own use and a continual renewal of the inspiration that keeps them serving ideals that have little connection with the values most prized by the generality of mankind.

This lasting enthusiasm for the freethought cause is a later stage than the mere rejection of religious beliefs. "The Freethinker" and the militant attitude it represents are constantly challenging unbelievers to act in accordance with their convictions, but most members of the community appear to find this somewhat more difficult than the passive state of unbelief. It

is considerably easier to invent excuses for evading the challenge.

"My parents will be hurt if I openly avow my disbelief. My sweetheart will not marry me without a religious ceremony. My children will suffer if I withdraw them from religious teaching at school. Unless I take the religious oath the Judge will decide the case against me. My chances of promotion in the Forces will be nil if I put myself down as an Atheist. My customers will go elsewhere if I associate myself with an attack on religious privileges. My constituents will not keep me in Parliament and no office will come my way if I advocate measures opposed the Churches. My friends and neighbours will avoid me unless I keep my freethinking ideas to myself." Yet it is impossible to argue like this without suspecting that a good deal of mental cowardice is involved, so the timid unbeliever rationalises his fear by thanking the militant one for destroying the false ideas that were leading him astray, with the addendum that something more constructive is called for. What this something is we are not told.

Strange to say, I have never yet met a militant freethinker who has not been keenly interested in and active on behalf of all kinds of other progressive causes, schemes for social betterment, educational improvements, healthier living and working conditions, the scientific treatment of delinquents, the encouragement of the arts and sciences, the securing of world peace, the preservation of the countryside and the many other aims that public-spirited people adopt according to temperament and environment. On these questions there are naturally as many differences of opinion between freethinkers as between Christians; but what unites us as freethinkers is the firmly-held conviction that the surest hope of progress for humanity rests in the complete freedom of individuals to hear and discuss all points of view and to criticise all creeds and institutions.

That religions, Churches and priesthoods continue to receive so much of our attention is due to the fact that throughout their history they have been, and to-day they still are, the greatest foes of this freedom. We make no apology for the destruction our efforts have wrought in these spheres in the past, nor for our intention of keeping up the attack. We do, however, retort to those who are so prone to damn with faint praise the cause to which they owe their own mental liberation, that this destruction ranks with the finest constructive achievements to be found in the whole of human history.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

PECULIAR PEOPLE

Cain kills his brother and receives no sentence from God.

Moses kills an Egyptian and God chooses him to act as His law-bearer, and talks on the mountain top with him.

David slays his tens of thousands against Saul's thousands, and is called a man after God's own heart.

Job is covered with boils, and thanks God for them.

Jonah uses a fish for a storm-raid shelter, and then having been saved himself, begs God to destroy Nineveh.

John preaches that Jesus is coming for forty years in a wilderness where nobody lives to listen to him and, as a reward, has his head cut off.

Jesus, God's only beloved, bleeds on a cross.

Paul was a murderer, a fanatic, and said dead seeds grow.

Satan turns from a serpent to a resident in heaven, a tempter of Jesus, and has been chased by Christians for over 2,000 years, and not caught yet, by a long way. Good record for a legless serpent.

Jesus said: "Behold, I come quickly"—and, to date, not even in sight.

JOSEPH FREEMAN.

CORRESPONDENCE

ST. GEORGE MIVART

SIR,—In reference to Edgar Syers' query re Professor Mivart, in the eighties of last century he wrote an article that appeared in one of our leading magazines, entitled "Happiness in Hell," which caused a considerable stir in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles; and, as far as I remember, as the Pope threatened him with ex-communication, he recanted and his article was withdrawn from circulation. After that episode Professor Mivart faded out and was never heard of any more.

At that time Charles Watts, a prominent figure on the Free-thought platform, lectured in many towns and cities in England, taking for his subject "Happiness in Hell—Misery in Heaven." I heard him at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Many old Freethinkers will remember Charles Watts. What a grand lecturer and debater! He had few equals, and what he did not know about the Bible wasn't worth knowing; and on history he was A1.

At that time, and during 1890, what an array of talent adorned the Free-thought platform! Bradlaugh, Watts, John M. Robertson, Mrs. Besant, Foote, Arthur Moss, William Heaford, Chapman Cohen and others that could hold their own against all-comers; whilst the lectures of Colonel Ingersoll, and his discussions through the "North American Review" with Cardinal Manning, Mr. Gladstone, the Rev. Dr. Field, D.D., and Judge Black, caused quite a sensation through America and England. At that time Ingersoll was at his very best, and to young Freethinkers I recommend them to read "Rome or Reason"; Ingersoll's "Reply to Gladstone," "Faith and Fact" and "God and Man" (the latter are replies to Dr. Field). They can be read to-day with the same relish as if they had been published last week.—Yours, etc.,

JOSEPH CLOSE.

SIR,—In answer to Edgar Syers, the sentence against Professor St. George Mivart was inflicted by Cardinal Vaughan, and he was denied the rites of Christian burial. The facts of the case were fully stated in a pamphlet by Marie Corelli, copies of which, I believe, may still be obtained from Andrew Block, 4, Bloomsbury Court, W.C.1.—Yours, etc.,

"NEMO."

OBITUARY

LORD SNELL

ONLY the older members of the Free-thought movement in this country will have recognised in the recent death of Lord Snell the "Harry" Snell of the Free-thought open-air platform of over 50 years ago.

He had come recently from Nottingham, where he had held the post of Secretary in the Nottingham Secular Society. From there he came to London, a raw country youth, as so many have done, seeking their fortune. We first met him during one of the meetings—I think in Victoria Park—and afterwards infrequently at other meetings. Since, I have formed the opinion that he must have looked back with some regret to these early years in which principles counted for everything; carefreeness made every week a new adventure for which he was answerable to none but himself.

From the Free-thought platform he turned to the Ethical movement under Dr. Stanton Coit, and his connection with the N.S.S. became slight. But on the occasions in which he appeared at the Society's Annual Dinner he always seemed pleased to meet old friends, and was cordial with new ones. Nor must it be forgotten that he laid stress upon his old associations, and avowed that whatever there was in him that was good he owed to his association with the National Secular Society.

His next move was towards politics, and he remained in the House of Commons until he was elevated—or 'condemned'—to the House of Lords. But that gave scant room for either originality or independence, and we doubt whether he could

have derived much pleasure in handing over conclusions that he must have personally disagreed with, and others for which he could not have had strong feelings.

Harry Snell—we get back to the older form—was a very earnest man where his opinions were concerned, and although he lacked the qualities of a great speaker, yet what he had to say was said in a manner that must have made him many friends and few enemies. He fought, as all earnest men fight, to the utmost of his opportunities, and at the age of 79 he could feel in his last moments that the world was something the better for his having lived in it.

C. C.

CHARLIE RUDD

The Free-thought movement has suffered another loss by the death of Charlie Rudd, of Luton, which took place suddenly in his 58th year.

As a regular reader of "The Freethinker" and member of the Parent Society, N.S.S., his association goes back many years. Any special effort for a particular object connected with our movement would be sure to include his name and contribution, whilst in another direction he never hesitated to put in some discreet and effective propaganda. Perhaps the best testimony to his character is the large number of friends who knew him well and regarded him with esteem and affection.

The remains were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on April 17, where a short Secular Service was held. The ashes were then taken to his home at Luton, where, before a large assembly of relatives and friends, many coming from a distance, a more intimate Secular address was given. The ashes were afterwards taken to one of his favourite country spots and scattered. The services were read by the General Secretary, N.S.S.

R. H. R.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon. Mr. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields: Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 3 p.m. Messrs. WOOD, PAGE, and other speakers.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m. A. ROBERTSON, M.A.: "The History of Morals—2: The Mediæval World."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture. Enfield, Lancs.—Friday, April 28, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Hapton, Lancs.—Sunday, 2-45 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture. Huncoat.—Thursday, May 4, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Bigg Market).—Sunday 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Birmingham).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m. Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK (London): "Free-thought, Religion and Politics."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. LUKE STRAIGHT: "Why I Do Not Believe in God."

SECULAR EDUCATION LEAGUE,

43 Chandos House,
Buckingham Gate, S.W. 1

Send postcard for Objects and Literature.

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

NEW EDITION

DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL

By CHAPMAN COHEN

Cloth 2/6

Paper 2/-

Postage 2d.

THE BIBLE

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians. Edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Passages cited are under headings: BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS, BIBLE ATROCITIES, BIBLE IMMORALITIES, INDECENCIES AND OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

MISTAKES OF MOSES, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by post 4d.

CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT? By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s.; postage 1½d.

AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY, A Survey of Positions, by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH, by Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS, by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS, by J. M. Wheeler. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

FREETHOUGHT

CHALLENGE TO RELIGION (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester), by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING, by Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d. The four volumes, 10s. post free.

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT, by Chapman Cohen. An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST, by C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; by post 5d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM, by Chapman Cohen. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

GOD AND EVOLUTION, by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. L. Du Cann. An enquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT, by Chapman Cohen. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH, by Chapman Cohen. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL, by Chapman Cohen. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

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

INFIDEL DEATHBEDS. The last moments of famous Freethinkers. By G. W. Foote and A. D. McLaren. Price 2s.; postage 3d.

SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS, by G. W. Foote. Price 2s.; postage 2½d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST, by Gerald Massey. With Preface by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES, to which is added **THE LAW OF NATURE.** By C. F. Volney. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an introduction. Price, post free, 3s. 2d.

PETER ANNET, by Ella Twynam. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR FREETHINKERS. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THE RESURRECTION AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS, by W. A. Campbell. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

REVENUES OF RELIGION, by Alan Handsacre. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

HENRY HETHERINGTON, by A. G. Barker. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Deity and Design. Did Jesus Christ Exist? Agnosticism or . . . ? Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. Atheism, Freethought and the Child. Christianity and Slavery. The Devil. What is Freethought? Must We Have a Religion? Morality Without God.

Price 2d. each.

Postage 1d. each.

THE PIONEER PRESS

2 & 3, Furnival St., Holborn, London, E.C.4