

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIV.—No. 31

Sunday, July 30, 1944

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Here and There

IT looks as though there may be some trouble between the teachers and the application of the new Education Bill when it becomes law. It will be remembered that there is to be definite religious teaching during school hours, and religion is to be made a qualifying subject. But who is to see that the religion which is to be given is of a satisfactory character? It cannot be left to the parents, for that would mean Bedlam let loose. It cannot be the Ministry of Education *in fact*, even though it may be in theory. It cannot be left to the teachers to decide, because that would lead to all sorts of complications. Teachers—the better-brained and the better-educated—might wish to tell pupils a little of the truth about religion, and that would not secure what the archbishops have decided—that what must be the case is the saturation of school life with official Christianity. There is only one party left and that is the clergy, and no large section of the community trusts them. In fact, there are numerous sections of the clergy who are fighting all the time as to what is real Christianity. In the year of Our Lord 1944, believers are still fighting as to what the deuce Jesus really meant by his message. It is a nice situation, and it stinks of priestly trickery and political dishonesty.

So far as the teachers are concerned, they deserve all the degradation they will suffer. Granting the proper teacher, he or she should be the monarch of the territory over which they rule. They should see to it that having been appointed, they should be allowed to educate the children, not merely instruct them. Pupils should be taught to distinguish between demonstrated truths and mere speculations. There should be more attention paid to teach pupils how to distinguish between one opinion and another, and not to wink at the crime of teaching them that there are some beliefs which must not be questioned. As things go, the one thing at the moment is that there will be a display of learning without real and useful education. The plan is, in short, to leave the "truth" about religion to the clergy, and equality of man to hard-shell Tories. In some regions the possibility of miracles is never overlooked.

Religion and the Army

No one but a fool, a knave or rabid Christian would claim that church service is popular with the Armed Forces. Officers submit, and take part in it, because many of them have a vague kind of conviction that it helps discipline. In any case, one may safely say that the officer who refused to take part in a church service would find himself marked for not setting a good example. Of course, legally, every man or woman serving with the Forces has a right to stay away from religious services, and that on the simple ground that

they have no religious belief. No other explanation should be asked for, and no other explanation should be given. But in view of the often troublesome method of securing this amount of intellectual freedom, to say nothing of the fact that objectors are often given some hours of not too attractive duties as a reward for their intellectual integrity; a large number allow their rights to be set aside. At all events, it helps the padre to tell his people how eagerly the common soldier loves his visits. Officers appear to be of sterner stuff, and are not supervised by travelling parsons. Many officers do, as we know from their own lips or pen, spend some of their time "guying" the padre, and so provide God's agent with a rather unpleasant half-hour.

Here, for example, is a letter that reaches us from a member of the Medical Corps in the Far East. It is an excerpt from a long and interesting letter, and may be set beside the stereotyped falsehood from religious quarters concerning the attitude of the troops towards religion:—

"The deity is by all accounts on the side of the strongest artillery. I am waiting to read that the strongest artillery is on the side of the deity. I fancy that is supposed to be understood. I think it is rather an ironical fact that the country which was supposed to be completely Godless has so far done more for the liberation of the world than those countries which have for centuries been followers of this cult. Of course, it will be said in substantiation of their feats that the deity knew that in their hearts they were true to him. I cannot think, however, that thinking people will be so easily fobbed off with such a weak explanation. The book I am reading, by Eve Currie, about 'Journey Among Warriors,' gives a fine view of the lack of religious persecution in the Russias, and shows quite plainly that the anti-attitude taken up by the Western Powers against Russia for the years prior to the war was stimulated by a hate and a fear which the last few years have done much to exhibit to the world as being false and purely propagandistic. But it is a little too late to try to close the stable door after the animal has bolted.

"I would like to see a book published which set out in clear and easy English, simple and using words of two syllables, the facts of religion, religious teaching, religious principles, and what religion has done, what it could do, and what it cannot do. I think it would be an ideal introduction and would do much to open the eyes of thinking, or simple-thinking, people to such an extent that the verbose and so-called erudite raspings of the pro-religious gang would have a hard job to answer. . . . I am not suggesting that wars are the peculiar result of religion, but I think that the less the mind is debauched by these beliefs the more easily is one able to appreciate things that really matter."

We print this as an example of the many letters we get from all parts of the war-fields. It stands out against the deliberate lying of those who would have us believe in the awakening to religion among the Forces. There is an awakening, but it is one that makes the outlook of the Churches rather black.

The Church that Was?

O modesty, thy name is surely Christian! Here is the Rev. D. C. Brameld, of Lower Darwen, who informs the world, and particularly the readers of the "Daily Telegraph," that "the Church has stood for two thousand years and has even thrived on persecution." It is that "even" and double-barrelled significance of the statement that caught our attention. First of all, there is the alleged persecution of Christians by the pagans, grossly exaggerated and largely mythical. For it was not the practice of pagan Rome to encourage persecution for religious differences. Long ago Renan pointed out that there were no laws in favour of persecution in Roman Law for religious differences. Pagan Rome was hospitable to all the gods that the distorted minds of people chose for worship. But Rome did insist on order, and it was the intolerance of Christian control that led to State interference. And the fact that when the Christian Church set out on its career of persecution it had to create machinery, such as the Inquisition, is enough to prove the absurdity of the Christian picture of the Church struggling for the right of existence against the brutal intolerance of pagan religionists.

But the Rev. Brameld did raise a point of considerable historic interest. The Christian Church did "thrive on persecution." Without that it would probably have been known to moderns as little more than one of the many curious religious cults that once existed. From the time when Constantine took Christianity under his protection and embodied it in a State religion, persecution became the chief instrument of the Christian Church. The Roman Church established and maintained itself by force. The laws against blasphemy, the tactics of Protestants, their refusal to give Roman Catholics civic liberty, the inter-wars that have been waged by Christian bodies, the policy of boycotting in society and in business, all these represent forms of force by which Christianity has preserved its existence. And to-day we have as a crowning piece of evidence the refusal of the Government to separate the State from the Church and the resolve to drench the schools with a particular form of Christian belief. The Church in all its phases owes its present existence to force. That the forms of force vary with the times is to be expected, but the inability of Christianity to maintain its power in free and open conflict is undeniable. Mr. Brameld framed a deeper and more significant truth than he imagined when he said that the Church has thrived on persecution. "From the mouths of sucklings——"

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"THEISM OR ATHEISM." By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

"INFIDEL DEATHBEDS." The last moments of famous Freethinkers. G. W. FOOTE and A. D. McLAREN. Price 2s.; postage 3d.

"PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS." By J. M. WHEELER. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

"THE CHRISTIAN FAILURE"

IT is always a pleasure to recommend a book to readers of "The Freethinker." I have benefited by such recommendations myself, and I wish a page—or at any rate a column—could be regularly allocated to them. Its readers can be trusted to recommend books with a bite, and not to praise anything that dexterously skates over thin ice or parades the proprieties in scorn of truth. It is nice, too, if one can recommend a book that is cheap. I suspect most of us buy our books only after careful consideration of our budget. Allowing for the different value of money, we may be no better off than Goldsmith's vicar who was "passing rich with forty pounds a year."

The book I have in mind is "The Christian Failure," published by Gollancz at 3s. 6d. The name of the publisher is significant of the sincerity of the title. If it came from Sheed & Ward you might expect it to show that the failure was due to our sinfulness in departing from the teaching of the Holy Mother Church. If it came from Hodder & Stoughton—christened the "Dodders" by someone—you might anticipate that the argument was that all of us would live happy ever after if we returned to Jesus.

Dr. Charles Singer, its author, means what his title says. He has no use for that favoured Christian cliché "so-called Christianity."

The earlier chapters of the book, dealing with religion and science, might be called in question by some. The author informs us that his father was a Rabbi, and apparently he is in no mood to abandon his inherited theism. When, however, the Freethinking reader reaches a chapter entitled "The Historical Record—the Root" he may well sit up and take notice. Here are blows against Christendom of unqualified strength.

"While it would be foolish to judge a religion by its feeblest exponents, it must and should be judged by its historic, its official, its formal representatives. The intelligent and the only intelligible practice of the Church is to be found in the acts of its leaders and the writings of its most respected theologians. We must not accept the common mode of evasion that such men have not the root of the matter in them. How often one hears of some detestable action or attitude of the Church: 'Oh, but that isn't Christianity.' But it is Christianity; it is historic Christianity. Whatever pang the limitation may cost the Christian, he cannot be allowed to choose his history, or even to select from it. . . . The acts of the Spanish Inquisition; the massacre of the Albigenses; the record of Luther with reference to the Peasants' Revolt and royal divorce; the inhuman temper of Calvin; the evil lives and designed cruelty of many of the Popes; and in our time the temporising of Christians and of the Churches with the evil forces that have overwhelmed much of the world: these are, for comparative and scientific purposes, as essential parts of the history of Christianity as are the lives of the saints."

This, of course, will not suit the Christian apologists, who want to put their theological thumbs into the pie of history, pull out good plums, and then proclaim that they all came from Christian planting.

Dr. Singer shows conclusively that the Christian Church has always been primarily concerned with survival and has courted craven compromise with the powers that be to secure its continuance. In Germany, so long as they were allowed to exist and function, the Churches made no protest against the enormities of Nazism. The Church is in danger—that was the alarm that was sounded; not humanity outraged and the Jew persecuted.

The line adopted by Dr. Barth that, to quote his own words after Hitler's seizure of power, 'the Church of Christ took some time to recognise the Nazi régime as its enemy' is certainly true; but it carries with it an extremely severe condemnation of the leaders of that Church, including Dr. Barth and including Niemöller himself. The racial policy of National Socialism was the very basis of Hitler's 'Mein Kampf.' This book, which both Dr. Niemöller and Dr. Barth had certainly read, was published in the years 1925-26. The racial policy was given a prominent place in all Hitler's early speeches. It was also given a place in the often published and very widely circulated programme of the Party, to which my own attention was drawn in 1931 by several colleagues. It is quite impossible to believe that German Church leaders were ignorant of the significance of a current matter of internal German policy perfectly familiar to every intelligent German outside clerical circles, as well as to many foreigners. It is very much easier to believe that Church leaders hoped that by silence or by compromise, or by accepting the Nazi régime, they and their followers and churches would escape attack. Of humanity outside their own churches they were not thinking, and, with very few exceptions, there is no evidence that they have much thought even now."

Those of us who can recall the outbreak of the first European war will remember that nobody had any great expectations of Christians. Who troubled to ask what the German Churches were doing? No, it was the three or four million Socialists at whose acquiescence people wondered. This is the moral of the book. These religious bodies have become impotent because their primary purpose has been to keep at peace with the powers that be. "The leaders of the Churches in Germany," says Dr. Singer, "while the Churches were still 'intact,' made no protest till their own interests were manifestly and immediately threatened. And even when they did at last make some stand their protests were—as they still are—with insignificant exceptions, based upon their corporate rights or deduced from their own specific doctrines, and not upon the dignity and worth of man as man, which surely forms the very basis of all their teaching." Some of us will query the "surely." I am reminded of an incident much beloved, and dramatically related, by Rev. Bernard Snell of Brixton—alas! to the ignorance of my nonage, a matchless prophet. A lady full of charity and good deeds was once asked by a priest if she could not do something really religious—could she not embroider an altar cloth? The reverend orator poured scorn upon this idea of religion. I have long thought that the priest had in him more of the root of religion than the parson.

About three days before the present war commenced, at the Modern Churchmen's Conference, an address was read, in his absence, by Dr. Cyril Norwood. He said:—

"What one would have expected in face of a situation of such menace was surely that a summons to resistance would have gone forth from all the heads of all Christian communions, and that the Vatican would have joined with Canterbury, and with all the Free Churches, to bear witness that the central citadel was in danger. We should have witnessed in hazy outline the lineaments of a truly comprehensive Church; the first beginnings of a new order. But no clarion call is sounded from Rome, and our own Archbishop, though he has tried, can do no more than bid us pray."

What a confession! What a tacit admission of the futility of prayer! At the South London mission hall to which I was attached in my youth, if a speaker failed and a last-minute substitute could not be found we had a prayer meeting instead. Prayer was a pastime when you had nothing better to do. Dr.

Norwood seemed to suggest it was the straw which the drowning man proverbially snatched. In a later passage he said: "Christianity is at this moment reduced to futility and contempt for no reason other than that it is so divided about the questions which are comparatively unimportant." Altar cloths and prayers are, however, more of the substance of religions than the dignity and worth of man. How could it be otherwise when from the beginning of Christendom it has been held that man is a worthless, fallen creature, unable to rise without supernatural aid?

Dr. Singer quotes Martin Luther on the Jews:—

"If that which you already suffer from the Jew is not sufficient, strike him in the jaw. I would like to assemble their most prominent men and demand that they prove me wrong, under the penalty that they have their tongues torn out by the roots."

A little more lengthily he is quoted in Brian Lunn's book on the prototype of Protestants:—

"What are we to do with this damned, reprobate people? If we tolerate them we become parties to their lies and blasphemy. We can't convert them: we must practise a sharp method if we are to save any of them from the eternal flames. First let their synagogues and their schools be fired; what won't burn must be pulled down and covered with earth. This shall be done to the honour of our Lord, so that God may see that we are Christians and have not assented to their lies. If we protect these houses in which they spit upon and desecrate Christ, it would be as bad as if we did it ourselves. Their homes are to be dealt with in the same way, because they carry on the same practices in them. Moses said that if a city practised idolatry it was to be entirely destroyed; if he were alive to-day he would be the first to demand the punishment of the Jews."

Lunn remarks of this disregard of the dignity of human life:—

"In his personal relations Luther was one of the kindest men who have ever lived, but anything that disturbed his hard-won and precarious peace of mind roused this religious fury."

As Shakespeare wrote:—

"In religion,
What damned error but some sober brow
Will bless it, and approve it with a text,
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament."

And, two hundred years after, Robert Burns:—

"I have often thought that the more out-of-the-way and ridiculous the fancies are, if once they are sanctified under the sacred name of religion, the unhappy mistaken votaries are the more firmly glued to them."

Dr. Singer points out that daily thousands are immolating themselves for the secular cause of the State, yet the Churches produce no martyrs. "Think of the hundreds of millions of people in Europe who call themselves Christian and then of the minute number of those who have made any voluntary sacrifice for their Christian faith." In the days when I thought "Liberal Christianity" was the answer to all the doubts that Tennyson bade me fight, I was much enamoured of the sermons of Rev. F. W. Robertson of Brighton. I still venerate the man. It is related of him that a lady remonstrated about his disturbing doctrines, and he replied that he did not care. "Do you know what happened to 'Don't Care'?" she asked, as if he was a child. "Yes, madam. He was crucified on Calvary." From Robertson's viewpoint it was a superb answer. Of that alleged historic Jesus it was said: "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Of his Church the judgment might well be: "It saves itself every time. Others it has no power nor any particular desire to save."

W. KENT.

ACID DROPS

THE Brains Trust is shut up for a holiday. The writer on the "Daily Mail" who attends to the B.B.C. says he is not "shedding tears." Quite brutally says that, so far as he is concerned, "it may go off for ever." This brute of a writer actually suggests the members of the Brains Trust—at fifteen guineas a sitting—"must be allowed to attack controversial questions on which men differ vigorously." Bless the man, that would be Freethought applied to life as a whole. And the aim of the B.B.C. is to get selected people who can be trusted to obediently support the policy of seeing that nothing of a dangerous kind is ever given the air. We think it was Martin Luther who said that the Roman Church did not deny the right to think, but took care to see that the thoughts voiced were not dangerous. There is nothing new in the world, not even the mental shuffling and evasion of the Brains Trust.

There is one man in this country who is quite certain that the B.B.C. is a god-sent instrument for the benefit of everybody, and the salvation of at least "listeners in." This is Mr. Saxon, who has been selected by God, via the B.B.C., to become the first North Regional religious broadcasting assistant of the B.B.C. Mr. Saxon is convinced that the B.B.C. is "One of the greatest missionary mediums presented to the Church in modern times." Why, certainly! Has not God directed the B.B.C. to his appointment of broadcasting assistant for doses of religion? And if God has done so much for Mr. Saxon, Mr. Saxon can hardly refuse to do something for God! So great is Mr. Saxon's appreciation of the wisdom of God, expressed through the B.B.C., that he is actually "on the look out for new ideas."

But that is not necessary. All the ideas that are necessary for God and the B.B.C. to continue their good work are to see that no lie is omitted where religion is concerned, and take care that no criticism is permitted, because the B.B.C. policy is to take the most ignorant religionists as setting the type that must be carefully guarded from hearing anything that would weaken their faith. If Mr. Saxon is at all determined to secure fair play for the public, and not treat the B.B.C. as an instrument to engage men and women in bogus discussions of vital issues, his position will not last very long. He would be breaking what the B.B.C. calls "the Christian tradition"

From the 1944 "Britannica Book of the Year" we learn that the Roman Church claims about 400,000,000 followers. Of these, the United States are said to house 23,000,000, and 20,000,000 in the British Commonwealth. Of course, these figures are "official"—that is, they need checking. For example, they cover all born of Roman Catholic parents, and do not allow for those who have given up all religion. We have many of these in the N.S.S. But if to these figures we add all the other Christian bodies, the Christian god must feel his head ache at the volume of petitions that meet him. But perhaps he takes them all as read, for they do not vary much in matter. In form they may differ, but on the whole they run "O lord we are sinners, but please send us more sugar." On the other hand, we can imagine Satan thanking God for calling to heaven the crawling, flattering, frightened crowd and sending to hell the men and women who at least had the courage to stand up.

On May 26 the Pope sent a special letter of sympathy to the people of Berlin who are under the stress of the Allied bombs. What a pity it is that the then reigning Pope forgot to send a message to the Emperor of Abyssinia—a brother Christian—when the Italian soliders and leaders were amusing themselves dropping the natives out of aeroplanes or bombing women and children from about a fifty-feet height. Hitler, it may be remarked, is still a Roman Catholic, counted as one of the 400,000,000 mentioned above, and is not yet excommunicated.

In these trying times, when the air is full of plans for reforming human society, it is well to know that the capacity for believing the impossible and seeing the invisible, on the excellent

authority of the Rev. J. Brierly, a writer to the "Church Times," that the section of the English Church known as Anglo-Catholic "believes in the real objective presence of our Lord in the blessed Sacrament." Lest the uninitiated do not understand ordinary bread and the cheap wine are turned into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. He died some time ago. And considering the large number of men and women who take the sacrament, the amount of magical bread and miraculous wine almost dazzles one. Now if beer could be produced in the same manner, how pleased large numbers of our fighters would be.

But, being fervent Christians, there still remains grounds for a quarrel. Thus a lady writes:—

"Why is it supposed to be so Catholic using expressionless gabble and involved phrases and nauseating pious phraseology? Doesn't God like English? In certain circles it seems to be not quite Catholic to pray in public in a tongue that is understood by the people."

But this lady is not quite fair, nor does she appreciate the importance of using the same words each time, and expressing oneself in a way that the people do not understand. That lady should have remembered that "Fo fim, fee," is no real substitute for Fee, Fo Fum. The first robs the spell of its occult (another fine word) power. The second, because it would be expressed in an incomprehensible formula, has all the recognition that an unseen thing breeds and an incomprehensible statement encourages. Jesus said: "He who believeth in me shall be saved." He did not say: "He who understands me." Understanding may do for a university; it is out of place in a Church.

It is reported that 58 men, survivors of a British tanker sunk by the enemy, have, after 37 days floating about in an open boat, reached an Australian port. They managed to get there without the help of God. And that is very thoughtless of the survivors. In such matters the correct thing is to say that God saved them—very deliberately, but still he saved them.

To seek truth and find it,
To seek beauty and create it,
To seek love and be willing to
Die for one's friend.

That, says the Dean of Canterbury, is his conception of the Christian ideal.

We have nothing whatever to say against that ideal, but in the name of all that is sensible what has that to do with Christianity? It will pass for the ideal of Pagan Greece, or even Pagan Rome in its better phase. The Christian is not one who seeks truth, he already has it, and no one is more vicious than he if one tries to prove to him he has made a mistake. The Christian ideal is not beauty—that is what the Christian Church has always considered as lusting after "carnal" things—and the last thing that the true Christian wanted, was beauty—until he got to heaven. To seek love, either sex love or love of friends was, too, satisfying one's carnal appetite. And the Christian saint never died for a friend, he died for a religion, and that only because it involved the safety of his not too valuable soul. But we do not blame the Dean overmuch. It is a very common practice, particularly among the higher clergy, to sum up what the times force them to believe and then call it Christianity.

It must be the plain fact—so plain that it cannot be disputed—that causes the leading article in the "Record," one of our very religious weeklies, to say that "we live in a professing Christian country." The italics are ours. It is true we have State Church, we have a king whose religion was selected for him some two and a half centuries ago, we have Sunday laws and blasphemy ditto, and there is a plentiful supply of State-paid preachers for those in prison and with the Armed Forces. But one of our leading religious organ says we are only a professing religious country. The only conclusion to be drawn from this is that the Christian churches cover an enormous number of humbugs. We realised that many, many centuries ago. Now a leading Church paper states it as something beyond dispute.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

"YOUNG MENATOR MOB."—Thanks. Shall appear as soon as possible.

O. BUDGE.—We think most of those who finish their copy of "The Freethinker" pass it on to friends. We are pleased, but not surprised, that you send your copy to some of our fighting men. It does good work. We have ample evidence of that.

Will those friends who are helping us to overcome the paper shortage, please accept our thanks and so save time in writing letters. We shall be pleased to hear from others on the same matter. There are firms who would undertake the printing of books and pamphlets, and we have many waiting to be placed before the public.

M. A. B.—We are getting into touch with the local secretary. He will probably write you.

M. CORPER.—Thanks; shall appear.

M. WHITEFIELD.—Too late for this issue; will appear next week.

C. MARTIN.—Thanks for good wishes. We have dodged catastrophe so far, and the only time to worry over it is when a bomb hits one—and then it must be done quickly.

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

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

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

WAR is a terrible thing, and usually a beastly one. But there is no need to lose our heads even with the existence of one of the most devastating conflicts the world has seen. An example of what we have said is furnished by the appearance of the new flying bomb. Men and women and children have been killed in every war, and the number of the killed and the quality of the agent with which they were killed counts for little. The flying bomb is one more example of the doctrine of frightfulness, but after all the shape and quality of the thing that kills is of secondary consideration. But we fail to see any substantial difference between the instrument that kills at a thousand yards and one that kills at a distance of one hundred and fifty miles. The doomed are not fastidious.

At any rate, whether we will or not we must see the war through. No one has any idea of surrender, and no one should have any such thought. We *must* see it through, but when we have done so we must take care that it does not again happen. It is certain that for some time after the fighting ceases there will be need of an organised and, let us hope, respected force kept in being, but that force from the outset should represent an international power. If the peoples of the world really desire a world peace they can have it. The British Empire, Russia, the United States and China can stand as creators and protectors of peace to all men. We are, in fact, nearing the time when the choice before us is world peace or world chaos.

From the "Liverpool Echo" we learn that two boys, whose parent was an Atheist, and who had withdrawn them from religious instruction, were by mistake billeted with a Nonconformist minister. The minister has, voluntarily, assured the father that his wishes with regard to his children shall be fully respected. We offer our compliments to the minister. We do not know his name.

The Keighley Branch N.S.S. has had the good fortune of arranging another debate with the Rev. H. M. Brook. Mr. F. J. Corina will put the Freethought side to the subject: "The Truth and Social Value of Christianity." The debate will take place in the I.L.P. Hall to-day (July 30) and will commence at 2.45 p.m. Another good audience is expected, and an interesting afternoon is promised to all present.

We have said many times that the Government Education Bill was largely, and perhaps mainly, intended to re-establish the clergy and religion in the schools. There was a plain indication of this in that every "reform" has to wait on circumstances except that of that concerning religion. That is to commence with the passing of the Bill. Now we see that "Picture Post" for July 15, gives us the following letter:—

"I am a schoolboy, aged 17½, and I wish to become a school-teacher. On approaching my headmaster, I was informed that there were no facilities for training men teachers. Mr. Butler wants several thousand teachers for the post-war era."

Presumably "Picture Post" is assured of the actuality of the incident.

If ever there was clear evidence of the value of prayer it was given in connection with our invasion of the Continent. Since the war opened in Normandy we have had the churches open all day and every day so that people could pray for favourable weather for the help of our Forces. The King was "advised" to issue a prepared prayer to the same end. But the prayers—both the free-and-easy one and the Royal one—have brought us a long spell of very bad weather that has favoured the Germans rather than us. Why not now try an explanatory prayer to God telling him that he appears to be backing the wrong side, and unless more attention is paid to the needs of the Allies all prayers will be suspended until further notice?

The House of Commons recently brought its combined intelligence to work to consider whether we should have a change of warnings when the flying bombs attack this country. Why not have "Here Comes the Bogey Man" with their approach and "Down Among the Dead Men" in place of the "All Clear." Then the House could devote its intelligence to other matters.

AT THE RESCUE SQUAD HEADQUARTERS

(A Poem for Gertrude and Fytton)

Two hundred yards away from here you're in another world,
Asleep and disregarding the rumbling from above,
Where flying bombs, hate-driven, pass on their errand of death.

Here I sit by the telephone, awaiting some grim summons;
Explosions not far off make the hut quiver and shake.
I long to hear the sirens sound their cheerful all-clear message,
And hope to know that all is well with both of you.

If gods there were, to them I'd pray
To help to keep you safe.
And yet, irrationally, I'm sure within my heart
That morning will bring release,
Will show me a world which is calm and quiet,
Normal and at peace.

You'll wake and wonder who I am;
I'll walk into the house and make a cup of tea.
Another nightmare task will be over;
The roar and rumble, crash and bang will cease.
Soon may they cease for ever!

JOHN ROWLAND.

HERO-WORSHIP AND FREE THINKING

I SYMPATHISE profoundly with your correspondent Mr. F. J. Wood in his protest against my describing four Benefactors of the Species as "political mountebanks." I have not read the article myself; I only wrote it. However, I believe it contains even more atrocious matter: namely, a blasphemy against the Metropolitan Water Board and an impiety upon our Inland Revenue. These "indecencies" also—Mr. Wood may well think—are likely to cause disgusted embryo Freethinkers, shocked at such profanity, to flee from the Cause in dismay.

I protest, Mr. Editor, against your printing, even from my pen, such very free remarks against these highly respected institutions which many Freethinkers may reverence. Free-thinking must not be too free. The sky's the limit. Let us criticise gods but not men.

Anxious as I am to comply with Mr. Wood's canons of "decency" (before the next bomb-product of his Four Heroes' political wisdom and political goodness kills me), may I ask Mr. Wood: "What are the ordinary rules of decency?" Also, "What are the extraordinary rules of decency which his statement that there are ordinary ones implies?" I want to do the decent thing by his Four Great Ones if only because I have the great good fortune to live in a country where a citizen can be sent to prison without any trial-nonsense for breaking unspecified rules.

The Quadrumvirate, or Four-Persons-in-One God, that Mr. Wood worships in his letter is indeed the true God of our little day, and Caesarism in its various forms of Fascism, Communism and pseudo-democracy our only religion. Corporal Hitler is holy in Germany; Marshal Stalin is sacred in Russia; Colonel Churchill is saintly to about two-thirds of England; and Commander-in-Chief Roosevelt divine to about three-quarters of America. Their beneficent political activities have provided more work for undertakers and coffin-makers; their bombastic rhodomontades stand on record for the ridicule of a more enlightened posterity; and the Edward Gibbon of the future will speculate on why our generation tolerated their barbaric quarrels and their lunatic theory that political problems are only to be solved by high-explosives.

At various times they have bawled "Criminal" at each other—and who am I to disagree?

But, lightly and even ironically, I flung a mild phrase of depreciation at Mr. Wood's Godhead, as if I were a Swiss, a Swede, an Irishman, a South American, or anyone else whose foolish rulers prefer inflicting peace and life instead of war and death upon their populations. Being a Caesarean hero-worshipper, Mr. Wood finds this jibe of mine "indecent." Not his the free thinking of Voltaire: "I detest your views, but I will die for your right to utter them."

Two verses seem to express the situation:—

Thinking, as all must agree,
Must never become really free:
If once that's allowed, we can see
It quickly becomes much too free.

Progressing at too fast a rate
Clear thought may endanger the State
Or worse, free from all inhibitions,
Mock at Supermen's war-coalitions.

To this lowest pit of indecency I seem to have descended.

Really, I ought to thank and praise the Four Rulers of our Destinies that their political clowning has not resulted to date in my being bombed to bits, as I nearly was while I was finishing this letter.

As the English poor are now fond of saying, "We have much to be grateful for; things might be much worse." Indeed they might. We might be governed by the ideas of "peace on earth,

goodwill towards men," and "love your enemies" of poor Jesus Christ whose followers have forsaken him for the God of War. Or we might waste our food munitions in actually feeding the starving children of half Europe now grubbing for acorns and turnips, while some minor political mountebanks (delegates of the United Nations at Atlantic City, reported by Reuter) recently sat down to a banquet of a choice of 86 wines and 16 luxurious food courses to chatter about "feeding starving Europe." (I would suggest that the toasts at that banquet should have been "Freedom from Want" and "Freedom from Thinking"; but Mr. Wood might call me "indecent" for criticising this particular piece of political clowning.)

Let us have no more national political heroes and hero-worshipping; they are as bad as other deities. What is the use of emancipating the mind from superstitions about gods if we fall headlong into superstitions about men or supermen?

A very little free thinking shows us that behind the artificial posturing and play-acting and speechmaking of the temporary figureheads of States are the economic and political realities which will only be solved by taking a great deal more thought than, judging by their acts and words, these momentary rulers do. Governments, after all, are servants to be kept in order, not masters to be fawned upon; from treating Governments as our sacrosanct masters and betters all our present evils come.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT—A REPLY

WILL you allow me to protest against your remarks re the Co-operative Movement contained in a paragraph in the current number of "The Freethinker" (July 16, 1944).

In your objection to a Chairman of Committee asking a boy if he attended Sunday school and having the reply "No," ended the interview—as a Chairman of a Co-operative Committee for some years, I often interviewed boys for jobs, but I never asked such a question.

"Names and details will be supplied to any prominent Co-operator who will dare to raise the question inside the Movement" (you say), "or who has sufficient influence to raise the matter in the Co-operative Press."

May I point out, sir, that it is not the business of the Press or Movement to protest against this. There are about 2,000 societies, governed by their own laws, and if a Chairman of Committee chooses to ask a boy such a question there is nothing on earth preventing him doing so. I deplore such a thing, but we are not governed by the Movement as to what form an interview should take; no more than a grocer in the private trade doing so, although he is a member of a grocers' association and takes the "Grocers' Review." One society cannot interfere with another society. I only want you to be fair to us for all our faults—and, being human, who hasn't got them?

My interest was aroused as a Freethinker of many years' standing and a reader of my lovable "Freethinker" for 45 years. And while writing to you I should like to point out that I was the first to get a letter published in the "Co-operative News" protesting against the Co-operative Sunday, my own Committee turning it down and deciding to take no action after hearing what I had to say. I enclose letter cutting from the "Co-operative News." Although F. J. Corina mentioned others, my letter was ignored. Still, I go plodding along, doing all I can in the interest of the "best of all causes."

In discussion classes here, I often give a paper which is very often taken from "Essays in Freethinking," as I find much useful work can be done that way.

Freethought is much more rife in the rural areas than is realised. The young men especially are intellectually alive to Freethought in our classes, agreeing wholeheartedly in what I have to say.

G. BAILEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

"YOUR M.P."

SIR,—Mr. R. B. Kerr criticises my review of "Your M.P." in which I said that private profit was responsible for all the muddles and hardships since the last war, and for the incapacity which nearly made us lose this one. I gave the facts from the book "Your M.P.," which show that Big Business, which stands for the private profit of which Mr. Kerr is such an admirer, was making money by exporting oil to Italy (then neutral), to be sent to Germany and used against our men. The same people sent copper, nickel and oil to Japan. That £2,000,000,000 in three years produced 23 modern tanks against Germany's 3,000 to 5,000. The Tory Party, who, like Mr. Kerr, are also champions of private profit, have decided not to reply officially to this book—but no doubt they would welcome Mr. Kerr's attempt to justify their action (or inaction).

Finally, I have no desire to be dragged into one of these marathon, boring correspondences at which Mr. Kerr excels.—Yours, etc.,
F. A. HORNIBROOK.

SIR,—The author of "Your M.P." is a very different sort of person from Mr. Douglas Reed, who has been given a free, gratis "blurb" by Mr. Smith in the current issue of "The Freethinker." Mr. Wintringham is a tried and trusted anti-Fascist who fought in Spain, and afterwards took a leading part in training Home Guards at Osterley Park, during a period when Mr. Reed, in his several "best sellers," was pandering to reactionaries and the baser emotions of the masses, by joining in the hue and cry against Fascism's greatest victim—the Jew. Why this publicity for an unashamed anti-Semite?

Mr. Hornibrook has praised Mr. Wintringham's excellent work; Freethinkers will perhaps pay heed to the condemnation of Mr. Reed's particular brand of anti-Semitism by such liberal reviewers as Norman Collins and Robert Lynd. And was it not our own H. G. Wells who unmasked Reed's association with the notorious Strasser brothers?—Yours, etc.,
PETER COTES.

THE ADDER'S BITE

SIR,—With mingled feelings of pity and disgust I read Normand Morrison's account of how he tortured animals and fish by exposing them to the bite of an adder.

What is the sense of this needless cruelty, is mankind one whit the better for the facts discovered? The mentality of a person who can deliberately inflict suffering on another creature, and, after callously watching it slowly die, publish the fact with pride is beyond my understanding.

The Priests organised the Inquisition to save souls, and even vivisectors make a pretence that they are benefiting humanity, but Mr. Morrison tortures merely in order to collect useless "data."

While secularists do not accept sentimental talk of "loving God's creatures," may I contend that we have no right to inflict suffering on a lower creature to appease morbid curiosity.—Yours, etc.,
K. W. GRIMES.

THE RIGHT TO AFFIRM

SIR,—I was recently summoned to serve as a juror at the Glamorgan Assizes held at Swansea. We were arranged in batches of seven (not twelve). I understand that this is a "war-time" practice. When our batch was empanelled, two out of the seven of us said we wished to affirm. The request was taken as a matter of course. We, each separately, repeated the words of the affirmation after the clerk—who knew the formula by heart. And that was that. No fuss; no question asked; nobody raised an eyebrow. The Judges' chaplain, sitting on the bench about eight feet away, looked quite unconcerned. What he thought is another matter. The presiding judge was Justice Sir Wilfred H. P. Lewis, O.B.E.

Moral: Freethinkers should always exercise their right in this matter.

Having regard to the correspondence between Mr. Irving and Mr. Corina, it would be interesting to know whether any witness who affirmed has ever been convicted of perjury.—Yours, etc.,
THOS. OWEN.

THE PAPACY

SIR,—If the Pope really enjoys the moral power and the political influence so many "influential circles" are eager to attribute to him, the man-in-the-street is entitled to ask: What he is waiting for to employ them to the benefit of mankind and the credit of the religion of which he claims to be the infallible Chief. During the last five years of carnage and destruction, the Holy Father has missed more than one occasion to step in with his alleged authority in the interest of humanity and justice; are his recurrent failure to perform, under the scant excuse of "neutrality," his obvious duties as Christ's Vicar and Ruler of Christianity can only be explained on the ground of lack of power or lack of good will.

The unescapable consequence of this fact is that in the first case—absence of moral power and political influence—"influential circles" are attempting to perpetuate a myth they intend to exploit in pursuance of their unholy interests; in the second, the alleged Vicar of Christ is a blasphemous and fraudulent Pretender, who should more rightly claim to be joint representative of Judas and Caiaphas. Absence of good will. In propping up a humbug or spreading a deceitful legend, the strains of "influential circles" are an outrageous insult to the most elementary principles of human decency and fundamental justice.—Yours, etc.,

A. HUNEAU,
President de la Federation Antifasciste Francaise.

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 Ethics of War."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Accrington.—Thursday, August 3, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORTT: A Lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Various Speakers.

Burnley (Market).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Enfield (Lancs.).—Friday, July 28, 7.30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames N.S.S. Branch (Kingston Market, Memorial 'Corner').—Sunday, 7 p.m., Messrs. T. W. BROWN and J. W. BARKER.

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.

Padiham.—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

Read (Lancs.).—Wednesday, August 2, Mr. J. CLAYTON: A Lecture.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Keighley Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Hall).—Sunday, 2.45 p.m.: Debate—"The Truth and Social Value of Christianity." Rev. H. M. BROOK v. Mr. F. J. CORINA. Chairman: Councillor A. R. BESTLEY (Bingley).

A RATIONALIST ON CHRISTIANITY

"FAITH, Reason and Civilisation"¹ is the title of a new book endeavouring to solve the problem of "finding a new system of values which enables men to live together in peace," and its author, Professor Harold J. Laski, finds it "difficult to see upon what basis the civilised tradition can be rebuilt save that upon which the idea of the Russian Revolution is founded."² Whether or not the proposition is adequate and desirable, I leave the reader of the book to decide for himself, though personally, I think that the Professor's solution concentrates a little too much on "Faith," to the exclusion of the more necessary "Reason." Indeed, the main theme of the book seems to be a eulogistic comparison of Christianity and Communism, which is singularly strange, coming—as it does—from the pen of a Past President and an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association!

Professor Laski says: "It is not surprising that, even when all the blunders and follies of its rulers are taken into account, the ethos of the Russian Revolution should have built, as early Christianity built, the elements of a universal fellowship," and goes on: "Faith in the Revolution possesses for its devotees the same kind of magic hold as Christianity exercised over its first followers. It is a call to what is highest in man . . ."³ So, throughout the book the same thing is repeated, and believing that a supernatural religion can no longer perform the work of reconstruction, the Professor offers a secular "religion" in its stead. He admits that both have committed excesses, but at all costs he must have his "faith."

Allowing, however, for figurative language, and leaving aside the obvious dangers of fanaticism, when—as Professor Laski says—"the idea of the Russian Revolution . . . has bred in its exponents a yearning for spiritual salvation,"⁴ I propose to deal solely with his claims for Christianity. He asserts that: "Even through the Dark Ages it (the Christian Church) kept alight a flame which slowly developed into a fire comparable both in its power to warm the heart and light the mind of man with the culture that it superseded."⁵ Nothing could be further from the truth, for Christianity was directly responsible for the Dark Ages while it was Moorish Spain that kept alive the flame of Pagan culture and so made possible the Renaissance, in spite of the Church! Yet the Professor goes further and maintains: "The victory of Christianity over paganism meant a revitalisation of the human mind,"⁶ or again, it was "a recovery of nerve in civilisation, a move from decay to regeneration, a revival of the values that give to man his status as *homo sapiens*."⁷

The evidence is otherwise. The eminent scholar, Renan, informs us that: "We may search in vain the whole Roman law before Constantine for a single passage against freedom of thought, and the history of the imperial government furnishes no instance of a prosecution for entertaining an abstract doctrine." Then came the disastrous triumph of the pale Galilean, for Christianity brought with it bigotry and intolerance, and a systematic persecution of heresy and unbelief which had previously been unknown. It became, says Draper, "a stumbling-block in the intellectual advancement of Europe for more than a thousand years." Is that how Christianity moved from "decay to regeneration" and revived "the values that give to man his status as *homo sapiens*"? Was the human mind revitalised by the neglect and destruction of the literary masterpieces of the ancient world, and by the substitution of crude theology for the scientific and philosophical investigations of the Greeks and Romans? Did a "recovery of nerve in civilisation" accrue from the ruination of the great Roman roads and aqueducts, beautiful edifices and splendid sanitary systems? Does Professor Laski really think that Christianity with its host of "Thou shalt nots"

gave "the passionate affirmation of the right of each human being to fulfil his individuality,"⁸ and that it built "the elements of a universal fellowship"? If he does, then I can only say that he is terribly mistaken!

"The great virtue of the early Christian Church lay in its emphasis on the elevation of the common man. It offered to the humblest of its believers the right to a faith in his salvation," he says, and continues: "It was the victory of this idea of an assured salvation . . . which gave a new status to the personality of the common man."⁹ This is delightfully naive, but it will not do. Professor Laski apparently forgets that the masses only accepted Christianity because it had been appointed the religion of the Roman Empire, and authorities tell us that even then they had often to be bribed and forced into adopting it. Surely the Professor must be aware of these facts; surely he must know that Christianity brought with it, not love, but hatred and corruption. Constantine himself deteriorated considerably under its influence, and so also did the empire, for rival sects soon engaged in bitter quarrels and controversies. Whatever change took place in the status of the "common man" was for the worse, and the religion that was forced upon him had the damnable effect of making him content with his lot, however lowly it might be. Christianity inculcated submission to rulers, and so lent itself to tyranny. Thus did Constantine make a wise choice! When the Professor refers to "assured salvation," however, there is one important thing that he has overlooked, namely the co-essential teaching of damnation. It cannot be denied that the harmful influence of the latter far outweighed the very doubtful good effect of "the secret consolation of heaven."¹⁰

Space limits my selection of a Rationalist's claims for Christianity, but the book will provide many similar examples to those I have given, as well as expressions such as: "When Christianity came, it enlarged the power of conscience,"¹¹ which I am at a loss to understand. Unhappily, Professor Laski has also been attacked by the "Christian ethic" microbe, which is so prevalent in our midst to-day. This ethic, he says, "stripped of its un-historical elements and . . . its eschatological character, is essentially an affirmation of the right of personality and, thereby, a denunciation of any social order which . . . denies that those rights are valid."¹² Fortunately, the Professor has supplied his own antidote for this complaint, admitting later that: "In its operation, that ethic has accommodated itself to slavery at its ugliest, to capitalism in its most ruthless form, to every war that has been waged since Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire."¹³ Here, at last, I have no criticism to make, for I am in entire agreement with Professor Laski, and it is therefore fitting to conclude on this note of harmony.

C. McCALL.

1 "Faith, Reason and Civilisation." An Essay in Historical Analysis. By Harold J. Laski. Gollancz, 1944.	8 Page 39.
2 Page 54	9 Pages 75-4.
3 Pages 56-7	10 Page 79.
4 Page 55	11 Page 147
5 Pages 69-70.	12 Page 81.
6 Page 29.	13 Page 134.
7 Page 57.	

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

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

Price 2d. each.

Postage 1d. each.

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