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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Jesus in the Sky

MANY of our readers will remember the yarn of the "Angels of Mons." It occurred during the war of 1914-1918. It was a war that was to end war and create a real democracy in this land. The story runs thus. Our troops were in a desperate situation. It looked as though they would be wiped out. Then at the last desperate moment the tide turned; the British army was saved. How? It seemed that a number of angels were seen in the sky—armed. They beat the Germans back, although they never saw the angels. But a number of prominent clergymen, including Winnington Ingram and a number of Nonconformist ministers, swore the miracle was a real one, and soldiers were found who swore they saw the angels—though some of these were found out afterwards never to have been out of the country. Then a well-known writer came forward and said that he wrote the story, and not with the slightest intent to deceive. He just wrote it, based on an ancient Roman legend. But the clergy had got hold of a good thing, and they hung on to it as long as they could. We believe we had something to do with the "killing."

Now we have another version. Again there is a clergyman who acts as a trumpeter in the matter—the Rev. Harold Green, Vicar of St. Nicholas, Ipswich. He is convinced that the story is true. We are not surprised, for a man who can swallow the Virgin Birth story, the Resurrection, the turning of water into wine, etc., in the New Testament, ought to be able to believe anything. During a recent alert in this country some people said they saw in the sky a picture of the Crucifixion of Jesus. It appeared as the siren sounded and was first seen by a woman. She first saw the Cross—dimly, apparently. But the more the lady looked the more she saw. First, the Cross was seen, then "within a few moments the Cross became more distinct, and gradually the features of Christ, and even the crossed feet and nails which held Him appeared." What Jesus was doing hanging about the sky in this fashion no one knows. He did not prevent the alert, and it cannot be that he appeared merely to watch the bombing. The lady said she will never forget the sight. Neither should we.

The tale evidently impressed the Vicar. He appears to believe it; but then a vicar should be ready to believe anything. Believing is his trade, and that stock is so low just now that he may well be expected to jump at the prospect of the market rising.

The picture was so impressive that the Vicar, with an eye to business, gave vent to the original remark that "we are living in the most momentous period of the human race and may expect very soon great things to happen not only on earth, but in the heavens." So he has invited everyone who saw anything startling on that momentous night to communicate with him. He says that in response, wit-

nesses are coming forward from all parts of the county; some are even calling at police stations. We shall not be greatly surprised if the clergyman sticks to his job of visiting the people who saw something in the skies that might have been a Cross, or looked like a Cross, or was a Cross, and that he will meet a large number of them who, after being given the data, will say that upon a certain night, or day, they saw something very unusual in the sky—that it looked like a man on a cross. Some may even give us much more detailed features, and just as the lady said she could see the nails in the feet of Jesus, so someone may say they saw his toe-nails.

These visions are, after all, very ancient stories. If the Vicar will go through some of the old documents in Ipswich he will probably find sworn evidence that some old women were seen flying through the air on broomsticks. This spiritual descendant of the famous Hopkins is walking in the same track as his predecessor. There is the same exhibition of credulity, with the same readiness for self-deception. Still, all things work together for the glory of God, and if we can reawaken the power of superstition it will make the task of Christianising the primary schools so much the easier. One can but point out that these "spiritual" visions are paralleled in the non-religious world—falsification of visions as a consequence of whisky, mental diseases, abnormal susceptibility to fear, and so forth. Still, if these visions, whether by man or woman, do something to "spiritualise" the world, the Vicar may probably look upon the result as part of the care God takes of his people, and the Vicar may be justified in feeling thankful for anything that will help the rebirth of religion. Many a religion has been built on the kind of evidence he is now seeking.

Teachers and Religion

The Educational Correspondent of the "Catholic Herald" has been conducting an inquiry as to the attitude of teachers to religion. He leads off with a very brief report by saying:—

So far from being an Atheistic profession, the teaching body is clearly in favour of having religious teaching in State-aided schools.

Now no one that we know of ever said that teachers as a body were "Atheistic." In such matters the teachers would fall into line with the community, and until we can say that Atheism is dominant—publicly dominant—we have no right to expect that there will be much difference between teachers and the people as a whole. But if the question were properly put, and if teachers could—or would—speak out plainly, then we think there would be a dominating vote on leaving religion outside the school. But so long as the teachers are "bossed" by those who profess religion, and so long as their promotion depends upon it, so long will they pretend a belief which they do not hold.

General honesty can only be where freedom of thought and speech exist.

Likewise we should expect that as State-aided schools are only in existence because they wish children to be taught a definite form of sectarian religion, and as appointments, promotion and ease of work exist where they at least pretend to be Christians, it is not surprising that the majority of these teachers *say* they are in favour of religion in the schools. What we have said is supported by the remark that the religious teaching envisaged (by the teachers) is not necessarily Christian at all. And that seems to clinch it. "Almost all those who gave answers wished to see included some instruction in the main faiths of the world."

Well, if religion is to be taught in the schools, then it should be *religion*. It should be what modern science calls "comparative religion." In that case children would acquire the knowledge that the Christian religion is akin to scores of other religions, with the same miracles, the same appearance of gods, etc. In other words, the teachers would study comparative religion in order to teach it, and the pupils would leave school able to discuss religion like educated, intelligent beings, and not repeat "what *we* believe" in a way that makes one wonder whether they had their education in an infant school and had not made much progress by the time they had finished their training.

There is another sly disclosure made by this pretended Catholic investigator which shows his hand. He says:—

Good religion means constant practice and suggestion from childhood onwards, and which cannot be acquired from a purely abstract point of view. They cannot therefore be left until the child attains mature judgment.

Did ever a man say more clearly that the only way to make Christians is to get hold of the child before it is old enough to appreciate what is being done to it? Finally comes the last paragraph, daring in its disclosure:—

We must let the world know that what Catholics want is Catholic schools for Catholic children, and that the appointment of the teachers is secondary to us so long as they are full-blooded Catholics.

The name of the reporter who so writes is not given. But no one could say in fewer words, and tell the outside world, that at all costs the Catholic Church relies upon maintaining its place and power only by "collaring the kids." Leave them till they are old enough to understand the world in which they live, and the Church may as well go out of business at once.

Wine, More Wine

The war has hit many people hard. It has left blanks in families, it has robbed friend of friend, it has taken the worthy and the unworthy, the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad, with an impartiality that cannot be beaten. But one remarkable thing, one that has been brought before the public by God's representatives on earth, is the growing shortage of Communion wine. This wine must be of a certain strength, neither more nor less. It must not intoxicate, but it must have an effect. One firm, in Lisbon, has its vineyard consecrated by a special ceremony. The wine must be of a certain quality for the Roman Church because, while the Protestant may be content with a wine that is only symbolically the blood of Jesus, that blessed by the Catholic priest is transformed into the actual blood of the

Saviour. What is to be done without it is a problem that is agitating many of our spiritual leaders.

Yet there is a way out, and we offer it to those who ought to have thought of it earlier. Open the New Testament at the Gospel of St. John, Chapter 2. There it is laid down that there was a marriage at Galilee. Both Jesus and his mother were present. There were also a large number of guests, and at a stage in the festivities the wine ran short. So the mother of Jesus went to her miracle-working son and said: "They have no wine." And her son said "What have I to do with thee"—not a very respectful way for a son to address his mother. But there were six water-pots of stone, and Jesus, on second thoughts, said: "Fill the water-pots with water," and they filled them to the brim. Jesus then turned the water into wine, and the guests tasted the wine and were astonished at its quality. It was actually better than the wine that had been made in the ordinary commercial way, and John says (verse xi.) that in this way "Jesus manifested forth his glory." And a fine manifestation it was. How many people engaged in the wine business would "glorify God" if that miracle could be performed to-day in England. Gods were gods in those days! They did something.

Now the chief miracle merchant with wine to-day is the Roman Catholic Church. It is rich in just that kind of miracle performed at Galilee. It is indeed frequently performed. The priest commonly takes some ordinary wine and a piece of ordinary bread and, says the Catechism, "the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ." There is no room there for misunderstanding. It is plain enough for a child to follow, and if the child is young enough, we see nothing marvellous in the child believing it. And if Jesus could turn six pots full of water into six pots, or six million pots, of wine—for it is not quantity that marks a miracle, but its quality—the Papacy might have at its feet the whole of the population of Europe.

Of course, it is not to be expected that the Vatican, having created the wine would give it free to the general public, as always with a keen eye on the commercial side, we must expect that a charge would be made, but the influx of converts would be colossal, and the power of the Church increased a thousand, nay, a millionfold. A spiritual epidemic would set in, and Atheism would receive an almost deadly blow.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

YOUR DUTY TOWARDS YOURSELF

WHEN I was young I was taught "My duty towards God." At the same time I was taught "My duty towards my neighbour." A little later I was told of my duty towards my King, my Church and my Country; my employers; my profession; the holy Inland Revenue; the blessed rates authority and the respectable water board; my landlord; my wife and children; and a hundred others. Even my gas company and my electricity company told me of my duty to them and bound me by a signed contract—mostly in small, unreadable print—to do it towards them.

But no one, not a single soul, told me of my duty towards myself. No one—except myself as I grew older and realised how all these divinities conspired to cheat me of time and money and health of body and mind—seemed to think that I had any duty towards myself at all.

In short: I existed only to be exploited.

No one spoke of God's duty to me. Nor of my neighbour's duty to me. Nor of England's duty to me. Nor of anyone else's. None of them seemed to be willing to recognise any duty to me at all. I was to be the unselfish and patient ass in Stendhal's "desert of selfishness called Life." I was to be the stooge of all.

But when one thinks it out for oneself—and no Freethinker should fail to do that—surely there is no more important duty than one's duty to oneself, and it is astonishing how most people, obsessed by a million imaginary other duties, fail altogether in their duty to themselves. Years ago I wrote in my private book of thoughts:—

"Be kind to yourself. Few are."

I still think that good sense. It is really fantastic how most people, even the profiteers and pettifoggers—unconsciously very often—sacrifice themselves and their interests to anything else and everybody else. They don't want to; they don't mean to; but they do. It is extraordinary how incapable men and women are of really pursuing their own interests. Nations are equally idiotic in this regard, as the present war shows.

The truth is that it takes great strength of character and extraordinary clearness of mind to sacrifice other things and other people to oneself and be really a man for oneself. As for nations—it has long been proverbial how foolishly the world is governed. The courage to be selfish (entirely and utterly one's own man, as Bernard Shaw was, when in youth he flung his poor old mother into the struggle for life instead of himself) is rare indeed.

"Respect yourself above all," said Pythagoras. And he was right. I am not sure that he might not have added: "And respect no one else." Or at any rate, "Respect everyone and everything else less than yourself."

Through my good fortune in being endowed with greater innate wickedness than other boys (the unanimous testimony of all who knew me!) I arrived at these truths by the light of Nature and when I was very young and small. Instinctively I have always loathed the herd, the team, the gang. Later it was cheering to find my ideas expressed in German philosophy in such books as Nietzsche's "Thus spake Zarathustra" and, above all, Max Stirner's remarkable "The Ego and His Own." The bankruptcy of English thinking is well shown by the fact that a translation of Stirner's book is virtually unobtainable in England to-day, and there exists no commentary upon him by any English writer.

In England, indeed, the cant of "Service" and "Unselfishness" reigns unchallenged to-day while we serve our God and neighbour by mass-murder and mass-lying. The individual is to sacrifice himself utterly for the robber-State. Tax-eaters of all kinds and varieties; politicians, bureaucrats and warriors of all four sexes (male, female, intermediate and neuter) multiply in and prey upon us, like horrible bacilli. Thousands of "Statutory Rules and Orders"; hundreds of by-laws; scores of social, professional, commercial, group, and family ordinances keep us cribbed, cabined and confined like the sheep most of us are.

Even porters and bus conductresses yell rude commands at us, so abject have we moderns become; and we are packed into public vehicles with far less consideration than sardines into a tin. Our scanty leisure is spent in "filling up forms"—for this is the Paper Age! "Bevin boys" are enslaved for the private profits of coalowners on the plea of war necessity. The Tories have bought the Labour Party for the small price of two or three Cabinet Ministers' salaries. There is insufficient food and drink and clothing and shelter; minds and bodies alike are stunted, starved and poisoned by adulterated mental and physical food. But all is well: the best of all possible wars is being waged, paper money is turned out as fast as the printing-presses can print it, and the Authoritarian Age of the Servile State in which Britons ever, ever shall be slaves is firmly established,

like Peter the Apostolic Rock. The individual counts for nothing! Nothing indeed.

Who, in such an era, preaches the gospel of "self-ownership"? Who cares to revive and cherish the spark of intellectual light and heat in a man's own breast? England has adopted Mussolini's motto: "Believe, obey, fight." What a million fools read in their daily newspaper or hear hourly on their wireless must be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is "official"—as official as the crucifixion of Jesus and the burning alive of Jeanne d'Arc.

"Where," as Lamartine asked, "are the young men sitting at deal tables in their garrets writing the words that make tyrants tremble?" They are all mouthing the shibboleths of the age, writing to the briefs of the more-or-less Communist Party, the tied-to-Toryism Labour Party, the Half-Christian Religion, or any one of the other popular, compromising, organised hypocrisies of to-day. The original mind is not to be heard.

Disraeli once said that he had to educate his Party. But free-thought has to educate its age and succeeding ages. We must disengage our minds from the tyranny of Governments, of mobs, of committees, of temporary religions, of dead and putrifying ideas. It is still within our power to breathe (untaxed) fresh air and sunshine, and to think our own (unexpressed) thoughts. We can retire, as Marcus Aurelius has taught us, into the citadel of our fortified selves, we who are not less (in his great phrase) than citizens of the world and heirs of all the ages. Take a lesson from God; Church; King; Country; Government; humanity; the political mountebanks of our day such as Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill and their little imitators—and instead of serving any or all of such monstrous egoists, serve yourself.

"Nothing is more to me than myself," said Stirner. Indeed, how should anything be more? C. G. L. DU CANN.

HEINRICH HEINE

"The spirit of the world
Beholding the absurdity of men—
Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile
For one short moment wander o'er his lips.
That smile was Heine! for its earthly hour
The strange guest sparkled; now 'tis pass'd away."

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

MATTHEW ARNOLD used the right word when he said that Heine "sparkled," but I suggest that it was not merely "for its earthly hour." Like a far distant star, Heine still sparkles brightly long after death, and if anyone doubts this, I refer them to the new English translation of his prose works.* All other editions are now, I believe, out of print, and this volume will fill a need, but unfortunately, it is much too short and selective. The editor, Hermann Kesten, is well aware of this, and he hopes that a modern translation of the complete works will soon be published. Meanwhile, he desires to bring Heine's prose to as large a public as possible, and we have to be satisfied with an anthology. The drastic cutting would shame any censor, and personally I long for the lot, but that is no reason why we should not revel in what Mr. Kesten aptly terms "fragmentary magic."

This book certainly captures the real Heine, and that is a great deal, for it is better to catch a few intimate glimpses of the man himself than to view a hundred lifeless portraits. Here is wit personified, and he who cannot laugh with Heine may be

* Heinrich Heine: "Works of Prose." Edited by Hermann Kesten. New translation by E. B. Ashton (Secker and Warburg Limited, 1943).

considered beyond hope. There is, however, a serious motive behind Heine's satire as distinct, say, from that of Swift. The great Dean, we feel, had no hopes for mankind. They were beasts, and that was the end of it. With Heine it is different. He knew that man could free himself if he would only fight to do so, and it is as a fighter for freedom that Heine wished to be remembered, viz. :—

"I doubt that I deserve the laurel wreath, for poetry has always been merely an instrument with me, a sort of divine plaything. If you would honour me, lay a sword rather than a wreath upon my coffin; for I was, first of all, a soldier in the war for the liberation of humanity."

Surely we should honour him with both the laurel and the sword, for Heine was ever a poet and always a liberator. In him we have the inimitable combination of lyricist, wit and fighter, and his works are a boon to any Freethinker, old or young, at any time. Mr. Kesten says: "Heine was an unbeliever despite conversion and baptism; but no man believed more strongly than he did in everything good, great and beautiful," and this is conclusively proved by his letters. In 1824 we find him saying of Byron: "This man was great; in pain he discovered new worlds; like Prometheus he defied the wretched humans and their still more wretched gods . . ."; later he describes God as an "animal-baiter," and when he is told that a friend has taken to preaching Christianity, he remarks: "I should much rather have heard that Gans had stolen silver spoons." Nor could he forgive Felix Mendelssohn for his "Christianising" and serving "the pietists with his great, enormous talent," but it was just a few months before his death that he wrote perhaps his most pungent heresy: "I shall denounce the good God who is treating me so cruelly to the S.P.C.A."

Heine once described himself as "the born antagonist of Jewish-Mohammedan-Christian deism," and so he remained to the end of his life. He knew how Christianity attracted and encouraged slaves with its hopes of rewards in heaven, but he was concerned with improving man's lot on earth, and he never regretted his devotion to the "best of causes." Indeed, it was in terrible suffering that he made this exquisite confession:

"The lovely consciousness of having led a beautiful life fills my soul even in this sorrowful time; I hope that it will accompany me in the last hours until the white abyss. Between ourselves, the latter may be the least dreadful; dying is horrible, not death, if there is a death. Perhaps death is the last superstition."

From 1848 until his death on February 17, 1856, Heine was confined to a "mattress crypt," suffering from incurable consumption, and almost blind, but his humour never left him. He was indomitable, and continued writing beautiful poetry, cheerful letters and splendid prose, easing his agony with opium and lifting his eyelids with his fingers in order to see. In writing to his "last love," Camilla Selden—"La Mouche"—he sometimes signed himself "Nebuchadnezzar II." ("Since I am just as crazy as the Babylonian King and eat only chopped grass, which my cook calls spinach"), and under his last signature in this form he notes that he was "formerly Royal Pruss. atheist, but now lotus-flower worshipper."

Thus, Heinrich Heine joked to the end of a great life. His literary output is almost baffling in its variety and intensity, for he failed in nothing that he attempted. He stands in the very front rank as poet, critic and satirist; and he knew the value of his own work, correctly prophesying that his name would some day be linked with that of Goethe. His affinity, however, is with the Greeks. He was a Hedonist, and he mourned the displacement of the "Hellenic gaiety, love of beauty and thriving zest for life" by the "gloomy, gaunt, anti-sensual, over-spiritual Judaism of the Nazarenes." "We want a healthy religion so that our morals may recover," he said, for "if the religion of the past is rotten, morals get smelly, too."

Man's happiness was his aim, and he realised that the road to it was emancipation: to "uproot servility as far as its last hideout, Heaven." That road he unhesitatingly took, vowing: "I shall not give the sword out of my hands until I drop to the ground." Heine remained true to his promise.

C. McCALL.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

I.

SHORTLY before ten o'clock on Sunday mornings boys attending Holy Trinity Sunday School assembled outside their school. Girls went to a separate building 300 yards higher up the road. Occupations of the waiting boys were diverse. Some ran about and played games, though careful of their Sunday clothes, starched collars and polished boots.

Older boys stood in groups talking. Girls passing by to the girls' school attracted attention in their Sunday frocks and ribbons and curled hair. Shapely legs in black or brown stockings or bare above white socks were eyed critically, with hopes for glimpses of white-frilled underwear.

The girls were pleased at the looks they provoked, and the usual salutation of "Hello, Mary," or whatever was the right name.

They responded variously, blushing, smiling, bridling, staring straight ahead, favouring handsome boys with bright-eyed glances and parting of dewy lips, speaking in whispers or with saucy pertness.

Several lads kept up remarks in dog-Latin, to be different, to impress younger and slower-witted ones, and in accordance with a theory that kids outside their own circle failed to understand their meaning.

The local version ran thus:—

"Hagave yagou sageen Magoll thagis magornaging?"

"Nago. Hagas shagee gagone agup yaget?"

"Dagon't knagow. Agask Jagim. Hagee wagas agout wagith hager lagast nagight."

"Hagee wagould."

"Yages. Whagere agis hagee?"

"Hagi! Jagim!"

Jimmy turns smiling knowingly. Follows brisk exchange of repartee about sweethearts. Jim is a notable ladies' man, and Molly one of the prettiest girls, so there is some envy of him, while he is complacent, aware he has scored.

Round Albert his pals gather, for he has money to spend. He demands, "Who's coming to Old Mother Wait's to buy some stickjaw?"

Those willing run off with him. Through the top yard, down the sidesteps and across the playground they scurry. The bottom gate is locked, so they climb over it. Slinking along under the wall, these boys turn up an alley, stopping before the open door of a dirty cottage.

They can smell what they have come for and shout, "Mrs. Wait!"

A blowzy woman appears, grins at them, and without a word turns back into her kitchen, to reappear with lumps of toffee wrapped in newspaper. Paying their pennies the boys go, hammering the toffee on the corner of a brick wall, putting bits in their mouths now, reserving the bulk for church.

Mrs. Wait's toffee was famous as proper jaw-puller, could not be chewed or eaten, only churned over and ingested as it dissolved. Opening one's mouth produced a curtain of strings between upper and lower teeth like strips of elastic. It was popular as an interesting medium to last from the moment of leaving school for church till one arrived home for dinner.

II.

Standing apart from others was a group of bigger boys. They kept up murmured staccato conversation, intervals being filled by grins, grimaces, meaningful glances and slight gestures.

These were the wits of Holy Trinity Sunday School. Their speciality was Biblical humour, though they did not eschew secular jocularly or comedy derived from Prayer Book, hymns, curates and other aspects of religious and Church life.

Bill had a fancy for rewording initials into different words from those originally belonging to them. Thus, "I.H.S." he recast as "I Helped Susy," and "R.I.P." became "Rest in Pubs."

Also he took words and used their separate letters as initials. Opening a Prayer Book he pointed to "The Preface," saying "The police ran every Friday after Charles Evans."

Another humorist favoured parody. His exhortation ran, "Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places, to go and see the donkey races; and if we acknowledge and confess our sins, we are sure to know which donkey wins."

Part of his General Confession was: "We have left undone those things which we ought not to have undone."

Like professional comedians, these lads derived pleasure from repetition, never finding their own jokes stale. Tom was satisfied to repeat the word "contrariwise," sure of drawing smirks from his hearers.

Much of this jesting was in riddles. Some were mild, as "Who was the cricketer in the Bible?"

"Saint Peter. He stood up before the eleven and was bold."

And, "Where is betting mentioned in the Bible?"

"In Acts. It says Peter lodged with one Simon a tanner."

To the other extreme were coprophitic and obscene queries and answers, with suggestions of sex and indecency. Plenty could be hunted out by diligent Bible students.

One of these had a knack of fitting together unrelated verses with startling results, as from Acts: "Judas went out and hanged himself and, bursting asunder in the midst, his bowels gushed out. And the lot fell upon Matthias."

Harry's talent was to group Biblical names, which said quickly conveyed improper notions.

The more shameless passages of the Bible, those characterised by Eastern frankness contrasting to Victorian prudery, could be quoted unchanged to everyone's joy. Variant upon this was a parody of hymns, quite an easy matter.

Hero of this group was Kenneth. He carried the campaign into class. When the doors were opened the scholars sauntered in, settling down after much fidgeting and talk. When he could get them quiet enough the Superintendent said prayers and had a hymn sung.

Each class then devoted itself to its teacher, who heard memorised texts recited, the Bible read, and expounded the latter. Anticipating this, on arrival at verse 67, Psalm 78, "He smote His enemies in the hinder parts," Ken said audibly, "He smacked 'em on the arse."

A titter ran round the class, followed by silence as Miss Salt blinked her eyes, seemed prepared to swoon, recovered with a gasp, shuddered, and in a bated voice called Superintendent Hill. To him she whispered indignantly, after which he yanked Ken out of her class and stood him by himself. But the trick was done. Ken's exegesis of Psalm 78 became stock repetition of the boys.

About a quarter to eleven the scholars walked to church, restlessly occupying back pews. Those who wished were allowed to leave before the sermon. This was contrary to the Prayer Book injunction to godparents that they shall call upon baptised children to hear sermons.

Particularly as the vicar had the whole Sunday School present at baptisms on the last Sunday in each month. Thus he hoped

to inculcate Christian doctrines as well as publicly welcoming newcomers to the church, to be participators in its benefits with their older brothers and sisters in Christ.

III.

Other Sunday afternoons had a different atmosphere from mornings. They started with a riotous diversion. The boys of a private school passed by on their way to walk along the hillside. They were greeted with shouts, hoots, catcalls, laughter, and louder yells of "Bulldogs!"

Clad in Eton suits and collars, immaculate and calm-faced, the preparatory schoolboys walked on, ignoring the uproar.

Mystery was why the Sunday School scholars used "Bulldogs!" as an epithet of opprobrium. Most people would regard it as complimentary. Yet it was the one most hurled at the passing private school.

Inside proceedings consisted of being read to by the teachers.

Choice of books varied from pious missionary stories and sob-stuff about dying religious children up to hearty adventure tales by Marryatt, Henty, Gordon Stables and other vigorous writers in the early part of this century.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

ACID DROPS

THE following is from the "Yorkshire Evening News" for April 27:—

A company selling religious books has been cited by the Federal Trade Commission on the ground that it falsely represents that its "Armoured Bibles" and "Heartshield Bibles" can deflect bullets, shrapnel or bayonets.

It is asserted that such statements "abuse and betray" the concern felt by families and friends for soldiers in combat (says Reuter's Washington correspondent).

Of course, the reaction of 99 Christians out of 100 would be that this company should be disbanded as a fraud, or its leaders should be imprisoned. But will someone be good enough to tell us what is the radical difference between this company and a number of other companies telling people that prayers may be said for the dead, that days of repentance or a day of national prayer may help us win a war? Or to take a very, very close analogical case, is there any radical difference between the company and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster selling or giving thousands of soldiers a medal blessed by himself that would save Catholic soldiers from danger? It will not do to say the Archbishop believed what he said, while the other was just a fraud. One is as likely as the other, and the fools in each case are on the same level.

Mr. F. Wood, Chairman of the "Faith for the Times" campaign, was shocked, or hoped to shock others, that not one of fifty girls he questioned knew what "Easter" meant. We also shivered, but for a reason different from that which "shivered" Mr. Wood. We have tried for years to tell a quite obvious lie and got away with it and failed. Yet here is an evangelist—or something in that line—who could not find one girl in a crowd, or procession, of 50 who knew anything about the religious meaning of Easter. We bow with all humility to Mr. Wood.

That dare-devil democrat and lover of Freedom and Fair Play—the Archbishop of Canterbury—says he is willing to answer any questions on religion—on the Radio. That is what we may call real courage. It is not his fault if the B.B.C. kindly assists by cutting out all awkward questions; he can, with his hand on his heart, say that he is answering real questions that have come to him. It is not his fault if he does not see the awkward questions.

It is worth noting that it is confessed by the leading P.B.C. officials that the reason why the Brains Trust pantomime is given to the people through records is that it enables them to cut out

anything that is objectionable before the public hear all the answers as given. Of course, we all know that the B.B.C. humbug is deeply rooted, but what are we to make of those public men who submit to have their remarks bowdlerised by a gang of B.B.C. officials for the sake of popularity. Self-respect ought to be enough to make them withdraw from the microphone until the public is dealt with honestly.

For foolishness, the B.B.C. "Anvil" outdoes the parent form. But it could not be otherwise. When four or five people gather round to answer religious questions in terms of religion, while there may be greater honesty displayed, it is bound to have a larger dose of foolishness. We think Commander Campbell ought to be transferred to the "Anvil." He would shine even more there than he does in the older institution.

The Papacy appears to have been making strong efforts to combine with the Greek Church. We fancy that the reason for this is that it may give Rome a foothold in Russia, and so work more mischief for their own gain. But the Greek Church will have nothing to do with it, or the Russian leaders are too familiar with the dishonesties of the "great lying Church" to let it gain a foothold in Russia. While the Roman Church stands for a State within the State it must always be a potential danger.

From religious—Christian religious—sources we learn that eight millions have been captured out of India's 350 millions, and four millions out of China's 450 millions. We expect that if these figures were checked a great many dead 'uns would be found in these lists; and if we took away the "Rice Christians" the numbers would be greatly reduced.

We commented last week on the story—emanating from a clergyman—that when Charles Jagger tried to make a statue of Jesus he could not produce anything that satisfied him. Then the door of his room opened and Jesus walked in and the sculptor finished his work. The brother of the sculptor knew nothing about it. Now a sister has been found who quite believes the story. She thinks it did happen. In any case, we will wager that the parson's story will win. It is too useful a lie to lose. Fools will believe it, and the Churches are losing the more intellectual of the population anyway.

There was a great deal of talk during the last war about a land fit for heroes we were to see. Of course, it never arrived, and it was never intended to arrive, and it was because the Russian people decided to try and fashion a country to their own liking, and without bothering God at all, that our leaders, with scarce an exception, did so much to create the ill-will of the world against those who had destroyed Czardom, and set God on one side. And Russia's lasting sin, one that the leaders in this country have never forgotten, was the banishing of religious teaching from the new schools that were created, and which in a single generation, transformed 150,000,000, 70 per cent. illiterate, into a nation that was 80 per cent. literate.

The reaction to that, if we were really an intelligent people, would have been to at least relax our desire to take advantage of the helplessness of children, to leave them with clear minds concerning the nature of religion. But, on the contrary, a Government that had outlived its elected life joined hands with a clergy ready to snap at anything to perpetuate their power, and proceeded to draw up plans which would saturate the primary schools with religion so that the Churches—and other interests—in this country might secure a new lease of life.

We shall, unless something unexpected happens, see the clergy enjoying greater influence—not because of greater faith in religion—than they have had for two generations. And the success of the Churches in this country has encouraged them to action elsewhere, for there is a move to get religion established in the schools in parts of Canada. In Ontario, until recently, religion held sway in *Roman Catholic schools only*. Now "ministers of various denominations" are engaged in the work of doing for the schools of Canada what our Government has done for England. "Oh freedom—" our readers know the rest of the quotation.

The Bishop of Durham has written a small pamphlet on the Church and Dissent in Britain. We are sure the Roman Catholics will be pleased with it because the Bishop refers to the Roman Church as "the principal Dissenting body." It is lucky for the Bishop that the Roman Catholics are not bosses in this country. Of course, the plain truth is that all Christian bodies are dissenters—first they dissent from common sense, then they dissent from each other. We have often noted that it is considered something worth recording when a gathering of representatives of the different Christian bodies can meet on a public platform without a detachment of police being called in to preserve order.

In 1904 the General Congress of the United Methodist Churches passed a resolution that they could not officially participate in a War. Now by 373 votes to 300 the same Congress has decided to rescind the vote. The deciding factor appears to be the Japanese. In the course of the discussion it was repeated that God "has a stake in the struggle."

If we had been at the Congress, and had possessed the right to speak, we should have denied that the Christian God has any stake in the matter. The Christian deity was not the god of the Japanese, and as there was never any chance of Japan conquering Christendom, we do not see where God comes into the picture. Moreover, it looks as though the Christian God will come out of the struggle with little honour and many bruises. Non-Christian Russia has, through the war, gained millions of admirers, and the Chinese likewise; while at home there are more pronounced Atheists in this country than ever before existed. What if God, when he hears of himself being dragged into the war, loses his temper and reverts to his early methods of inflicting pestilence, a plague of boils, etc.? We ought to remember that he has already sent crowds of locusts to annoy our fighting men.

In Glasgow the church of St. George has been broken into and the collection boxes burgled. In the olden times God would have smitten the robbers with some terrible disease. Now any man may "cock his bonnet" at God Almighty and nothing happens—unless a plain, ordinary policeman takes God under his protection.

In Mexico there have been complaints that the hymns in the churches are "loud and noisy." But they always were. The people were told to "Make useful noise unto the Lord." God did not tell them to give him a dose of grand opera.

Sometimes truth comes out noisily and with offence; sometimes it creeps out and hits only one church out of fifty. The President of the Baptist Union told his audience the other day that: "Thirty years ago England was nominally a Christian country; it is so no longer. Christianity is in the minority." We wonder what other Christians think of truth being thrown about in this careless manner.

The Bishop of Birmingham says that the "legal essentials" of the marriage service are a "relatively small part of the service." They are, in fact, the *only* part that is of any legal importance. The rest of the service is just a performance—more or less pantomime.

The "Church Times," in pointing out the number of Brains Trusts springing up all over the country, does not mince matters when dealing with the original sample. It actually heads its criticism, "Brains and Boloney," a delightful description of the mixture of smart answer (rare) and flapdoodle (often) we get on Tuesday evenings. The "Church Times'" most serious complaint is that, listening to the half dozen or so of these superior people dealing with the carefully selected questions, among other things, there "is an increase of mental laziness." We have pointed out time after time that most, if not all, these questions could be answered "if only the inquirer bestirred himself to consult the appropriate book of reference," and we are glad to see so many other journals are now toeing the line with us. It certainly looks as if the people who religiously listen to the original Brains Trust every week are beginning to ignore the "brains" part, and only want to hear the "boloney."

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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SUGAR PLUMS

ON Whit Sunday, May 28, the annual meeting of the N.S.S. will be held in the Holborn Hall, Grays Inn Road, London, W.C. The proceedings will begin at 10-30 a.m., and a good rally of London members is expected. The provinces will, of course, not be unrepresented, but in the present conditions of travel and other circumstances, no large number from the provinces is to be expected. But this should have the effect of bringing all who can by any means manage to attend to do so. There will be two sessions, with an adjournment for lunch. This will be provided at a cost of 3s. Both provincial and London members who wish to join in the lunch must let the General Secretary know as early as possible.

In the evening there will be a public meeting addressed by well-known speakers, and we advise all who attend to be there in good time. Doors will be open at 6 o'clock; the chair will be taken by the President at 6-30 p.m.

We are pleased to learn that three impressions of Mr. F. J. Corina's sex-education book for young people, "We Are Sixteen," have been sold out. A new and improved edition printed on art paper has now been published at 6s. It may be obtained either from the Pioneer Press or direct from the publishers, Clegg and Son Limited, Bradford, Yorks. Postage 3d.

In the midst of the most bloodthirsty war in existence, with brutalities that would have been unbelievable a thousand or more years ago, it will be at least interesting to give a pen-point picture of the world without Christianity. The writer is not an ancient heathen or a modern Christian. It is from the pen of a distinguished Christian dating from the last century. His name was Canon Scott Holland. He says:—

"The Roman Empire far more nearly succeeded in giving unity of life, culture, government, and intercourse to the entire body of civilised men, European, Asiatic, and African, than we, in our wildest dreams, could ever imagine possible today. Ancient Rome got far nearer to realising the fusion of black and white races . . . than our Empire ever ventures to attempt. Her citizenship embraced with

perfect ease every variety of race, from barbaric Scotland to hot Africa. . . All fell under one policy, under one municipal system, and recognised each other on a legal equality of rights and duties. A Roman citizen might journey from Edinburgh to Babylon and never cease to find himself perfectly at home amid a circle of familiar scenes and usages and institutions; and the throne of the Caesars was open to Slav or Spaniard alike. . . A common unity for Christian Europe is infinitely less conceivable now, eighteen hundred years after Christ, than it was for pre-Christian Europe. It is Christian Europe which gives us the spectacle of race divided against race by implacable enmities. . . Racial differences grow more intense, and let us note it is Christianity itself which tends to sharpen them."

What would these Romans have said if they could return to see how we have developed under Christian control?

Was the man who said this a mere humorist or not?

"What is the responsibility of the Churches here? The responsibility of the Churches is this: the Churches guide, control, and direct the conscience of the community; they establish the moral standards which fix the ideals of the people; they direct affairs, not merely in the Senate and Council Chamber, but in the shops and factory, and in all the affairs of life. No interest, however powerful it may be, can long withstand the resolute united opposition of the Churches."

Well, it happens to come from no less a person than David Lloyd George. We found it in some old papers dated 1911. What a funny man he must have been at close quarters.

We were just looking for a few lines, not our own, to fill space. We had not to look far. They are from one who was at least respected by all decent individuals, John M. Robertson, giving his opinion on the superiority of the term "Atheism." Here it is:—

"The best argument for the use of the name Agnostic is simply that the word Atheist has been so long covered with all manner of ignorant calumny that it is expedient to use a new term which, though in some respects faulty, has a fair start, and will in time have a recognised meaning. The case, so stated, is reasonable; but there is the *per contra* that, whatever the motive with which the name is used, it is now tacked to half a dozen conflicting forms of doctrine, varying loosely between Theism and Pantheism. The name of Atheist escapes that drawback. Its unpopularity has saved it from half-hearted and half-minded patronage."

We are not surprised that Roman Catholic papers are displeased with the B.B.C. for broadcasting Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." The story was built upon the tortures inflicted on heretics by the Roman Church. The "Universe" is particularly angry and, from their point of view, justly so. For here was a lurid presentation of the Church in action given in circumstances that intensified the horror of the Christian-created Inquisition, with priests authorising the torture. The Catholic complaint is the more justified because, where our home Churches are concerned, the B.B.C. has officially declared that it will not permit criticisms of our established creeds because the more ignorant section would be shocked. Their ignorance must not be disturbed.

In a report of the Catholic Biblical Association, held recently, "it was announced that a committee had been formed to produce a commentary on the Bible. The need of this has long been felt by Catholics in this country." We agree that a commentary on the Bible is a very useful thing, and, in pointing out that one already exists, we heartily recommend "The Bible Handbook" (Pioneer Press, 2s. 6d.) as the best thing in commentaries, which will provide Catholics with their "long felt need" of some downright common-sense.

"I SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD"

(Concluded from page 184)

IN the absence of initiative from the Bench, however, one would have expected that Christian leaders would have agitated, in their own interests, for the removal of the oath and for the institution of some other, and non-Christian basis, for the daily torrent of lying that goes on in the courts—and elsewhere.

This constant advertisement of the inability of God even to guide the words of a witness along the path of truth does the Christian belief no good at all. Imagine the feeling of relief that a lying witness must experience when he finds that he has "got away with it" despite God's watchfulness; imagine the poor opinion he must form of God when he finds that his own desire to lie proves more powerful than God's help in telling the truth. Imagine the effect of discovering that ignoring the Judgment Book may favourably influence the judgment.

What chance of respect can a mere parson have when God himself, and his holy book, can be set at defiance? No sensible business man would tolerate such a deplorable advertisement of the uselessness of his goods.

But perhaps Christianity is in that parlous state when, like the proverbial drowning man, it will clutch at any straw that seems to promise it a public showing—even if it is only a showing-up. There seems to be little other reason for Christian support of the oath, so far as I can see, and I feel sure that the better type of Christian must be afraid and ashamed of the constant reflection it casts upon the creed.

Both the courts and the Churches, then, ought to have made some move towards abolition, but they have failed to do so, though such action would be in their true interests. Let us now examine a little more fully the case for reform from the Free-thought point of view.

Although the Freethinker has no disabilities in a technical sense in the matter of making legal declarations, the affirmation being a valid and legal substitute for the oath, there are, nevertheless, some difficulties which turn technical perfection into practical imperfection.

Perhaps the chief of these is the fact that, in order to affirm, a process something akin to the "contracting out" method has to be followed. The oath-taking witness is simply handed the Testament and told, "Repeat after me: I swear by Almighty God, etc." But to make an affirmation one has to reject the Testament, usually handed out by a policeman or a court official, and to state, "I wish to affirm."

This request usually causes a stiffening up of the court officials, a peering over spectacles at this uncommon species of witness, and a slight annoyance because of the hitch in the automatic process of dispensing justice. Attention is drawn down upon the witness rather than upon what he has to tell the Court; and only the more widely experienced habitués of the courts are able to observe such an event "without batting an eyelid." This description states the position conservatively. Sometimes more unpleasant sequences occur.

On one occasion, appearing as a witness before a Registrar, I made a request to affirm, and the Registrar smilingly looked up from the notes he was studying.

"You wish to affirm? Yes. Are you a Quaker?" he inquired.

He had, of course, no business to ask that question. He knew it—and he knew that I knew it when I replied, without answering his question: "I have a conscientious objection to taking an oath, and I wish to affirm." The smile disappeared from his face, and, as a frown replaced it, he turned to the body of the court and gave a short homily on the types of religious people who, not wishing to take oaths, were allowed to affirm, concluding by saying: ". . . and even people who have no religious belief at all may affirm." I am sorry to say that he was a Quaker himself, and I had expected something fairer at his hands than

this display of pique. But bigotry is deep-seated, even in the best of them.

Mr. Chapman Cohen relates a case in which, as a juryman, he asked to affirm, but was not allowed to do so. Following the refusal, he was about to leave the court when the Coroner ordered him to stay until he (the Coroner) released him. Naturally, Mr. Cohen knew his ground, and defying the improper order of the coroner, he left the court, brushing aside a policeman whom the Coroner ordered to detain him.

In the days of the Grand Juries I once saw a member cause considerable irritation to a well-known High Court Judge by insisting upon the affirmation, which caused some delay and dislocation in the elaborate business of swearing-in. No words were exchanged, but the Judge tapped on his desk in an annoying fashion with his pencil, and cast irritated glances at the ceremonial saboteur.

These instances, and many like them, illustrate what I mean when I speak of the "contracting out" element. Add to them the cases in which justice is but tardily administered to the man who dares to wear the label, "Different; probably Atheist" (usually in the lower courts, but not always), and it will be seen that penalties still attach to principles when seeking justice. Bear in mind also that there are now more Freethinkers with "something to lose" in this atmosphere of religious hypocrisy, and it will be appreciated that the search for justice might easily result in undeserved injustice.

I do not suggest that the atmosphere of prejudice exists in every court, or in the mind of every Judge or magistrate. Far from it. There must be many more people in the official circles of our courts who are themselves Freethinkers, or favourable to Freethought, than there were when Bradlaugh had to face Parliament with his Bill to make things a little more tolerable. But it does exist in many courts, and in many minds—and to a man with the burden of a legal action on his shoulders, it is difficult not to fear that the court he is to plead in may be such a one.

With the oath discredited as a means of impressing people with the seriousness of the occasion; with constant injury to the reputation of Christianity by its use; with affirmers definitely labouring under a handicap, what then is the obvious solution?

It is clearly the substitution of a purely civil declaration in all instances where an oath is at present used for civil purposes. This is no new idea, and to adopt it would be no new departure, for already the method exists in many spheres.

A doctor does not swear by Almighty God when he writes out a certificate; business men do not do so when they sign agreements; the citizen does not swear by Almighty God when he promises to pay his rates, or electricity bills, on entering an agreement with the Corporation; even the careful finance companies do not seek the help of God when drawing up their almost watertight declarations; and (other things being O.K.) you can even get an overdraft without Almighty God.

All these things involve honourable commitments—yet God is left out of account. Any building society would prefer a rent book, fully paid up, to the Bible, when making a mortgage advance to a borrower. The estate agent thinks more highly of the phrase, "I have a good job," than he would think of, "By Almighty God," when letting a house; and I am certain that a man's general character impresses me much more than his religious ideas when I am considering doing business with him—although there is an old saying that "Wesleyans are no worse for watching."

A simple declaration to the effect that, "I promise to speak the truth in the evidence I shall give, in justice to all concerned, and I am aware that perjury is a criminal offence," would not only be a cleaner and a more ethical form of declaration, but would also have a more steady effect on those to whom the seriousness of perjury really does not need pointing out.

To work for such a reform would be a task in which all decent-thinking Christians could join hands with Secularists without loss of prestige to their own beliefs. It is a task to which we might apply ourselves diligently—but not until the war is over, because controversial legislation (with the exception of the Education Bill to strengthen Christianity) is forbidden until peace returns.

F. J. CORINA.

A DANGEROUS SUGGESTION

IT is admitted that the Sunday school is rapidly losing ground in Wales, and "the guardians of the faith" in the various denominations are getting concerned about it. It ought to be explained to English readers that attendance at Sunday schools in Wales is not confined to children; on the contrary, some of the scholars are eighty years of age or over.

In a recent article in "Y Tyst" ("The Witness"), the official organ of the Welsh Congregationalists, the Rev. Idwal Jones, Rhydyfro, discusses the situation. He suggests that for those under twenty years of age a series of graduated lessons, based on the following syllabus, should be arranged and generally adopted:—

1. The Jewish background of Christianity—

(a) An outline of the principal periods in the history of the Jewish nation. (b) The evolution of the idea of God in the Old Testament. (c) The evolution of the idea of Man in the Old Testament. (d) The evolution of the idea of religion in the Old Testament.

2. The Greek background of Christianity—

(a) Greek Culture and Roman Politics. (b) The moral and religious crisis in the Greek world.

3. The Life of the Lord Jesus—

(a) The ordinary life of Palestine. (b) The preparatory years. (c) The Public Ministry. (d) Jesus Christ and the Jewish sects. (e) The Gospels and Criticism.

4. The Teaching of the Lord Jesus—

(a) About man. (b) About Society. (c) About God.

5. The Early Church—

Its first leaders. Paul and his letters. The theological controversies of the Early Church.

6. The Catholic Church—

An outline of its history. Its characteristics. Its saints. The Catholic Church in Wales.

7. Protestantism—

Its history. Characteristics. Leaders. Its relationship with Wales.

8. Nonconformity—

Its history. Characteristics. Its heroes. Welsh Nonconformity. History and principles of the Congregationalists.

9. The Great Religions of the World.

The Rev. Idwal Jones assumes that, having completed the course, the students would be in a position to undertake a detailed study of the Bible. But is it not just possible that, no matter how carefully they were shepherded, the scholars would know a little too much about religion and the Bible by then? One is inclined to think that the reverend gentleman is playing with fire, and that the suggested course is a very dangerous proposal. But perhaps he consoles himself with the reflection that there is not the slightest prospect of its being adopted, and that in the meantime he can afford to be considered a courageous innovator.

THOS. OWEN.

THE VENGEANCE OF MARY ANN

"DON'T pack the dress till the very last minute, and be sure not to crush it. I have some shopping to do. Meet me at Paddington by seven o'clock." Thus addressing her chambermaid, Mrs. Robinson-Jones, after a last look in the mirror, which reflected herself wearing a mauve gown of rich figured satin, and a huge hat adorned with sumptuous plumage, exchanged these splendours for plain travelling wear.

She had to take the train that evening in order to attend a marriage at eleven o'clock the next morning. Familiarity between her and the bride's mother, formed when they were companions at school, had long existed. Before and after acquiring the nuptial state, they had many a time figured as rival belles at places of week-end change, and of summer resort. The days of their rivalry were still far from ended, time having spared each of them a shapely figure likely to soften their matronly dignity for years to come.

The locality of the wedding was a gay inland watering place, with many wealthy guests and residents; and the ceremony would bring a throng of handsomely-dressed people, including mutual friends, from various parts of the country. An occasion so precious must be worthily used. Mrs. Robinson-Jones, whose taste and experience were as reliable as her opulent purse, procured a rich yet discreet toilet, sure to excite universal admiration when seen of her stately but still graceful form. Alas for the uncertainty of human previsions, a grain of sand has spoiled a fine project before to-day.

The disturbing atom in this case was Mary Ann, the chambermaid, under notice to leave in the morning. After the departure of her mistress, she squeezed herself into the splendid dress, pinned on the superb hat, and strutted before the glass. Then she placed these articles in the wardrobe and, taking a greasy print frock and a dirty crumpled cap, apparel discarded by her enemy the cook, she packed them carefully for delivery to Mrs. Robinson-Jones at Paddington; and, when locking the receptacles, muttered grimly: "Won't the missus shine to-morrow!"

On reaching her hotel at an advanced hour the same day, the fair traveller, a little tired by the journey, but filled with pleasant anticipations, immediately opened the trunk to remove the dress. A shortness of breath and a feeling of sickness followed the surprise occasioned by the ghastly substitution. But pride came to the rescue. She had her presence in the district concealed, alleging that she felt the return of a former indisposition which would prevent her leaving the house on the following day; and that if the other ladies invited to the ceremony became aware of her arrival and disappointment, it would be sure to give them pain.

Her window faced the garden of the church selected for the wedding, and next morning, from behind the curtain, she had glimpses of wavy feathers and shimmering gowns, as the guests in animated groups traversed the shady path from the highway to the doors of the sacred fane; and also returned the same way in a gay procession after the ceremony. The result of this furtive scrutiny was the melancholy consolation that the brilliance of the scene, though remarkable, would have been much enhanced by her intended contribution; and that, but for the perfidy of Mary Ann, she herself would have been the queen of all that goodly company.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

A SUFFERING GOD

The Dean of St. Paul's says that "God shares in the sufferings of men." Well, he knows more about gods than we do, but his remark reminds us of the tale of the boy whose father said, as a preliminary to a thrashing, "This hurts me more than it hurts you," and the boy replied, "Yes, Dad, but not in the same place."

THE DISTINCTION OF DUFF

IN every age of English literature there seem to be some writers who are so indefinable that they never get their deserts. Individual books of theirs get praise; but their general achievement is never satisfactorily assessed. They write books of many types, some of which are destined to live and others of which are forgotten almost immediately they are published.

Charles Duff strikes me as being one of the writers of our day who has thus been ignored by the powers that be in literature. He has never been noticed over-much by the fashionable pundits of the literary world, but his books (or some of them, at any rate) have acquired a wide circulation among those thoughtful readers who are not impressed by the orthodox critics. "A Handbook of Hanging," for instance, made an impression on the general public, but since it was an attack on the system of capital punishment on which our legal code appears to depend, it could not be accepted by the orthodox folk of all schools of thought. "This Human Nature," which is fortunately still available in the Thinker's Library, is an interesting view of the development of human personality through the ages. And it contains so many shrewd comments on the maleficent influence of religion on human development that it should be on the shelves of every Freethinker.

Duff's great metier, however, is Spain. He is editor of the "Spanish News-Letter" and he has long been one of the outstanding people in this country who have shown up the evil tendencies of the Franco regime in Spain. In a book called "Spain: A Key to Victory," published in 1941, he suggested a way in which the Spanish Peninsula might be brought to play its part in winning a democratic war—though that is a war which our rulers do not now seem disposed to fight.

Rumour has it that Duff is writing his autobiography. I hope that this is true. For he has played many parts. He has been a merchant seaman, a lecturer at London University, a liaison officer with the Italian forces in the last war, a lawyer, a Foreign Office official, a journalist, and pretty well everything else that an intelligent man with a flair for languages can be. The autobiography of such a person should be a really important and interesting book. It is certainly a book which Freethinkers would like to read.

I hope that what I have said will strike the readers of these columns as constituting a reason for studying the works of this interesting writer. There is much which he has written that is pure journalism, and that will not be read in the future when the immediate situation giving rise to it will have passed. But I feel sure that in his day and age Charles Duff is a figure meriting some attention, especially from those who are not impressed by majority verdicts as to what is and what is not important. Read, at any rate, "This Human Nature." It is a book that has real value, for it does not take for granted any of the ideas and taboos which the orthodox would impress upon us.

S. H.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORKING MAN

Father Gerard Rimmer has been addressing boys and their parents on "What the Church has done for the working-man." That seems a rather dangerous topic for a Catholic priest—providing he told the truth, which we very much doubt. It is hardly likely that the reverend father pointed out how the working-man's political movement has been poisoned by the Church, and how the trade union movement has had its activities curbed in certain useful directions, particularly by Father Rimmer's Church. But we must be fair, even to the Church. This much it has done for the working-man—in the darkest days of industrial depression before the war, and in the anxious period of the war, it has continued to promise him pie in the sky, and to provide masses for his loved ones—at the usual price.

TWO SONNETS TO FYTTON ROWLAND

(Aged three months; to be read when he grows up)

I.

The world's an evil place; you will be told:
They'll preach to you of sin and circumstance,
They'll say existence is an evil dance,
And curse man's endless, seething lust for gold.
Do not believe them; man's no sinful wretch.
The muddle which you see surrounding you
Does not derive its inspiration through
Man's saddened spirit, but from his long stretch.
Men do not evil for their sinful minds
But, since things changing rule their erring hearts,
They glean glimpses of joy in fits and starts,
And do much folly which no wisdom finds.
No scathing god rules this distracted earth,
Since man has means to conquer every dearth.

II.

Your mother and your father are not gods,
Immutable and whimsical and free.
They do not wish to find satiety
In ruling you with stinging canes and rods.
They are two human beings, friendly souls,
Who wish to give you every chance in life,
Saving you from sadness and from strife,
And helping you towards your destined goals.
Parsons and priests will tell you you are bound
By every motion of your supple mind
To destinies unfruitful and unkind,
Unless you listen to their sermons' sound.
No thought more foolish could be given you.
The world is yours, is to the best you're true.

JOHN ROWLAND.

National Secular Society
HOLBORN HALL, Grays Inn Road,
London, W.C.

A

**FREETHOUGHT
DEMONSTRATION**

WHIT-SUNDAY, MAY 28th, 1944

Chairman:

Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN

Speakers:

J. T. BRIGHTON,
L. EBURY,

J. CLAYTON,
F. J. CORINA,

R. H. ROSETTI.

Doors open 6 p.m.
ADMISSION FREE

Commence 6.30 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE

A CORRECTION.

SIR,—I do not propose to criticise Couchoud's "Creation of Christ" till I have read it; but in Mr. Cutner's exposition of the book (May 14) there are two glosses of his own which demand comment.

Mr. Cutner says that Irenaeus denied the Crucifixion. Many years ago I searched the extant text of Irenaeus to find this denial, but could not. It would be a thankless job to do this again, so I will content myself with observing that Eusebius ("Ecclesiastical History," v. 7) quotes a long passage from Irenaeus in which the latter refers explicitly to "Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate." This, of course, does not prove the Crucifixion, but it proves that Irenaeus did not deny it. It is quite true that he says Jesus lived till over fifty, basing it on John viii., 57. That, obviously, is not the same thing as denying the Crucifixion.

Secondly, Mr. Cutner refers to Mark's disparagement of the Apostles and asks: "Does this kind of treatment . . . prove that the Apostles were real people? Or just myths?" Obviously, it proves nothing either way. It just proves that Mark had a poor opinion of them, that's all!—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

LIES IN POLITICS

SIR,—Mr. Chapman Cohen, in his article "Our Spiritual Leaders," said "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." From this statement one gathers why politics is called a dirty business. And as all the politicians are in the business, it is assumed that the lies are made to hoodwink the customers, i.e. the public. A pretty fine state of affairs in the affairs of State! But the point to bear in mind is that "everyone expects it (the lie) in politics." Why should this be so? Is it possible that the public prefer deceit to probity? A remark by George Eliot seems to fit in here—"There is a terrible coercion in our deeds which may, first turn the honest man into a deceiver, and then reconcile him to the change; for this reason—that the second wrong presents itself to him in the guise of the only practicable right."—Yours, etc.,

S. GORDON HOGG.

INCREASING OUR CIRCULATION

SIR.—As an old reader of "The Freethinker" for upwards of 50 years allow me to congratulate you in maintaining such a high standard of excellence, not only for Freethinkers but for all who are really interested in religion. "The Freethinker" seems to improve weekly and deserves a bumper circulation. In its pages some 50 years ago was a notice printed how to increase its circulation, and here are three ways I remember quite well:—

(1) Ask your newsagent to display in his shop window weekly "The Freethinker."

(2) Order two or three extra copies (weekly) and guarantee the newsagent against all unsold copies.

(3) Leave a copy in the cafe, train, hotel or other suitable place.

At that period I lived at Braudon Colliery and the paper cost one penny. I made arrangements with my newsagent to take six extra copies weekly, and it was rarely I was called upon to pay for more than two copies (unsold). But things have changed very much since then. Yet if Freethinkers to-day can afford to take a few extra copies weekly to send to their friend and others interested it would help very much to break down the boycott which it has had to fight against from its first number. At present the shortage of paper is against my plan as mentioned, but when the war is ended and things become normal rules of 50 years ago can still be used with very marked effect.

There must be hundreds of Freethinkers who have old copies of "The Freethinker" in their houses. These can be used today.

Now that open air meetings have started, I appeal to all Freethinkers who have spare copies lying dormant to fold each copy neatly and tie with a piece of fine twine and see that they are delivered at meetings. This example I follow myself by sending Mr. Brighton a parcel of 25 or 30 every now and again. As he sells a good lot of pamphlets and books, he gives to every purchaser a copy of "The Freethinker." This is a move in the right direction and helps the cause of Freethought most wonderfully, and to all Freethinkers I say: "Go thou and do likewise."

With kind regards and best wishes,—Yours etc.,

JOSEPH CLOSE.

P.S.—In my 78th year and still going strong. Reading and writing without spectacles.—J.C.

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. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: "The History of Morals—(3) The Modern World."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m. Mr. C. McCALL: A Lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Various speakers.

Bristol Branch N.S.S. (Durdham Downs).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. G. THOMPSON and other speakers.

Chester-le-Street (Bridge End).—Saturday, May 20, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

Cornholme.—Thursday, May 25, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. Debate: "Life After Death." Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES.

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, May 19, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Herrington Burn.—Thursday, May 25, 7 p.m. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON: A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Messrs. T. W. BROWN and J. W. BARKER will lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Friday, May 19. Mr. C. McCALL: A Lecture. (Platt Fields): Sunday, 3 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Nelson (Chapel Street).—Wednesday, May 24, 7-15 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.

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