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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

God and Us

SOMEWHERE in the Bible is to be found the saying: "O that mine enemy would write a book." I am not taking the trouble to fix the page on which it appears because there is something interestingly human in the wish. Books have made an author many friends, but have also made him many enemies. An author may be met with growls of anger or songs of praise, and there is always a measure of danger in writing a book. Many a man has gone to prison for daring to write a book; others have gained fame. Besides, what a man says may be forgotten or forgiven. But what a man shall issue in black and white may give him endless trouble. There is indeed considerable wisdom, even though it is not free from a touch of malignancy, in "O that mine enemy would write a book!"

Consider the fact that the Christian Bible was theoretically written by God. He wrote the Bible, or inspired others to write it for him. Also, he produced his book so that men should know the right path from the wrong one and bring peace and happiness among his children. But, alas, "God's chillun" have spent a great deal of their time and energy in fighting each other to determine what God meant. If no other book ever gave so much happiness to mankind, it is also clear that no other book ever generated so much hatred. "How these Christians hate each other" was the comment of educated Romans on the behaviour of God's selected followers. And if it were possible to bring back to earth some of these cultured Romans, their first remark on a survey of the world would probably be: "They are still at it." It has often made us wonder why some crafty Christian did not plead that in their opinion the "Holy Bible" was really written by Satan as a means of outwitting his celestial other half. Satan left no books behind him, but on the confession of God's representatives on earth he has had more followers than his heavenly opposite number.

God under Revision

God has, according to his official representatives, written one book only. It is claimed by one section of the Christian world, known as the Roman Catholic Church, that God placed the interpretation of his book in its hands. He presented that Church with the copyright of his first and only effort in literature. That step makes an appeal to common sense, for the value of a book lies in its being understood, and with the modesty that belongs to Christian advocates, the Catholic Church has claimed the right of interpretation. But there are others, and the English Church also claims to be God's interpreter, and has prepared an approach to God by way of its interpretation of his first and only effort in literature. That Church produced, centuries ago, a "Book of Common Prayer." This was drawn up by Godly men (women were then not given any

place or power in the Church). But the version of what might be called "Modes of approach to God" has had to be revised from time to time. It has been re-edited—always under the guidance of God—which leads one to assume that God himself was never quite clear as to what he did mean when he wrote or inspired others to write his solitary work. These changes and re-interpretations would seem to indicate that either God was of a flighty character, or that he simply wished to move with the times.

We now read there is to be another revision of this Book of Common Prayer. The revision will, as usual, be under the supervision of God himself. It is not for us to lay down any authoritative rules for understanding God's book, but we do, very humbly, offer one or two suggestions for the revisers. For instance, we think that the morning prayers which call upon the sun and moon, showers and dew, wind, fire and heat, and frost, etc., to praise the Lord, might be dispensed with. They seem a little out of date, and not a little risky in these days when so many are inclined to apply the same test of common sense to God's book that they would apply to just an ordinary author. And if the call to fishes and floods, whales and fowls, beasts and cattle, etc., to praise the Lord are retained, it might be given a more appropriate heading. We suggest "God at the Zoo" would meet the situation.

The prayers that our rulers may be endowed with wisdom and justice might also well be abolished: for a most casual study of the situation proves that God does not pay the slightest attention to that petition. We know that not more than twelve Members of Parliament ever cheer the poor preacher by their presence, and the Church runs risks of being found out. We are not rude enough to believe, as did Ingersoll concerning the American Congress, that when the recording angel looks at the members he registers the noise that rises to heaven as prayers for the people, but it may be the case with the English Parliament just the same.

Some Suggestions to Parsons

There are some things in the English Prayer Book that need very careful editing. For example, there are two prayers for the weather. In the first, God is asked to send us *moderate* rain. The second carries stronger suggestions. It opens by reminding God that he once drowned the world in a fit of bad temper, and so, "although we deserve a plague of rain and waters," God is asked to send only such rain as may bring us "the fruits of the earth." Could anything be more sarcastically put? It is too much for God to be told that, while we require rain, we wish him not to lose his temper and behave as he "didst once drown all the world except eight persons," or emphasise that we want "moderate" rain. Even gods have their feelings. It would be more manly, as we have often suggested, if instead of going on our knees we stood up and announced that unless a *moderate* amount of rain is given, all the places in which

God is worshipped will be closed till such time as there is a reasonable quantity of moisture supplied. It might be true that we should have to endure hardships without God, but it is certain that without worshippers all the gods would soon disappear. In these matters God and "Us" have mutual responsibilities and reap mutual profits. Each should pull their weight.

With some parts of the Prayer Book, perhaps mere substitutions might serve. For example, "Grant us, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood." Now that would be—if God's worshippers ever thought while they prayed—quite revolting to decent-minded men and women. We know that the official reply would be that this was only figurative language. But even to the Christian the tragedy upon which this phase of Christianity is based is not, where the Churches are concerned, a symbolic performance. It was a very real thing; and even if it were treated as mere symbolism it is of such a beastly character that it should be dispensed with. There is a further—Christian—reason for revision of the book. It may give the whole religious game away. For this practice of god-eating is a common one among savages—primitive ones. And even though it may be practised by "civilised" Christians, it is running risks to indicate where the Christian doctrine of god-eating came from. Indeed, the whole of this portion of the Communion services might well be left out. It stinks too much of blood and, as we have said, provides believers with a clear track to cannibalistic origins.

There are quite a number of the parts of the Prayer Book which would, if deleted, cover the tracks of Christianity. In the marriage ceremony we have the statement that one of the reasons for God ordaining marriage was "to avoid fornication" and to gratify the passions of those who "have not the gift of continency." This is about the lowest level on which one can place marriage, and the crowning insult is offered by putting the celibate monk on a higher level than the decent married citizen.

Attached to this is what is called the "churching" of women after childbirth. The origin of this is indicated when one remembers that until we near the end of the sixteenth century it was not the "churching" but the "cleansing" of woman after childbirth. And that does tell us something. It tells us that it was not for the benefit of the woman that the process of cleansing took place, but for the protection of the man. It was believed that the birth involved some of the tribal spirits, and therefore a man could not safely be associated with his wife until the influence of this ghostly creator had been wiped out. But the word "cleansing" became offensive to more civilised ears and brains. Hence the modern camouflage. So in the interests of the Church of England we suggest that this reading be discarded altogether and so cease to help towards a misunderstanding of Christianity. A religion that is understood is a religion that is about to die.

Another hint of how to protect Christianity from modern understanding. When visiting the sick the parson is told he must say to the sick man:—

Dearly beloved, know this: Whatever your sickness is, know you certainly that it is God's visitation. . . . This sickness is sent unto you for the example of others, and that your faith may be found in the day of the Lord.

Now that is very plain, too plain, damnably plain, idiotically plain. It says exactly what it means, and says it in a way that cannot be misunderstood. Your ailments from toothache to scarlet fever, from a mere stomach-ache to inflammation of the brain, whatever it is, are sent by God, and if you bear it patiently you may be cured. When a slate falls on your head, thank God for his not using an elephant—all shall "lead unto everlasting life." The Government is at present busy, or pretending to be busy, in providing the people with a really adequate medical service for every man, woman and child. How far expectations will be realised remains to be seen. Many of the doctors with large and expensive practices are very doubtful if such a scheme would succeed. The doctors with less wealthy practices are a little more sanguine of its success; the intelligent poor hope for the best, while masses of people "upper" and "lower," rich and poor, well-schooled or badly-schooled, will prefer to carry a potato in their pocket to cure rheumatism, or swallow bottles of coloured and flavoured water to keep them healthy, or appeal to the saints for help. But we have done what we can to guide the Commission that will be appointed to revise the Prayer Book.

We have space for but one other suggestion. At the opening of the section of the Prayer Book headed "A Communion" (that term stands for a denunciation, with a threat of punishment, in this case by God, for sins committed) there are ten things that are, or should be, cursed at least once a year and all on a string. The cursing is not nearly so wide in its sweep, or so minute in its instruction of detailing the many ways in which the unfaithful will be punished, but it is, in its way, quite a good "cussing" ceremony, and when Christians can "cuss" their enemies in this thoroughgoing manner, it does, as all may see for themselves, fill the true Christian with a sense of satisfaction that nothing else can equal. But for all that, this cussing chapter might be cast aside along with the other things mentioned. For as they stand they are not merely offensive to those who have already outgrown Christianity, they are likely to arouse suspicion or disgust, or, more deadly than either, whatever sense of humour one may possess. Above all, every time God's adventure into authorship is revised, it leaves the track to Christian origins less open and arouses less dissatisfaction. The Roman Church does what it can to prevent catastrophe by denying its followers the right to read any book that is likely to lead to the truth concerning Christianity. And after all, the only way to keep people Christian is to keep them ignorant of Christian origins.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A SPANIARD'S SURVEY OF SPAIN

SENOR SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA'S "Spain" (Cape, 1942, 492 pp.; 25s.) is an invaluable study of the fortunes and misfortunes of the peoples inhabiting the Iberian Peninsula. The topography and history of Spain, its discovery and colonising of the New World; the rise and ephemeral existence of its western empire and its speedy decline as the premier European Power, Madariaga clearly outlines. Perhaps he unduly extenuates the colonial crimes of his countrymen which shocked the conscience of Las Casas. His Philip II. is certainly not the monster of Motley, but is more in keeping with that of Dr. H. C. Lea, who contends that Philip's enormities were more the product of religious fanaticism than of innate depravity and, that when Spain's ruler displayed any inclination towards mercy to the heretics, his father confessor promptly warned him that

even kings who swerved from strict Catholic orthodoxy risked the danger of eternal suffering.

The long preceding causes of the tragic Civil War are passed in review, while the conflict itself and the leading actors in it are critically surveyed. In recording the follies and futilities of the Republican groups during the war, our author was aware that he was treading on dangerous ground. He himself, however, is an earnest reformer who is fully alive to the clerical danger; the autocratic methods of the Army, and is as firmly convinced as Ferrero, the author of "The Principles of Power," of the absolute necessity of maintaining a truly democratic form of Government if a stable system of administration is to be established in a country such as Spain. Also, Madariaga reminds us that the leading Republicans were his "old acquaintances or friends of a lifetime. It was in these men I—like every other Liberal or Socialist Spaniard—had put my trust. This may also explain why I have been led to concentrate on their doings rather than on those of the other side who, despite their temporary success, are of no permanent importance."

In Spain, the black army has played many parts, mostly sinister. Still, in past centuries the Church has possessed many eminent men. But in recent generations the clergy, and especially the hierarchy have invariably proved sullenly obscurantist. And the religious question in Spain is excessively complex. Passionate and emotional to a degree as they are; inflexibly individualistic in feeling; even their anti-clericalism and the various political panaceas of Spain's insurgent sons assume a religious aspect.

The deplorable state of education in the Peninsula was perpetuated and encouraged by clerical intrigue. As our historian phrases it: "The story of Eve and the apple—the fruit, be it remembered, of the tree of knowledge—is a marvellous basis for a crusade against education, and in a country in which husbands do not trifle with feminine slips, the Church is bound to find many an ally—avowed and unavowed—in its efforts to keep Eve away from apples and serpents. There is thus a plausible origin to the obscurantist tendency of the Spanish Church. It comes from Spanish pessimism. Let us keep the children out of mischief. The less they know the less they will want to have, the less harm they will want to do."

The Church strove to strengthen its power by placating the opulent classes, whose legacies and other gifts maintained Catholic institutions. Then, through pressure on political circles, the clericals tried to stifle all suggested improvements in education. So recently as 1923 a leading Spanish educationist stated that one-half of his country's children received no instruction whatever, while 25 per cent. were being educated by the State and the remainder were in the clutches of the priests. But although the Catholic creed is taught in the State schools, intolerance is not encouraged, whereas, writes Madariaga, "the Church educates with a *tendency*, and gives all its teachings a pronounced bias and an intolerant turn. Hence the persistence of the rift in the nation, a state of mutual intolerance born of the intolerance of the Church, since one cannot be tolerant towards intolerance."

Clerical abuses of the most flagrant character led to terrible reprisals in Barcelona in 1909. Despite the religiosity so widespread, anti-clerical activities are always popular. The Ubao scandal "in which a clerical family was proved to have conspired to lock up a young woman in a convent under cover of a non-existent religious vocation in order to secure her money, produced a political sensation not yet forgotten."

The Crown favoured clericalism as a support to the tottering throne, and Alfonso XIII. had been trained by preceptors whose outlook on modern life was that of the Dark Ages. Agricultural advances alone were fostered by clerical wealth, but her activities in other cultural fields were shameful. The Church deliberately encourages superstition and she desires the suppression of all

independent thought and defames and ostracises those intellectuals who dare to depart from orthodoxy to this very hour.

During the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera the Government yielded to clerical clamour concerning the schools. The priests detested the non-Catholic text-books used in State institutions. So, notes Madariaga, "the Government satisfied the dearest wish of the clerical reactionaries, i.e. the enforcing of a uniform text-book for the nation. The true aim of this measure was to secure a safe clerical point of view in controversial teachings such as history and philosophy. . . . The teaching profession was put under the strictest pressure to bow before the Church, to go to Mass, whether they believed or not, and in every way to submit to clerical demands. The chief inspector of schools in Granada was deprived of his post for not being present at the official entrance of the Cardinal Archbishop into his diocese." Such outrageous proceedings occasioned a revolt of the teaching profession. University professors resigned their chairs; students of both sexes went on strike and several seats of learning were closed. Yet, the Dictator was forced to retreat; his decree was withdrawn and the closed Universities reopened. Still, this disgraceful system of sacerdotal despotism is the beau ideal of many benighted survivals in our own island.

The abdication of Alfonso and the emergence of the Republic, so soon to succumb to a military uprising which led to the present Dictatorship, are events subjected to careful review by Madariaga. With the termination of civil strife, both contestants were war weary and, despite the terrible legacy of hate and counter-hate, most Spaniards welcomed peace.

Franco, however, failed ignominiously as a statesman, and his punitive policy served to perpetuate the bitter animosities which an enlightened ruler would have striven to heal.

Republican leaders who had escaped to Paris were surrendered to Franco by the Vichy authorities. "Many of them," states Madariaga, "lost their lives after trial by court-martial which, in the circumstances, organised by officers of the rebellious army, must strike all fair minds as monstrous. No doubt there were many Revolutionists with a heavy score. . . . Yet there is something revolting in the spectacle of military officers, who, after all, whatever their reasons, had risen in rebellion against the State, sentencing people to death for rebellion."

Franco's neutrality in the present war was decidedly doubtful. In England's darkest hour and at Hitler's invasion of Russia, he did not hesitate to proclaim his sympathy with the Nazis. Franco condemned American intervention and boldly asserted that the Allies had already lost the war and affirmed Spain's adherence to the German Army engaged in a battle "which Europe and Christianity had so long awaited."

But surprises were in store, and in Madariaga's words: "Towards the end of the year several Spanish and Portuguese ships were torpedoed in mysterious circumstances off the south-eastern coast of Spain. This led to the suspicion that the Axis Powers were planning an attack on Gibraltar or North Africa through Spain. The year, however, came to an end and nothing had happened. From a still neutral Spain, General Franco silently watched the German Army, including his Blue Division, freeze to death on the snowy plains of Russia, the Japanese Air Force blast to the ground the monuments of 'Hispanidad' respected by centuries and the North Americans in Manila, and the whole of the American continent gradually rise against his German and Japanese allies, while Senor Serrano Suner's [Franco's Deputy] model, the Duce, fell into the most tragic impotence that history has ever witnessed."

Still, let us trust that when peace is at last established, the victors will cordially co-operate with Spain's more progressive sons in the task of restoring the Iberian Peninsula to something approaching its earlier intellectual and social eminence.

T. F. PALMER.

THE DEVIL'S CHAPLAIN (1784-1844)

I.

ONE HUNDRED years ago—that is, on June 5, 1844—died one of the most remarkable personalities in the Freethought movement of the 19th century. A B.A. of Cambridge, a fully qualified surgeon, an ordained Church of England clergyman, and withal a brilliant orator and wit, Robert Taylor seems to have had a combination of talent rarely, if at all, found in any other Freethinker; and I might add, his influence was far greater than he is generally given credit for.

Born in Edmonton of a well-to-do industrial family, young Robert very early showed astonishing gifts of memory; and after a successful schooling, was eventually apprenticed to Samuel Partridge, then the house surgeon of a general hospital near Birmingham. In addition, he kept up his classical studies with a private tutor—thus accounting for his exceptional knowledge of many languages. Unfortunately, he also “got” religion, much to the disappointment of Partridge—who, by the way, turned out the best friend Taylor ever had. “My dear poet,” he implored his pupil, almost with tears in his eyes, “whatever you do, for God’s sake, never give your mind to religion.” It was, declared Taylor later in life, “the best advice that was ever given to man; but the bite had been received, and the wholesome advice came too late to cure it.” He received the Sacrament when he came of age; and though he had good cause to regret the step, it was perhaps well for Freethought that he eventually did so. He knew Christianity from the inside.

In the meantime, he came to London and attended Guy’s and Thomas’s hospitals, working hard for two years, and eventually, in 1807, receiving his degree of M.R.C.S. as well as high encomiums from the famous surgeon, Sir Astley Cooper, who took a special interest in his career.

But religion had taken a very strong hold, and he decided to abandon medicine and become, if possible, a minister of the Established Church. Studying hard in Cambridge, he “scored a most decided triumph over all his competitors,” he tells us in his unfinished autobiography, “The Life and Opinions of Talisphron”; and it is all the more to his credit that he was bracketed with the son of Sir William Herschel—later, the famous astronomer, Sir John Herschel.

Robert Taylor was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Chichester on March 14, 1813, and read the prayers at St. Dunstan’s, Fleet Street, choosing as the text for his first sermon, 2 Cor. v. 20: “Be ye reconciled to God.” The Sunday following, the vicar gave him the whole duty at Edmonton Church, which was crowded with his old schoolfellows and friends, and the bells were rung “in honour of his family’s happiness.” They all extolled his “discourse and delivery and filled his mother’s heart as full of joy as it could hold.”

It was while he was acting as curate to the Rev. R. Lloyd at Midhurst, in Sussex, that he was finally ordained priest by the Bishop of Chichester, who thought very highly of his exceptional abilities and singled him out for special duties. These brought him in contact with the “gentry” in the district, and for over four years he enjoyed a well-deserved popularity.

His happiness, however, then was soon ended. A Mr. Ayling, greatly struck with Taylor’s scholarship and recognising certain omissions in his reading, gave him the use of his own library—and Taylor’s “religion” came in for a bad time. Apart from discussions with Ayling, the work of Gibbon and Thomas Paine shattered his belief in Christianity, and he decided to inform his family that he had become a Deist—which, in those days, and with a very religious family, was something quite as bad as Atheism—or worse. To cut a long story short, Taylor came in for a very bad time, for his family disowned him and he lost all his friends, including Mr. Ayling. But in the end, feeling that like Paine himself, he had not given up God, he felt it his

duty to “recant.” He was obliged, however, to leave Midhurst; he got rid of his “sceptical” books, he joined another church in Newington, he prayed a great deal—all to no purpose. At 35 years of age he realised he was as big an “unbeliever” as ever. He still preached—even in Edmonton, but a pamphlet written by his former vicar, Lloyd, against him, finally led him to leave London.

Later, he accepted a curacy in Birmingham, became notorious for sermons in which “infidelity” was rampant, and drew large crowds who came to laugh; as he himself noted; “Nobody was disappointed. The frightful looks of those who can never laugh at anything only hindered the laughter of better disposed hearers from becoming obstreperous.” The end came when he delivered a sermon on “Jonah in the Whale’s Belly,” in which he allowed all his irony and cutting satire to dwell upon his theme. That was the last straw—and his family, horror-stricken at his “blasphemy,” shipped him over to the Isle of Man.

Here he found it impossible to earn a living, and in 1821 returned to England. He then managed to get to Dublin, tried preaching again, was forbidden by the Archbishop, and set to work to publish some tracts under the general title of “The Clerical Review.” But though he was encouraged a little by the better educated in the city, he eventually had to leave and came to London again in 1824.

It will surprise some readers that he then formed the “Christian Evidence Society”—nothing to do, of course, with the undistinguished society of that name that one sometimes hears about these days. Taylor’s object was to show that there was no evidence whatever for Christianity, and he began his campaign at the Globe Tavern in Fleet Street. He delivered 95 orations, and the society then removed to Salter’s Hall in Cannon Street. Here 38 discourses were given, and if the curious reader would like to study them, he will find them (reprinted later) in Richard Carlile’s “Lion.”

Taylor’s scathing satire on current beliefs was too much for the pious, and he was charged with blasphemy in 1827. From the verbatim account of the trial published in 1828 by Carlile, one can see that the authorities were quite alive to the fact that the prisoner was not just a common “illiterate” blasphemer, but an extremely able scholar, and therefore, on that account, all the more dangerous.

The trial took place at the Guildhall Court of King’s Bench before Lord Chief Justice Tenterden; and it may as well be said here that, as far as possible, the Judge behaved like a gentleman—quite unlike Justice North, who over 50 years later tried G. W. Foote. Lord Tenterden was not happy at the trial, and not only refused to sentence the prisoner but also refused to try Taylor the second time he was charged. It was Justice Bailey who passed sentence.

I gave an account of this trial some years ago in these pages, so that I need not go over the ground again. In the end, the prisoner was found guilty and sentenced on February 7, 1828, to give recognisance for his good behaviour in a sum of £1,000 and one year in Oakham Gaol. Reading the account of the proceedings these days, one can only marvel at the ignorance and intolerance shown.

His detention was not very rigorous, as he was allowed to read and write; and he commenced straight away, and with the help of Richard Carlile, to reply to a particularly virulent pamphlet against him by that good Christian, the Rev. J. Pye Smith. Taylor had prepared a leaflet which he called a “Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society,” and Pye Smith devoted many pages in an attempt to answer the charges therein against the authenticity of the Christian religion which were compressed in a few prepositions in the manifesto. Taylor’s rejoinder is called the “Syntagma” and is a fine vindication. I will deal with it more fully in a later article.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Executive's Annual Report

THIS is the fifth annual report of your Executive that has been rendered under war conditions. Once again we express the hope that when we again meet the war of brute force will have given place to that larger warfare which counts successes in terms of the realisation of human brotherhood and the growing betterment of life.

In spite of a world dislocating war it is good to be able to report that the increase of members of the N.S.S. has continued. Twice the number have been enrolled compared with last year. It is also gratifying to state that many of these recruits come from the Armed Forces. It is to be hoped that they will show as members of the N.S.S. the persistence and courage they have displayed on the battlefield. Income is also on the upward grade. On the literary side of our movement, represented by the Pioneer Press, the demand for literature shows a marked increase, and would have been doubled or trebled but for the paper shortage.

New branches have been formed at Jarrow, Bristol and Keighley. There should be many more in the coming year. A score of new branches might be formed in Lancashire and Yorkshire alone.

The difficulties in the way of organised propaganda in both halls and in the open air should make all keenly appreciative of the work done in trying circumstances. Taking our farthest branch from home, it may be noted that Glasgow—which has had a Freethought organisation since the first quarter of the last century—reports good progress in many directions. The lectures in the Cosmo Cinema have been very successful, and have very notably increased interest in the movement. The increase in our literature sales have been marked, and it is unfortunate that the paper shortage has impelled a certain amount of "rationing." Our influence in that city grows and should keep on growing. In Edinburgh the society is indebted to Mr. F. Smithies for his work, in spite of ill-health and often in defiance of the weather. In the North of England Mr. Brighton continues to carry on his work in the open air, in halls and in the press. He appears to have lured many clergymen into set debates. His activities cover a wide field, and the results are good. Other branches in the north have had their work curtailed by war conditions, but this will be remedied with the return of peace.

In Bradford there has been kept up a very vigorous propaganda in the open air, in the press and in halls, with marked consequences. Mr. Corina has been working hard in this area, and your President, by request, paid the city a visit to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his first visit there. The meeting was a memorable one, but it will not be repeated.

The Blackburn Branch is very active and is making good progress. Mr. Clayton continues his roving commission in Lancashire under the direction of the Executive. In Manchester the branch, among the oldest in the history of the N.S.S., has for some time been quiescent, mainly owing to the war, but has now reorganised itself and anticipates an advance. There is no reason why this hope should not be realised. There are plenty of Freethinkers in the city, and a large proportion of them would be quite willing to help in some way the Cause. The branch should make it its business to get into friendly contact with these men and women. The result, we are sure, would be gratifying if not completely satisfying. A word of approval and appreciation is due to Mr. T. M. Mosley who, in Nottingham, is carrying on a lone but successful series of open-air meetings. There should be an active branch in that city. Birmingham is also going through a revival. Here again we have a very old centre of Freethought activities, and there is a

large number of Freethinkers who have not yet been brought into close connection with the local society. A plan for utilising their sympathies should be formed and applied for use when the war comes to an end. The Executive will give what help it can.

In London special mention should be made of the work of Mr. Ebury who, under the auspices of the North London Branch, has kept the flag flying in the open air right through the winter, and with excellent results. But of greater significance than even Mr. Ebury's winter and summer work is that men and women should have gathered in wintry weather to listen to Freethought lectures. A very high compliment that to the speaker. The West London Branch has also carried on successful meetings in Hyde Park and in halls, with good results. Other London branches have kept the ball rolling, and to-day there is a greater certainty of producing results than there has ever yet been.

A special word of acknowledgement is due to Mr. G. Thompson and Mr. J. V. Shortt for services rendered in Bristol and Bath. The inhabitants of both Bath and Bristol were familiar with German bombs, but they were not expecting the bombs of these two "Liverpudlians," who, dragged away from their home town, seized the opportunity of making war in the two cities named. Your Executive continues the policy of sending free literature to the Forces at home and abroad. But the literature is sent only on demand. This ensures that the literature falls only into the hands of those who are ready to read and consider. Often this leads to discussions, and one result of this is that many who wrote for literature have become regular subscribing readers of "The Freethinker" and have also joined the Society. Another result has been that a great many men, and some women, have applied for alteration of their registration as belonging to some religious body to write themselves down as "Atheist," "Freethinker," "Rationalist," or just "None." This is the legal right of every man and woman serving in the Armed Forces. These changes offer parson-jarring consequences. The strange thing is that the news never reaches the B.B.C. padres—at least, they never mention them.

Among the deaths of the year we have to record that of W. Blaney, of Manchester, a very sturdy Freethinker, familiar to those who visited Manchester for lecturing purposes and appreciated by loyal Freethinkers. A son of Mr. E. T. Bryant, member of the Executive and an ardent worker in the Cause. Mr. Robert Johnson (aged 80) and John Barrowman, also of Glasgow, both associated with the Glasgow Branch for many years. Chester-le-Street (Durham) registers the death of T. W. Birtley, for fifty years a staunch servant of the Freethought cause. No more honest or more earnest Freethinker ever lived. To these must be added Charles Baker (78), of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. His connection with our cause was a lengthy one, and those who were most familiar with him fully appreciated his sturdy intellectual independence.

To the relatives, and of others not mentioned, we tender our sincere sympathy. We are living in times when death is abnormally active in our midst, when millions of men face each other seeking to restore some degree of right by the method of mutual slaughter. But this in no wise weakens the pangs that accompany the snapping of bonds which, however anticipated, still leaves a gap in our lives. More than most fighting causes we have reason to place a high value on men and women who fight for a cause that can bring no material gain or public praise. The speaker, the writer, receives from his public—whether large or small—some immediate recognition of his labours. But beyond these there lies an army of men and women who work steadily for a cause which they believe is for the benefit of mankind. They are indeed the salt of the earth, and we shall, if we are wise, pay tribute to their memory by

ACID DROPS

"PEACE NEWS" recently broadcast the news that German and Allied troops, less than 400 yards apart, joined in the Easter services. Lieutenant Garigliano, for the Allies, prayed for the Germans, and Captain Oscar Reliboch returned the service for the two forces. And then what happened? Oh, they just recommenced slaughtering each other as rapidly as ever. We think there is a moral to this somewhere—perhaps it is that man cannot be religious without making a jackass of himself.

The B.B.C. Director of Religious Broadcasting, the Rev. W. Welch, has announced that there are 50 per cent. of the listeners in favour of the broadcasting of religion. If the B.B.C. claims that number, we may be certain that the real number is only about 25 per cent. For the B.B.C. is not famous for its truthfulness in any direction, and where religion is concerned, as we have proven out of its own mouth, its favourite saint is the famous New Testament character who was struck dead for telling a lie. That practice was not retained, because if every Christian preacher or writer who told a lie were dealt with similarly, the Christian Church would have been decimated. In regard to lying for the glory of God, the B.B.C. may claim that it is really in line with the historic Christian tradition.

Of course, a sense of common fairness would, where there were obviously two sides to a case, give both sides a chance, even though in numbers one side was far ahead of the other. But the B.B.C. really does reach truth, even though it be a shameful one, when it says deliberately and boastfully that it will permit no adverse criticism of Christianity. And once again we say that this method of deliberately lying to the public should be denounced and boycotted by prominent men and women until a policy of fair play was adopted. We know, of course, that a great number of mediocrities would never have been heard of by the public but for the B.B.C., but the better ones should remember that by joining the B.B.C. gang they are co-operating in misleading the general public. They are deliberately conniving in misleading the public. That is the plain and ugly truth that stands out from a mass of broadcast untruths.

Scotland seems to be, religiously, in a very bad state. The "Sawbath" appears to be breaking down rapidly, and at one of the Church Assemblies that are now in full spate, Principal David Cairn lamented the decay of the "Sawbath," which he called the biggest asset the Church possessed. He ended his melancholy song by saying that if the "Lord's Day passed away it was doubtful if the Church would survive." Let us therefore hope that Sabbatarianism will pass away with increased rapidity, for no greater blight ever fell upon a people than British Sabbatarianism.

It was with some degree of unwarranted superiority that General Smuts in a recent address said that "Russia has still to make her great contribution to human history." Essentially, Russia has already given its principal contribution, and it is left for other countries, particularly South Africa with its unrepresented coloured population, to make their contribution. That lesson, as we have insisted since the Russian revolution occurred, is that we can, if we will, radically alter the social conditions in a single generation. No other country in the modern world has yet broken loose from the practice of taking generations to do what Russia has done rapidly and effectively. We continue to talk about "long planning," which in Russia would mean radical and fundamental changes towards the realisation of a new social structure and outlook, but with us means a mere nibbling at a problem, and so retarding a change until the change itself is out of date before it is in operation. We talk about a change so much that people lose interest in its realisation.

A stained glass window is to be installed in the Chapel of Our Lady, at Norfolk, Virginia, U.S.A., with the Virgin holding a warship instead of the child Christ. So says the "Manchester Evening News." We are not surprised at this dash of realism. After all, there are not many Christians, in Virginia or anywhere

else, who, if they were in trouble, would not prefer a good warship to guard them than a picture of a woman nursing a baby. But one is not used to finding anything quite so related to truth as this picture of the Virgin Mary brandishing a warship. The next step will be to depict Jesus throwing a good-sized bomb at Satan. There seems room for endless development here.

It looks as though there is a genuinely holy row taking place between what we might call the High Church party in the Church of England and the Salvation Army. It appears that the much-despised ladies and gentlemen with tambourines and red jerseys are going to commemorate "the religious conversion" of the late General Booth a hundred years ago, in St. Paul's Cathedral, on June 2. Now the Salvation Army "deny the necessity of all Sacraments," and this "false conception of the Christian religion" must make it impossible for London Churchmen to reconcile "the sacrifice of their cathedral to ecclesiastical Quislingism." This last word is surely delightful, and is at its happiest when referring to such out-and-out believers as the Salvation Army. In fact, as the "Church Times" lays it down once and for all: "There can be no question of reunion between them and the Church." That's pretty straight for Dean Matthews.

At a London police court recently a young woman came before the magistrate and was offered the choice of going to prison or going to a Roman Catholic convent. She refused to go to a convent, and apparently no other kind of home was offered. She was sentenced to four months' imprisonment. We have only a newspaper report on which to go, but, on the face of it, she did not object to going to some other "home," but she had a very strong objection to going into a Roman Catholic institution. The girl evidently had some reason for preferring prison to a convent. Could not some other place of detention be found for her? It looks as though some inquiry should be made.

"Religion," says Dr. Abel Jones, "should unite us"—that is, all bodies of Christians. Well, it may *drive* them together for a time, particularly when it is a matter of hanging together in order to avoid being hung separately. But there never was a time when Christians did not fight like wild cats, and there never will be. Christians were fighting in New Testament times, and they have been at it ever since. And when the Churches do amalgamate for a common purpose the wise citizens begin to look round to see what next piece of rascality the Churches are planning.

The Bishop of Ripon (Dr. G. C. L. Lunt), discussing the gulf between the Forces and the Churches, writes in his "Diocesan Gazette": "... but because the Church has lost touch with the world they now fail to see its value, apart from the traditional custom of baptism, marriage and burial. The brotherhood which men failed to find in the Church they are finding on the battlefield. After the (last) war it was left to such secular organisations as the British Legion to try to keep alive the sense of fellowship. There is a grave risk of the opportunity being lost by the Church a second time." Well, even a Bishop can get somewhere near the truth when he really tries.

At Colchester recently a speaker at a youth gathering graciously said he had no objection to lipstick and powder if artistically used. But nobody asked him!

Miracles to-day are evidently regarded as a monopoly by Roman Catholics for Roman Catholics, and the Catholics appear to be disturbed by the entry of an Anglican preacher into the field of the miraculous. So the vision of Jesus in the sky at Ipswich, seen by an Anglican clergyman, is being resented as a kind of trespassing on Catholic grounds. We do not agree with this. Probably the vicar was anxious to prove that when it came to foolishness, or even downright lying, the English Church can lie as heartily as the monks of old and the Catholic priests of to-day.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. CULLERT.—Thanks for cuttings, useful even when not immediately used.

Will those of our readers who are kind enough to send us cuttings add to our indebtedness by noting the date and name of the paper from which the cutting is taken? Often they are not used at once, and the absence of a date often makes a good passage unusable.

M. BARNARD.—Very pleased to hear from you. Thanks for reference.

J. A. N.—We are feeling quite well. It was under pressure from friends that we gave up the afternoon session of the Conference, and we really did feel the better for the break before the evening meeting. The Conference deserves congratulation on finding so worthy a substitute for the chair as Mr. Griffiths. The reports we heard were very complimentary.

THE BENEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: F. A. Hornibrook, £1 7s.; A. R. Williams, 3s.; North London Branch, N.S.S. 10s.; A. Rogerson, £1; S. J. Barker, £1 6s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

THE conditions under which "The Freethinker" is now being printed prevents our dealing this week with the freeing of Rome. The Editor will deal with that subject next week.

We were very pleased to hear the Prime Minister in his last speech say there would be an attempt to create an international court to consider disputes between nations, with a force at its command strong enough to enforce its decrees. That is good—on the surface at least. Among the earliest of our own writings, now some 45 years at least, was a considered conclusion that this was the only way to secure world peace. International wars are in the same category up to date that duelling, which was private war, was until it was definitely placed among criminal offences. Armies are kept for use, whether they be international or national forces, but the chance of world peace will always be in danger when each country when at loggerheads is able to decide its own cause of complaint.

National war is only the duel on a larger scale, and any nation, or group of nations that is able to say finally what is the right or wrong of a dispute cannot avoid playing the part of a bully. We shall be curious to see what interpretation Mr. Churchill places

on his own delivery, and also how he will reconcile it with his "What we have we shall hold." The rights of any nation to deal with other nations is a good thing; the right of a nation to deny that right, or to lay down the conditions of intercourse as final, is another thing, and a very dangerous one. We must remember how powerless the League of Nations was in the face of nations who held to the right to decide their own case.

According to the "Universe," Archbishop Griffin is disturbed at so many young people being ready to discuss politics at any time, but they are never ready to take the slightest trouble to argue about God Almighty. Well, that is the first time we have heard a Roman Catholic Archbishop complaining that people are not arguing about God. But we have not the slightest doubt that if any of his flock were found seriously arguing whether God existed or not, or why he does not do better than is his habit, the Archbishop would be the first to stop the discussion.

We fancy that what is troubling the Archbishop is that the younger generation manifests a desire to discuss politics rather than religion. And that, so far, is a good thing. The danger is that if they become obsessed with politics to the exclusion of religion, they are likely to pay heavily for it sooner or later. For the clergy, including Archbishop Griffin, are also interested in politics to the extent that they will oppose all reform, however good, from a secular point of view if the interests of the Church are not endorsed and protected. If the clergy stood aloof from politics, social reform would develop more rapidly than it is doing at present.

But there is here not merely an expressed opinion that Christians are made of very poor stuff, but there is also a growing difficulty in getting people to play the part of priest or preacher. Why is that the case? There was a time when the Churches could command a sufficient number of preachers to carry on the game. What has cut off the supply? It is not salaries; they are larger than ever. There are only two things left—status and honesty. First by generations, then by individual cases, intellectually honest folk are seeing through the nature of, not one religion, but of all religion; not one god, but all gods. The Churches are to-day in the position of a general who suddenly finds that his soldiers have got so disgusted with their job that they are gradually leaving the ranks. The Churches once had the pick of the land, then they had to put up with second or third-class material and now even that is forsaking it. The game is nearly up.

The "Church Times" is at last beginning to recognise that the Church is no longer attracting young men into its service in numbers, and is pointing out that:—

In the absence of an adequate number of ordained priests the Sacraments cannot be ministered to the people, nor can the word and teaching of the Gospel be effectively declared. No enthusiasm of amateur preaching and no deluge of ranting uplift can take their place. There is no substitute for the priesthood in the Catholic Church. We have no hesitation in asserting that the paralysing shortage of priests in the Church of England is the greatest cause of the decay in organised religion in this country.

This is about as terrific an indictment of the Christian religion as one could conceive. A man may go wrong by never knowing what is right, but once having determined what is right he should, on the whole, keep right. According to the "Church Times," the hold of Christianity is so poor, its ethical value is of so slight a character, that unless each individual is constantly exercising himself in his belief and is carefully watched over by an army of spiritual policemen, Christianity carries no more moral influence than a policeman does when he keeps an eye on a would-be pickpocket. We have said many times that this is actually the case, but we never expected a prominent religious paper to give us such unqualified endorsement.

ANNUAL REPORT—(Concluded from page 217)

furthering the advance of the principle which they worked for and loved. We all owe much to these men and women who have done their duty quietly without desire for material reward or public recognition. We should all do well to bear constantly in mind a famous passage in the writings of George Eliot and never forget that our path would not be as smooth as it is to-day, and our ideas as clear as they are, were it not for those who have lived little known lives and now lie in unknown graves.

The world war has forced multitudes to serious consideration of the future of civilisation. For the moment all are shouting for a radical alteration in the social structure. That the post-war period cannot be a mere repetition of the pre-war age may be taken for granted. How much real improvement there will be is another and pressing question. Our war will go on; we could not cease our fight without being false to every principle we have professed. But our special enemy, organised religion, has already taken steps which indicate what we are to expect by way of opposition.

Seventy-four years ago the English Government, then educationally behind many of the continental States, introduced the first Education Act in this country that was of any quality. Secular education in the elementary schools might then have been brought into operation, leaving it for those who wished their children to have religious instruction to arrange for it in their own way and at their own cost. Joseph Chamberlain and many other well-known men rallied round the cry of "Education, National, Secular and Free!" It was at the last moment when the Church and the Nonconformists, fearful of leaving the Christian religion out altogether, reached a compromise that religion should be *in* the schools, but not under the control of the educational authorities, save that the religious lesson should not be distinctive of any Christian organisation. Children might be withdrawn from the religious lesson.

The Bill that is now before Parliament and which will become law is, religiously, a step back to pre-1870, and by way of compromise, promises reforms that may or may not follow. In any case, it puts back the priest in the schools. In action it will mean that teachers who do not qualify for religious teaching, or are known to be non-Christian, may find it difficult to gain appointment and next to impossible to be promoted. If the parson is not in the school in person he will be there by deputy, reaping all the profits and running none of the risks. We are repeating the blunder of 1870 but on a larger and more dangerous level. It is also noticeable that while other promised reforms are to wait opportunity, the religious portion of the bill is to operate at once. The idea of making entrance to all upper schools dependent upon ability does not appear. Our rulers will continue to be made up of those with a "social" pull.

This time the Churches are so sure of their victory that one of the leading spirits, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was bold enough to tell the House of Lords quite plainly that you cannot teach religion to children in a school which teaches religion as other subjects are taught. He said that the whole of the schools must be "pervaded" with religion during the whole of the school time. Religion must be suggested in every lesson. We are getting back to the stage of "great is the power of God" accompanying every subject. We are going back in one jump to pre-1870, and taking a second jump towards the 14th century. The child must be saturated with a form of religion that is rejected or ignored by a multitude of educated and intelligent people; and this is being done while our political and religious leaders, from the Prime Minister downward, are bellowing themselves hoarse declaring their devotion to freedom, independence and equal liberty for all.

What are we to do? Well, there is at least one thing. When France lost the Franco-Prussian War there was one man, a

statesman and a Freethinker, who had the courage to tell the people the truth. Gambetta said to the French: "We have been beaten, and we deserved it." One may with equal courage say to all who really believe in equal freedom for all: "We have been out-manceuvred, and we deserved it." If only half the number of those parents who regard religious instruction to children as poisonous had availed themselves of their legal right and withdrawn their children from religious instruction, the Government would never have dared to re-establish religion in the national schools. And that might have given the large number of teachers who dislike the religious teaching on various grounds to openly protest against the domination of the schools by religious leaders. The plot nursed by the Bishops and Board of Education would have died a quick death. In 1870 the battle for better education was won to the extent of preventing religion being recognised as part of the school curriculum. Religion would have been taught, but it would be of a very poor character. In 1944 the Churches have been able to take advantage of a world war to reinstate themselves in the schools as indispensable for our national welfare. We should mark well the moral of the change so far as Freethinkers are concerned. It surely suggests the need for more work and greater care on our part. Our historic enemy may not have the strength he once possessed, but he is still capable of striking hard when opportunity allows. In 1870 we won the struggle for the schools to the extent of preventing religion being a compulsory part of the school curriculum. Then we took too much for granted; we overlooked the fact that in such matters we must either advance or retreat. We must strive for more and more if we would avoid going from less to lesser. We waste an advance made when we fail to use it as anything but a step towards greater victories.

To-day we hear much of internationalism, but the Freethought movement has never been anything other than international. It has never admitted the validity of colour, sex or nationality as dividing lines. And it must be noted that when the air is vocal with hymns to freedom and human equality there are still attempts to curtail freedom of speech and publication where religion is the subject of attack, and this by nations that are loudest in their praise of freedom. In the United States, since this Conference last met, an attempt was made by the authorities to prevent the entry into New York of a parcel of Freethought literature consigned from the Pioneer Press to the "Truthseeker" offices in New York. Among these books that were seized were a number of copies of the "Bible Handbook," a work that for about fifty years has been circulated in America. The "Truthseeker" properly and promptly took legal steps to have the goods delivered, and eventually they were released. An appeal to English Freethinkers by the "The Freethinker" for £100 was made, and subscribed by return of post, with promises of more if needed. In the end the goods were released, and the authorities appear to have decided to let the matter rest.

In New Zealand, Roman Catholic influence has been strong enough to continue its refusal to permit the entry of Miss Edith Moore's telling pamphlet, "No Friend of Democracy," a documented indictment of the Roman Church. The sole offence here was the attack on the Roman Church. In Australia a University professor was bold enough to attack the policy of teaching schoolchildren misleading views of religion, which roused an immediate demand from the united Churches for his dismissal. But the professor stuck to his position, and in the end the bigots were robbed of their prey. These incidents should remind us that religious persecution is still rife in all the English speaking countries and that our own blasphemy laws set the example. There are other incidents, but these will suffice to demonstrate the truth that the only harmless religion is a dead one.

On the continent of Europe Freethought organisations have ceased to exist publicly in France, Spain, Italy, Holland, Germany and, in fact, all over the Continent. They will come to life again when this war ends, and cannot but be encouraged by the enormous development of "Atheist Russia," which has done more for the creation of a new social state in a generation than Christian countries have done in centuries. History may yet admit that even this world war might have been avoided if the Russian Revolution had not met with the frantic opposition, misrepresentation and hatred of the Churches and other large vested interests.

With regard to the revival of continental Freethought, it has been suggested to your Executive that, bearing in mind the number of continental Freethinkers at present in this country, steps might be taken by British Freethinking associations to form a committee which, in concert with foreign representatives, could devise plans for the rebirth of those associations that were stamped out of existence by the religious furore of Hitlerism and its satellites. Your Executive felt it would be carrying out the wishes of all members of the N.S.S. in promising whatever support it is able to give to restore the continental Freethinking associations to their old status.

To return to home matters. It is good to be able to report that the number of letters written by men from all parts of the fields of war to our offices have increased in number. All sorts of questions are asked concerning religion and our organisation, and the attention paid by our secretary to these matters is, we are sure, bound to bring us many close friends when these men return to civilian life. Many of these inquirers have become members and, it is to be hoped, will furnish us with more ardent workers when the war of blood is succeeded by the conflict of brains. The Churches are mustering their forces, and we must be ready to carry on our propaganda with increased vigour as opportunities arise.

If a man had to forecast the immediate future of our movement he might truthfully say that the outlook portends some trouble, the continued struggle of the Christian Churches—established and non-established—to at least hold existing territory, the closer fusion of vested interests and religious propaganda, and a great development of the Freethought movement as a whole. The number of leading men in science and literature who would write themselves down as Freethinkers are to-day more numerous than ever, but not nearly so numerous as they should be. The Churches do not agree upon doctrines, they do not agree upon how much of the truth they may tell with safety, but step by step they are being beaten back, and although here and there they may win a skirmish, the decisive battles are more than ever with the movement that we represent.

And when that expression, "The movement which we represent," is used, it expresses the vital character of the National Secular Society. We are not aiming at converting leading scientists, philosophers, or men of letters. They will always have the freedom that their social state enables them to have. It is when the findings of science and a scientific philosophy begin to trickle to the "masses" that knowledge threatens established religious beliefs. It is then, too, that Freethinking begins to discharge its historic function and displays itself. It would certainly be an interesting work if a capable and *honest* man were to set himself the task of discovering how, and to what extent, different scientific discoveries owe their existence to Freethought, and also through what channels this acquired knowledge reached the intelligent masses of the "common people." Then would be discovered the part played by Freethinking in the mass development of scientific understanding of the new world that is opening and its possibilities for human betterment. Freethought has played the part of pioneers where scientific and social theories are concerned. It has trampled out a path for others to follow, and has made each victory a stepping stone to further advance.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Annual Conference, Holborn Hall, London

THE fifth war-time Annual Conference of the National Secular Society was again held in London. A little below the number of last year, but bearing in mind the difficulties of travelling, preoccupation in war-time work, etc., the gathering was a good one in size and excellent in feeling. Many were prevented coming at the last moment; but there was no doubting the enthusiasm of those present. Aside from individual members, delegates and representatives included Messrs. J. Clayton, J. F. Corina, G. H. Taylor, J. T. Brighton, J. W. Barker, F. Burton, J. Farmer, W. J. Pringle, P. V. Morris, C. McCall, L. Ebury, T. C. McGough, F. Hansing, J. G. Lupton, L. R. Venton, E. C. Saphin, W. Collins, Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Venton, Miss E. Woolstone. Many apologies for absence through ill-health and work-time engagements were received.

The first item on the agenda was the Executive's Annual Report, read by the President. The report was listened to with great interest, and passed without demur. Item No. 2 was the Financial Statement of the Executive's income and expenditure. This showed, as did the number of new members, an increase. Indeed, for several years past, an increase in both members and income had been registered.

Next on the agenda came the election of the President. As he had been again nominated, Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary, Mr. Rosetti, to take the chair. Mr. Brighton then moved, and Miss Woolstone seconded, that Mr. Chapman Cohen be elected President for the ensuing year. Some very complimentary things were said of the retiring President's work for the cause, and the motion was carried with acclamation. A very brief response was made by the President, who said that so long as he was capable of helping the cause of Freethought, he asked for no better task. He had now filled the post of President for 29 years. It was no light task, when looked at from afar, particularly when one had to follow two such giants as Charles Bradlaugh and G. W. Foote, but where one's feelings are, work cannot become drudgery. He could at least say that the movement had not weakened under his leadership. We must all see that our movement becomes stronger.

The election of Secretary came next. Mr. Rosetti was proposed and seconded, and many tributes were paid him for his close attention to work. The President also paid tribute to his unflinching attention to the duties of his post. The time was approaching when the Society would have to consider greater office help.

Mr. R. H. Clifton, a very old and trusted member of the Society, was then reappointed Treasurer; and our Incorporated Accountant, Mr. H. L. Theobald, re-elected as Auditor. The next item on the agenda was the election of the Executive. It was moved and seconded the Executive be re-elected, with the exception of Mr. Preece, who is out of London, and that Mr. Griffiths represents South London in his stead. This was agreed to. Mr. Corina raised the point that in the schedule of Group Areas there was no group for Yorkshire. He wished the Executive to consider establishing a Yorkshire Group. The President promised that the matter would be brought before the Executive at an early meeting.

There were five items for consideration before the Conference. The first was "Domestic Policy of the N.S.S." This was introduced by the President. This led to a long and interesting discussion, and if opinions often clashed the difference was only on the line of policy, not of principle.

This ended the morning session, and the President asked to be relieved from the afternoon's session. It would be the first session from which he has been absent since 1891, but there was

an evening meeting to face, and if only to gratify his friends, he felt that he was justified in asking the Conference to excuse his absence in the afternoon. The members would be well able to select a chairman for themselves. The Conference then adjourned until 2-30.

At the afternoon session Mr. Griffiths was voted into the chair. There were four subjects for discussion. The first, "The Future of Education and the Churches. Mr. Taylor made a very vigorous speech dealing with schoolchildren taking part in religious ceremonies, dual control and religious tests for teachers. He could see no difference between Nazism and the religious ritual. Some excellent speeches were made by Messrs. Page, Saphin, Colebrook, Morris, and by Mesdames Thompson and Venton. In the end it was moved and carried that young students in training schools should be circularised by the N.S.S. To this Mr. Brighton and others asked for some literature suitable for children.

Mr. Collins made a very useful opening on "The Use and Abuse of the Press, Radio and Cinema," but could find no cure other than that of serious and continuous propaganda. Finally, Mr. Clayton introduced "Freethought Propaganda During and After the War." His speech opened the way to a fruitful discussion. Mr. Clayton gave an interesting account of the difficulties in the small towns and villages, and Mrs. Thompson asked for plans that would enable women to take a hand in propaganda: Mr. Ebury moved, and carried, the following resolution:

"This Conference, in view of the increase of racial hatred and intolerance brought about by war, reaffirms its adherence to the international brotherhood of man, and moves that emphasis should be given in our propaganda to this ideal, and so play our part in producing the conditions for a just and lasting peace."

The meeting closed with Mr. Corina moving a vote of thanks to the General Secretary and others who had worked, behind the scenes, to make the Conference a success, and also to Mr. Griffiths for his having so ably filled the chair.

THE JOKER

I have a pack of playing-cards,
And one of them's the Joker.
I've never understood its use—
Perhaps it's used in "Poker."
A pack of Arnold Bennett "Cards"
Meet weekly, solving queries;
And one—the Joker—always scores
When sober thinking wearies.
If one should doubt a miracle,
Or ways of salamander,
The Joker's bound to testify
He's *seen* them, as Commander.
If one should ask why parsons wear
Their collars in reverse,
No doubt the Joker soon would give
An explanation terse.
If B.B.C. would yield a peg,
God's myst'ries to unravel,
The Joker would find much to tell,
Though other "Brains" might cavil.

—W. G. PRIEST.

SOME THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION

IN recent days much has been said, and more has been written, on the subject of education. A new Education Bill has been before Parliament, and there have been arguments—lengthy and usually quite inconclusive—about many of the details of the educational procedure which is to give us a new world in the months and years ahead. The alert reader will have already noticed what is the important phrase in what I have just written: it is "many of the details." The general basis of education seems to have been taken for granted by all, except for a few great experimenters like A. S. Neill (dismissed by the man in the street as "cranks"). Outside the ranks of the schoolmasters, Herbert Read, in his "Education Through Art," has given us much food for thought, and that brings me to the real subject for these somewhat random jottings.

Our educational system is seemingly constructed, so far as it has any real aim, to give the country the requisite number of clerks, salesmen, technicians, engineers, scientists and similar useful folk. There never seems to have entered into the heads of our educational authorities (save for the "cranks" already mentioned) the thought that education should be as much for the benefit of the individual child as for the benefit of the State. Anglo-Saxons have rarely allowed themselves to be deceived into making children into unthinkingly obedient puppets of the State in the way so much appreciated by Adolf Hitler and his lesser imitators on the continent of Europe, but they have tended to fall into a similar trap. In other words, they have allowed themselves to see that one possible basis for education is to build up a generation suitable for the modern world, and as a result there has been far too much emphasis on the vocational side of teaching.

Now, I think that all readers of these pages will agree that one of the most important matters in the world—if not *the* most important—is the work of the artist. Only if we have an adequate supply of artists of all kinds—painters, sculptors, musicians, actors, poets, novelists—can we obtain that unbiased criticism of the way of life of the average man which is so vitally necessary if progress is to go on. Only through the medium of the arts is it possible to see the world in a way sufficiently detached from everyday affairs to provide for necessary changes in our traditional ways of life.

Do we make any real provision, in our educational system, for the development of the artist? I think not, and I have, as witnesses in support of my belief, many artists of considerable ability who have written autobiographies which show how little their development owes to their schooldays. In recent months I have read these autobiographies: "Odd Man Out," by Douglas Goldring; "Double Lives," by William Plomer; "The Weald of Youth," by Seigfried Sassoon; "The Mistletoe Child," by Herbert Palmer; "Inland Far," by Clifford Bax; and "A Cornish Childhood," by A. L. Rowse. I think that I can fairly say that only in the case of Rowse is there any indication that his schooldays were of any assistance to him in the development of his personality as an artist, and he is probably an exception to the general rule because it so happened that his mind, in the early stages, tended to move along more or less academic lines. It is only since he has grown up that he has shown himself able to launch out as a poet of some importance.

What, then, is the solution of this problem? Can our orthodox school curriculum be trusted to find the artist in embryo and give him a chance to work out his own way of life? As it stands, one would think not, and there is no indication that this problem has even entered into the minds of our legislators, even the otherwise enlightened architects of Mr. Butler's Education Bill. For instance, they have stressed the need, as they see it, for compulsory religious observance of the narrowest type. And

the artist is almost always a rebel in the matter of religion, so that the only result of great religious pressure in the schools will be to make the artist-schoolboy feel even more separated from his fellows than he was under the older systems.

I feel that the only way in which this can be satisfactorily settled is by a more than usually determined attempt to assist those educational experimentalists like A. S. Neill, who are doing such fine work. The London exhibition of paintings by his pupils is a justification of what he is doing, for he is encouraging those boys and girls entrusted to him to express their personalities through art. It is not for nothing that Herbert Read has blessed Neill and his work. He is aiming at producing, not people who will be useful to the state, but people who will have within them the potentiality to live full lives. There must be many other gifted teachers who could do similar work if they were granted the opportunity and, if we can devise some machinery by which these people are enabled to set out on their difficult path, we shall be doing a very valuable piece of work, both for educational progress and for the individual progress of the children of the next generation.

There appears to be little doubt that in the years ahead of us we are going to be increasingly faced with pressure that may be called democratic but will actually be totalitarian in its inspiration. Only if we do our best to repel any educational steam-roller will there be a chance to overcome this pressure. And artists, more than anyone else in the world, can lead the way in this opposition to totalitarian interference with individual development. An educational policy designed to encourage the artist is therefore part of any truly democratic system. That is why I think that education deserves more attention from artists than it has hitherto received. In the past we have tended to think that the artist must necessarily be unhappy at school, but have told ourselves that he will overcome this in his after-life. In the old muddled regime of capitalist industrialism this may well have been so, but whether it can be so under a more regimented regime is extremely doubtful. The art that has come out of Nazi Germany is not encouraging, and even Communist Russia has tended to give us too much propaganda and too little real art.

So this problem finally boils down to the same thing as so many other problems in this difficult period. Freedom is the solution, and only if increased freedom for the individual can be guaranteed will great art arise. In education we have to insist on freedom for children to develop without undue interference. If this can be granted, a period of new glories in artistic achievement may well lie before us. If we fail, we may be the last generation to see the production of any art worthy of the name.

JOHN ROWLAND.

CORRESPONDENCE

IRENÆUS AND THE CRUCIFIXION.

SIR,—Mr. Cutner is free to quote any authority he likes, but in his own interest he should quote correctly.

He said that Irenæus denied the crucifixion of Jesus. I quoted a passage in which, on the contrary, Irenæus affirmed it. I could have quoted others, e.g., "Against Heresies," iv., 28, § 3, where he speaks of "the Lord's death being surely the condemnation of those who crucified him"; but I do not want to go through Irenæus with a comb—he's not worth it!

Irenæus seems to have been ignorant of the date of Pilate. He thought Jesus was baptised at thirty and crucified at about thirty, and gives as his authority "the Gospel and all the elders . . . who in Asia conferred with John, the Lord's disciple." But there is grave doubt as to who this John was, and Mr. Cutner, who thinks the twelve apostles a myth, is hardly entitled to identify him with the "St. John" of the New Testament.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

WAR DAMAGES

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to a letter under the heading "War Damaged Churches" in your issue of the 28th ult., in which the following paragraph occurs:—

"The assessors of the War Damage Commission in this district are attempting to induce owner-occupiers of damaged houses with a 50 per cent. payment against cost of re-roofing on the grounds that much of the property here was roofed with inferior 'Portmadoc' slates. This notwithstanding that the houses were tight and rainproof before the bombing began."

The reference to 'Portmadoc' slates as inferior is most detrimental to the products of Festiniog Slate Quarries, which my Association represents, and cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. Genuine Portmadoc slates, which are the product of the quarries in the Festiniog district, conform with British Standard Specification for Welsh Roofing Slates, No. 680/1936, of which I enclose a copy, and withstand all the tests there laid down.

I would ask you to give the same publicity to this letter as that given to the letter referred to above.—Yours, etc.,

E. ANDREWES

(Chairman of the Associated Slate Quarries).

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. Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.: "The Future of Politics."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. Debate: "Does God Explain the Universe?": Rev. GORDON LIVINGSTONE v. Mr. F. SMITHIES.

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

Lumb-in-Rossendale.—Wednesday, June 14, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Friday, 7-30 p.m. Mr. W. A. ATKINSON: A Lecture. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 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.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m. Mr. T. M. MOSLEY: A Lecture.

Read (Lancs.).—Thursday, June 15, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Worsthorne (Lancs.).—Friday, June 9, 7-30 p.m. Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

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