

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIV.—No. 37

Sunday, September 10, 1944

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

THE Rev. J. T. Welch is the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the B.B.C. All things considered a better description would be "Constrictor," for that would more accurately describe his function. His task is really to see that any opinions dealing with religion must not be of the kind that (a) directly attacks Christianity, (b) declares that another religion is superior to Christianity, or (c) suggests that the world would be better if religion was made a subject that is of private concern for such as believe in it. To call Dr. Welch's job one of "religious broadcasting" is, in plain language, false. Dr. Welch is, we understand, well paid for his post. It would be worth twice as much if, when he retires, the work that he does should come to an end and in its place a purely scientific study of religions, their origin and their social quality, should be undertaken. We do not say that Dr. Welch does not earn his salary. He does; but it is a task which a lover of truth and fair play would never think of accepting.

Working for the B.B.C. with Dr. Welch are a number of "Governors" appointed by the Government, each of whom receives a very comfortable payment for little service of £1,000 annually. And at least two of these Governors have publicly stated that, where broadcasting religion is concerned, the message goes into all sorts of homes, and the policy is, therefore, that of not doing or saying anything that will shock their primitive intelligence. Mark that these primitives have not asked to be kept at this low level where religion is concerned; it is the controllers of the B.B.C. who have laid it down as a working rule. It is apparently not a case of where the least informed ask the better informed not to enlighten them; it is the better informed who do not count it wise to tell them the truth about religion. Or it may be that they keep before them that part of the New Testament which tells them they should not offend even little children. But I would point out to the controllers that it is very easy to underrate the knowledge and the intelligence of those whom they are trying to keep in outer darkness. Even children are apt to be more sensitive to truth than their elders imagine. Children of ten or twelve are inquisitive, they are greedy for instruction, and often are forced to play the hypocrite to their parents and teachers because they force them so to do. One remembers the story of the young curate who took a party of boys to the Zoo, and pointed out to them that the storks were the birds that brought babies to their homes. And one of the boys, after looking pitifully at the curate, whispered to his companion, "Shall we tell him?" Youngsters are often very merciful to their elders; and if parents would co-operate might also be very helpful to them.

All of this, I may remark, is quite apart from whether Christianity is true or false, good or bad. It may be that the Atheist is altogether wrong and the Director of Religious Broadcasting and the well-paid and obedient Governors are in the right. That is a question that never can be settled until the believer and the unbeliever, the Atheist and the Theist meet in fair and open discussion with, say, a Director of the Study of Religion in the chair. To say that freedom of discussion—real freedom of discussion—would probably deceive many is fairly and fully met with the retort, "How can a Christian know that his religious opinions are right if he is never permitted to pass them through the cleansing fire of open criticism?" Theoretically and legally our laws are based upon the assumption that every citizen understands them. Of course, everyone does not understand them, and usually the citizen has to find out what is the law by breaking it. A judge will go to great pains to explain what the law is. Why cannot our clergy, and semi-clerical institutions, work on the same line with religion? Religion seems to say—sometimes does say—to the people, "You must not ask for proof of the truth of religion, you must believe in it; and then you must further believe that you understand it." In a civilised nation, religion turns the mental phases upside down.

No, nothing can make Dr. Welch's job anything but a very mean one, a cowardly one; a job that will continue only so long as people can be fooled. Religion is dying, and nothing can restore it to a perfectly healthy state. But it might be possible for it to die with dignity when the conditions are such that it can no longer live with honour.

Pity Our Leaders

I am afraid that many of my readers will wonder what exactly Dr. Welch has to do with what I have been writing, save that he is an agent of the B.B.C. This: The other day I came across a recently issued pamphlet by Dr. Welch on "The Ten Commandments." Over a cup of tea at a nearby teashop I made myself acquainted with its contents. And bearing in mind that he is, in addition to his main post, Chairman of "The Anvil Brains Trust," I thought that he might give me ninepennyworth of amusement. For the "Anvil" is the most remarkable institution in existence. It is made up of parsons of various brands, with one lady who has no ecclesiastical honours, and its task is to determine what is the meaning of what they themselves believe. It is interesting to note that they are seldom, either as a whole or in sections, certain of what it is they do believe. Like really good Christians, they began by believing first, long before they set to work to try to find out what the deuce it is they believe. That is good Scripture, for the New Testament says, "He that believeth shall be saved." If getting to heaven involved understanding, its population would be as scanty as in the

House of Commons when the parson reads the daily prayer.

Dr. Welch begins with a rather flashy opening, the gist of which illustrates his ability to rescue a falling cause. He says that the Ten Commandments have been going out of fashion—which is not true. About half of them never ought to have been in fashion; and the others are made up of commonplaces that are expressions of social life, and even at that need brushing up from time to time if they are to be properly beneficial. They are not more Jewish than they are Babylonian, or Persian, or Egyptian, and they belong to the Bible no more than they belong to every group of human or social animals, if the life of the group is to be maintained. Some small, faltering steps Dr. Welch has taken in his mental march because he has discovered that the Commandments are not Jewish in origin, and declares, with astonishment in every word, that "Every society observes most of them." For a B.B.C. religionist that is remarkably generous. It verges even on the fringe of heresy.

The curious thing is that even a trained parson—most carefully trained, since he does not appear to be acquainted with the commonest features of the philosophy of modern evolution—should be quite at sea concerning the origin and development of group life, whether we are dealing with human, semi-human or animal groups. For example, he says that when he first went to Africa and came into contact with natives how greatly surprised he was to find with these people that honesty was rigidly observed, and had been for centuries. The childishness of that surprise is well capped by the story that when he asked a friend (not one of the natives, but a brother Christian Englishman) why it was that the British people seemed much more naturally honest than others, the brother Briton said it was because for 400 years the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" had been read aloud in our parish churches Sunday after Sunday "till it has entered into our British character." I think that should help us to understand why the B.B.C. will permit no criticism of Christianity. But I think, as one might expect, that Mark Twain explained the close relation between the English people, honesty and God when he said that it was when he travelled round the world, and saw how much of it was "owned" by England, he remembered that the British people were mentioned in the Bible—"Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall inherit the earth."

But it is to be noticed that the native people whom Dr. Welch met did not need to be bullied every Sunday for 400 years to acquire the simplest qualities of associated life. They got to that state by nature. It was God's favourite people who needed hammering for four centuries before they could learn the lesson that honesty really is better than robbery in the long run; that truthfulness is better than lying—unless one is a Cabinet Minister or a preacher for the B.B.C.; and generally that human nature, with all its faults, is not the semi-criminal that preachers would have us believe unless they are carefully watched by an army of priests.

But let us be just towards Dr. Welch. Somehow, with that remarkable brain of his, he has reached the stage of thinking that the superiority of certain phases of behaviour to other phases might have been discovered

by man without God. That, he says, is the important thing. The laws of morality were discovered by man, but we must remember we didn't make them. That, he thinks, is very important. His summing-up of this phase is that God made moral laws and man found them, as he found diamonds or other material things.

Now, if Dr. Welch is not above taking a really friendly hint from an Atheist, I suggest that he should not, for the sake of his own reputation, stress the legend that man began his career in the Garden of Eden, and then, after long toil, discovered the moral law. Morals happen to be one of those things that never was discovered by any one person, or by any particular group of human beings. It is one of those phases of life that in the strictest Topsisian sense "grewed." Man never discovered morality; it is one of those phases of life that is expressed in action long before they assume the character of a theory. In the later part of his existence man came to recognise the function of what he came to call "morality," to widen its function, and create "laws" for its better understanding. I am stating the situation in the simplest way; and in this matter following the practice of the B.B.C. with regard to religion—that is, stating it, at the cost of mathematical-like accuracy, so that even a Director of Religious Broadcasts may understand the scientific point of view.

Further to elucidate, it must be borne in mind that man is derived from a gregarious animal group—it is suggested of an ape-like form; not, as is so often said, from apes. This does not mean that a female ape suddenly gave birth to a human form. "Derived" is the keyword here. Anyway, modern science is content to rest its case here. It is not a case of choosing between evolution and some other process; there is nothing else. The Christian "God made" is no more a rival explanation than Dr. Welch's talk is common sense. Man's physical structure is alone enough to prove the evolutionary case. It is the only theory that will explain the makeshift quality of man's bodily frame.

It must, in justice to Dr. Welch, be pointed out that he is not alone in displaying so much ignorance concerning the nature and development of morals. The kind of attack that was still popular in our youthful days has become completely discredited, with the result that a man in the position of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as others in high places in the Church, fall back upon this theory that morals is a part of human life that points to the existence of God. I am not going to argue the case now, but will satisfy myself, and perhaps help Dr. Welch to understand a question of importance, by commending two or three books which really ought to clear his mind on the subject and to remind those of the standing of the Archbishop of Canterbury that it is rather dangerous nowadays to act on such problems as the origin of morals as though we were living in a pre-evolutionary epoch. First, I would suggest to all concerned, if they are not familiar with the subject, to read carefully the fine fourth and fifth chapters of Darwin's "Descent of Man." These two chapters deserve attention because of their simplicity and force. Of course, Dr. Welch may have read Darwin's work; but if he believes his childish assumption that God created morals and man "discovered"

morality, it is really very, very bad, even taking the religious side of the B.B.C. as a standard. I almost owe Dr. Welch my thanks, for he gave me an excuse for reading again this fine piece of exposition. The next to be at least looked over is "Morals in Evolution," by Hobbouse (two very bulky volumes that may frighten the casual reader). The next on my list is Westermarck's "Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas" (again two bulky volumes, but again it is thorough). The last are two books by Karl Groos (1891 and 1898); the titles of the two are "The Play of Man" and the "Play of Animals." It is this last one that I stress for the benefit of Dr. Welch and our Archbishop. I can hardly believe that the latter has not read these books, particularly the "Play of Animals" and Darwin's "Descent of Man." If he has, his assertion that belief in God supplies a meaning to morals is difficult to understand.

I will finish with a telling quotation from Hobbouse. After dealing with animals, he says:—

"When we come to human society we find the basis for a social organisation of life already laid in the animal nature of man. Like others of the higher animals, man is a gregarious beast. His interests lie in his relation with his fellows, in his companionship . . . with his fellow men. His loves and hates, his joys and sorrows, his pride, his wrath, his gentleness, his boldness, his timidity—all these permanent qualities, which run through humanity and vary only in degree, belong to his inherited structure. . . . Hunger and thirst are of the nature instincts, but the methods of satisfying hunger and thirst are acquired by experience or teaching. Love and the whole family life have an instinctive basis; that is to say, they rest upon tendencies inherited with the brain and nerve structures. . . . Instinct, already plastic and modifiable in the higher animals, becomes in man a basis of character which determines how he will take his experience, but without experience is a mere blank form upon which nothing is yet written."

I do hope that Dr. Welch will turn to some of the books I have mentioned before he again gives one-sided talks for the B.B.C. He will not then be so foolish as to say God made morality and man discovered it. Man made his moral code for thousands of years before any gods appeared on the scene. Nay, he practised it before he understood its character. When he reached the stage of asking why certain actions were good and others bad, he explained it in terms of gods. But that was long, long ago, and to-day the nature and development of morality are well understood — except by those who carry on the religious work of the B.B.C., where questions are forbidden and the truth is seldom heard.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SAGE OR SOT

You can learn from the sage, you can learn from the sot; Indeed, from the latter you'll learn quite a lot! From the sage you will learn the things you should do, From the sot you will learn the things to eschew; And this is a fact, though it seems very odd— The sot knows much more than the sage about God!

—A. HANSON.

THE WOMAN PRIEST

(Scene: The Breakfast-room in Petit Magna Rectory, where the Reverend Harold Brown and his wife Edith are dawdling over breakfast.)

THE RECTOR (reading his morning paper): Good God! What an outrage!

WIFE: What's the matter, darling? War news again?

RECTOR: No. It's the Church news. Monstrous! Shocking! Outrageous! The Archbishop should act. What do you think? The Bishop of Hong Kong has ordained a woman a priest. A Chinese woman at that.

WIFE: Well, why not?

RECTOR: Why not! It's against all the traditions of the Church since the time of the Apostles. It's unheard-of. It's contrary to St. Paul's teaching. It's the beginning of the end for the Church of England. What will the Church of Rome say?

WIFE: You have always told me that Rome calls us heretics, and schismatics, and sectaries; and says that I am only your concubine, since priests cannot marry and you are no true priest. So what does it matter what Rome says?

RECTOR: Well, one does like a little respect from one's fellow Christians. Fancy, a woman a priest! Even in these days it's going too far.

WIFE: One a day a woman will be made a Bishop; then Archbishop of Canterbury. Then someone will discover that God is really a woman, and we shall have Goddess the Mother and Goddess the Daughter instead of God the Father and God the Son.

RECTOR: Don't be blasphemous, Edith—even when we are alone. You don't understand theology.

WIFE: Nor do you. Nor does anyone else. But why in the name of common sense shouldn't a woman be a priest? Then I could do your job. I am sure I should do it much better.

RECTOR (grimly): I am sure you would do it much worse. But that's not the point. The point is that the profession is let down.

WIFE (warmly): I don't see that at all.

RECTOR: You wouldn't, my dear. Women are all right as Sunday school teachers, as helpers, as parsons' wives, or even as deaconesses, provided in the last case that they are kept strictly to the job. But as ordained priests—no; it would not do at all.

WIFE: If a woman can teach she can preach.

RECTOR: Men would not come to church to listen to a woman laying down the law. Even the law of God.

WIFE: Men stay away as it is.

RECTOR: Besides, you cannot have a woman celebrating the Holy Communion.

WIFE: I don't see why not.

RECTOR: It's not traditional. It's not done.

WIFE: But it would be done if she did it.

RECTOR: Fancy a woman marrying people. Or burying corpses. Or baptising babies.

WIFE: Who could give better advice to the would-be married couple? Or comfort the relatives of the departed the better? Or hold the baby better at the Font? Look how you held the Simons' baby upside down at its christening the other day, till the poor little thing yelled blue murder and Mrs. Simons was so indignant that she nearly assaulted you in church! No woman could have made the mess you did. Why, you practically dropped the baby!

RECTOR: How could anyone tell which end of that wretched kid was the baptismal end? Both ends looked absolutely alike. But there you go: right off the point. Just like a woman.

WIFE: Well, coming back to the point, I say a woman can preach, pray, visit the parish, take the chair at meetings, officiate at services and do all the rest better than any man.

In fact, being a priest is a light and clean job exactly suited to a delicate woman; far more suitable than war-factory work or gallivanting about in ridiculous service uniforms and trying to pick up the nearest male.

RECTOR: Now, Edith, don't be catty.

WIFE: Don't "Now, Edith" me! You know I am talking sense.

RECTOR: No, you are not. I have no prejudices against your sex, darling, but even I can see women would not do as priests. Nature has unfitted them for the sacerdotal office.

WIFE: But what about ancient Greece and Rome? The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome had priestesses.

RECTOR: Pagans, my dear. You forget. We are Christians. Jesus never called a woman amongst the Twelve Apostles.

WIFE: But he called Judas Iscariot—a bigger mistake than calling a woman. No woman would have done worse than betray him if he had called her.

RECTOR: My dear, you don't understand these things. And you must not criticise Our Blessed Lord and Saviour. Not even at breakfast when we are alone. You will be doing it in public next without thinking. And then where will we be?

WIFE: You are only saying that because you cannot answer my point.

RECTOR: The answer is, as I said in my sermon the Sunday before the Sunday but one before—

WIFE: Don't quote your sermons at me, Harold, or I shall scream. There are limits even to the patience of a Rector's wife.

RECTOR: Edith, you are impossible!

WIFE: Thank you. And what are you I should like to know?

RECTOR: Now, don't let's quarrel. We have kept the peace for nearly a month—or rather I have.

WIFE: You mean I have. You are the quarrelsome one. As always! Why don't you admit that I am right and you are wrong?

RECTOR: Because the reverse is the case.

WIFE: You think so. Read that (handing him a paper).

RECTOR: What's this? (Reading.) "The Reverend John Barnett, during the fortnight he acted as curate in this parish, performed all his duties to my complete satisfaction. I can confidently recommend him to any incumbent in need of the temporary services of an assistant priest as a most earnest and capable young clergyman of sound but reasonable evangelical views." (Signed) P. F. Roberts, Vicar, St. Cuthberts, Plimpton, Devon. . . . Oh, that's your brother Jack.

WIFE: No, it is not Jack. It's me.

RECTOR: You. Nonsense. It's Jack.

WIFE: I tell you it's me. When you thought I was spending that fortnight with my mother I was in Jack's clothes acting as *locum tenens* at St. Cuthbert's. Oh, what fun I had! You need not look so appalled. No one knows. No one will ever find out.

RECTOR: But—good heavens!

WIFE: I made the finest curate St. Cuthbert's ever had. They all said so. And the Vicar was generous. I came back with a ten-pound note.

RECTOR: "The wages of sin—"

WIFE: Nonsense. I avoided celebrating the Holy Communion. Far from sinning, I worked hard and told others not to sin.

RECTOR: Darling, your sense of sin is defective. Even in our most intimate moments you seem to have no sense of it.

WIFE: Well, your sense of sin is morbid. I have told you before. Considering how small and unimportant your sins are.

RECTOR: Perhaps we should be practical. That tenner—

WIFE: You shall have a fiver of it, darling, to salve the shock to your ecclesiastical feelings. I got the idea from seeing one of your hens turning into a cock and starting to crow. Seriously,

I only did it to teach you that I am as good as you and a woman's as good as a man. Confess that I am.

RECTOR: Oh, better—better. I never got five pounds a week when I was a curate.

WIFE: Perhaps you were not worth it, darling. No, I did not mean that. I am sorry I was horrid. There! I forgive him. Come and kiss his little wife and be a good boy.

RECTOR: If you promise solemnly you won't do it again—

WIFE: Nonsense. The world—even the world of the Church—is moving. Before you die I shall be a parson myself and saving you the expense of a curate. And all the parish will say that "the grey mare is the better horse." . . . Now come and be kissed like a good boy.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

MAN AND HIS LANGUAGE

IN reviewing Dr. Bodmer's book, "The Loom of Language," Mr. T. F. Palmer writes: "This work is decidedly controversial, and many trained philologists will dissent from its conclusions." That is true, but for the rest Mr. Palmer appears to accept everything that Dr. Bodmer writes without checking up on the statements made.

I am not a trained philologist, but I happen to be an Esperantist and a Freethinker (with, I hope, the mental alertness that the latter term implies), and I believe that readers of "The Freethinker" will appreciate the following facts.

Although Dr. Bodmer points out that Volapük failed when tested as a spoken language at its Third Congress (1889; at the two previous Congresses, German was the language chiefly used), he does not, with what should be scientific accuracy and fairness, also point out that the Esperantists held their first (1905) and their twenty-nine subsequent International Congresses entirely in Esperanto with complete success. The average attendance at these Congresses has been nearly 1,200 people of dozens of nationalities from Shanghai to Dublin and Los Angeles.

On page 462 of "The Loom" we are told that Esperanto failed to persuade the League of Nations in its favour "in spite of wire pulling." The facts are that in 1922 the League of Nations Third Assembly had adopted a report in favour of Esperanto; and this was further discussed by the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, only to meet with obstruction from the French delegates, France at that time having a reactionary Government. This was an example of those nationalistic influences which eventually undermined the whole work of the League. Later French Governments, it is fair to say, came out strongly in favour of Esperanto.

Page 461: "Esperanto remained unchanged till 1894, when its author himself initiated a drastic reform." That statement is about as accurate as the first chapter of Genesis, and shows how careless are Dr. Bodmer's researches. Dr. Zamenhof, the author of Esperanto, wished to accommodate those who thought the language could be improved; but as most of the "improvements" suggested were mutually exclusive, he himself put forward an alternative form, and in 1894 brought the matter to a head by asking for a vote on the question. The voting showed that the overwhelming majority of Esperantists were against any changes in the language, and accordingly it was left unchanged. The Esperanto of to-day is the same as the Esperanto first published in 1887, except that new root words are added as the progress of science, art and culture demands. The grammar and all fundamentals remain exactly as with the original.

Evidence that Dr. Bodmer has not made a proper study of Esperanto is clear. On page 498 he gives forty words with their alleged Esperanto equivalents. Fifteen are incorrectly trans-

ACID DROPS

lated, and one of them with a word which does not exist in Esperanto. On page 467 he gives an alleged example of Esperanto in which he makes mistakes in both spelling and grammar, uses words with the wrong meanings, and fails to make use of the flexibility of the language to obtain good rhetoric.

On page 462 we are told that the "five accented consonants . . . impede recognition of international roots and slow down the speed of writing." Here the armchair critic divorces theory from practice. The accents, in fact, take the place of extra letters and therefore *aid* speed of writing; and it is found in practice that the accents, so far from impeding recognition of the roots, actually enhance it. Moreover, the number of accented consonants is six, not five.

Page 464: "Zamenhof's vocabulary consists of a collection of arbitrarily chosen roots . . ." Dr. Bodmer repeatedly accuses Zamenhof of being arbitrary. Let us quote Zamenhof's own words: "The most known words of the Aryan languages were chosen and very carefully prepared so that they conformed to the requirements of an absolutely regular grammar, and orthographical and practical applicability, and so that the words and forms should not come into collision with one another."

Dr. Bodmer's various criticisms of the structure of Esperanto (the objective case-ending, derivative affixes, adjectival concord, regular conjugation of the verb, etc.) may seem plausible enough to the superficial inquirer, but for those whose purpose is sincere, and who understand *all* the tasks which an international language must perform (which are not confined merely to the task of spreading a knowledge of modern technics), these features to which he objects are proved in practice to be essential. Dr. Bodmer himself makes (Chapter XII) several "new" suggestions for the basis of an international language (such as that it should be essentially an isolating language, its rules of grammar would be rules of word-order; its word material essentially Latin-Greek; its list of ordinary words not more than a thousand and the project to abolish many verbs in favour of combining operators with basic verbs) which Zamenhof himself tried out thoroughly during the fifteen years when he was constructing Esperanto, and found that they would not work.

These are only a few of the faults in Dr. Bodmer's dealing with Esperanto, but they are sufficient to show that he is not an authority on that subject; and the ordinary reader is left wondering how many similar mistakes would be found by the peoples who speak and use the many other languages with which he deals in his book. If Darwin had produced his "Origin," and Frazer his "Golden Bough," with as little regard for scientific exactitude, what useful purpose would they have served? For all Dr. Bodmer's academic criticisms of Esperanto, its author did take much greater pains to be accurate.

Finally, one cannot help feeling that anybody really in earnest to overcome the "curse of Babel" would at least learn Esperanto properly, put it to a practical test by using it to communicate with Esperantists in diverse parts of the world, and thus study the movement and the language from the inside (which is the only way properly to study any language) before passing judgment.

PETER BALL.

GEMS FROM INGERSOLL

"The destroyer of weeds, thorns and thistles is a benefactor, whether he soweth grain or not."

"Colleges are places where pebbles are polished and diamonds dimm'd."

"Is there any such thing as Methodist mathematics, Presbyterian botany, Catholic astronomy or Baptist biology? What has any form of religion to do with any science or facts? Nothing but to hinder, delay or embarrass."

MR. CHURCHILL paid an official visit to the Pope in Rome, and is graciously received. He is followed by Mr. Attlee with another official visit to the Pope, who is likewise graciously received. What a pity it is they did not visit the Pope to ask for his influence to prevent the brutal assaults of Italian soldiers on the Abyssinians. At any rate the Pope has no political power over the Italians, and we believe that if a vote were taken there would be no more Kings—for awhile at least—in that country.

We wonder whether the visit and the conversation turned in any degree to the question of what has become of the seven hundred and fifty million Italian lire in cash and the billion of lire in Italian Government bonds paid by Mussolini to the Pope in 1929 in return for the renouncing of all claims outside Vatican City. The Pope and Mussolini appeared to be on excellent terms.

The serious and the ridiculous often run cheek by jowl, and we see an illustration of this in the notice that "at the King's desire"—please note the wording—September 3 was to be observed as a national day of "prayer and dedication." It is all very ridiculous, and it is not the less so because it begins with a lie and ends with an harlequinade. The lie is that this farcical day of prayer is by the desire of the King. That is not the truth, certainly not in substance. In such matters the King acts as his religious advisers "suggest." Some advertising must be done if the churches are to slow up the process of decay that has set in where they are concerned. And who is better fitted to lead the procession than the King? He is the head of the Church, the defender of the faith, and King George and God can meet as monarch to monarch to help us win the war—particularly now when there is no doubt of our winning the war whether God takes the King's tip or not.

But why ask the believers in deity to pray? Presumably they have been doing this all the time. We had a number of days of prayer, and setback followed setback. Then the clergy dropped the set days of prayer. The consequences were too suggestive. But when the tide turned, and now there is no doubt whatever that we shall win the war, our artful religious leaders decide that it is once again safe to introduce God to the public notice in a public way. But the plan of keeping the churches open night and day, so that whoever dropped into church, to rest their feet, or to consider things, to consider the best horse for the "3-30," to meet a "dame," or even to say a prayer, would all be counted together to the better advertising of "he who sitteth on the throne" and they who as his representatives reap their profit on earth. It was a very artful trick, this non-stop prayer business; it made the people responsible for the existence of unpleasant things, instead of the clergy. One needs a long spoon to sup with the clergy.

The foolish parade of the Day of Prayer which was suggested in the name of the King, although in these matters he does only as he is "advised" (which serves to add stupidity to humbug), has caused one of our readers to dash into verse:—

If *praying* can win a "bloody" war,
What the hell are we "fighting" for?

We give it up.

But since the fiasco of the last day of prayer we have had a war development in the shape of the flying bomb plague. That really did offer God a chance of "cashing in," and also the clergy. God might have made each of these flying bombs to turn round and explode in the midst of bodies of Germans. It would have decisively disproved Hitler's claim that he was carrying out God's will with regard to his war. If a hint may be given by an Atheist to either the King or the clergy, we can assure them that this slaughter of children and old people, of breaking up God's churches, and even the war itself, has driven large numbers to reflect on the value of religion, and the doubts will not be removed by a Royal invitation to go to church and thank God for his goodness. "There is blood upon the hand," and pantomimic performances headed by King and priests will not wipe it clean.

The Government is being blamed by some people for not doing more for the public by way of protecting them from flying bombs. We think that unwarranted. The flying bomb can only, apparently, be met by shooting them down before they come over a crowded city. They cannot be driven back like war-planes. But all Christians believe that God could, if he would, scatter them to the winds before they got near the shore. Yet the people who blame the Government lack either the courage or the sense to lift the blame from their Government to their God. It was Heine, we think, who said that camels and Christians were the only animals that take their burdens kneeling.

The "Osservatore Romano" is now beginning to get alarmed at the way in which Italian Fascists are slowly but surely getting ousted, and Italian Communists, notoriously disrespectful to the claims of the Vatican, taking their place. It has therefore uttered a solemn warning against those who are combining Roman Catholicism and Communism and calling themselves "Catholic Communists." "These people, it declares, are trying to usher in "a beautiful tyranny" which shuns neither "dictatorship nor violence." The Vatican paper should, however, make it clear as to whether it is the Catholic or the Communistic part of the combination which loves tyranny. In any case, it was Pope Pius XI. who said that no one could be a good Catholic and a good Socialist at the same time.

The same dare-devil paper—the organ of the Papacy—has now become sufficiently daring to denounce the destructive work of the Germans in Florence. Divine "influence" evidently could not be counted upon while the Germans were in Rome. One of our correspondents calls our attention to the fact that the Pope has not denounced the flying bomb. But candidly we do not see any distinction between the bomb that flies and the bomb that is carried and dropped, or between that and a man-of-war firing on another man-of-war that is too far away to hit back. The aim of each general or commander is to get the enemy at a disadvantage, not to wait until each side is equally manned.

A pitiful example of "pathetic fallacy" was recently furnished by the women of Warsaw. The anticipated help not coming to hand from any of the Allies, they have sent to the Pope for help. They say in their appeal, "Only God is with us," and we may add that he is, as usual, doing nothing. And the Pope! What is he likely to do? His task will be to see to what extent he can profit from the troubles of others, and as a thorough-going Fascist in both theory and practice he has to take very careful steps. Of course, when the Allies have re-established Poland the Papacy will rejoice, for Poland is one of the strongholds of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic papers are naturally very displeased at our leading caricaturist, Low, depicting the double dealing of the Roman Church with regard to the European political situation. Very solemnly it announces that "It is extremely bad taste to use the weapon of the cartoon against religious bodies." It also announces that the "editor and owner of the paper (the 'Standard') are unable to refuse any of his work without risking losing all." Which only makes us realise how glad we ought to be in having at least one journalist who is not afraid to let out the truth about the Roman Church and its political manoeuvres. It would be better for all—except Roman Catholic leaders—who have the courage, so dangerous a feature of the Roman Church.

The "Catholic Herald" notes with satisfaction that while the village of Lisieux is in ashes, the Basilica of St. Teresa is unharmed. The explanation would seem to lie in the fact that either God does not care the proverbial tinker's curse for the people at home so long as the statues of his heavenly pets are secure, or that the Germans are too religious to destroy the statue of a saint. Most people would sooner have seen the village preserved and the idol smashed.

Strenuously as some of our clergy, including those who are with the Forces, stress the matter, the lie of the growth of

belief in Christianity among the troops is gradually breaking down. The opposite of this is so definitely the case that several clergymen have reluctantly confessed that unbelief is rapidly growing. One way of expressing this lie is to say that our men are showing greater interest in the Bible and in Christianity. That is true, but it is not the truth suggested by the preachers. Our own literature is in constant call by the troops, and our regret is that the paper shortage prevents us sending more than we are doing at present. But they are doing good work, and the greater benefit to Freethought will come when the troops return home. When that does arrive the B.B.C. religious propaganda will look more ridiculous than it does at present.

Proof of what has been said was given at a recent meeting of the Glasgow Presbytery. The Rev. Stewart Thomson said quite plainly that before the war a great many men had lost interest in religion. At the same meeting the Rev. Davidson said the Presbytery "ought to face the fact that the Church had lost its hold on many of the younger men and women," but he thought they may give the Churches another chance. Mr. Davidson is foolishly hopeful. A man may never know the truth, but once known it remains. To use an old phrase, A nose that has been pulled cannot be unpulled. A man may be ignorant of the truth about religion all his life, but once the truth is known it remains known for ever.

With regard to the series of lectures on "Life after Death." Those who are familiar with what the B.B.C. considers a discussion will not be surprised to learn that the Rev. Canon F. H. Brabant opens the discussions, continues the discussions, and finally closes the discussions. The Canon will knock himself down occasionally for him to jump to his feet unhurt, and in the end will play the part of referee by pronouncing that Canon Brabant has triumphantly handled the Canon Brabant who dared to cross swords with him.

We need give only one example of this double-barrelled Canon. He decides that in God's world "there is no room for death," and in Christianity death "is robbed of its terrors." All we need say is that there are plenty of funerals in "God's world," and the vast majority of mourners act as though death is a very real thing indeed. All the idle talk of myriads of preachers has never altogether taken away from death its sorrow. Put on one side the stereotyped expressions used to hide the sorrow of parting, the Christian and Atheist are on the same level.

As to the "terror" of death, that is entirely and completely of religious origin. There are, in fact, no greater cowards in the face of death than Christians, however much they may be camouflaged. Sorrow is a compliment to both the living and the dead. But terror exists only for fools and those who have the better part of their intellect poisoned by a religious training. Christianity befouls death as it does life. Death should bring only the cleansing sorrow of those we have loved or respected. To basic Christianity, it suggests nothing higher than the reprieve of a convicted criminal.

"Never again" is the loudly expressed determination of the Allied leaders with regard to the war. But most ordinary folk like ourselves would be better pleased if we knew exactly what our leaders mean by it. If "Never again" has reference to Germany, that "Never again" may be achieved. But the gain will not be what it ought to be if the opportunity for more war is left open to other peoples. Given a chance to get what a people wish to get by force, and there will always be those who will swallow the bait. And the use of the flying bombs opens up the curious vision of a war when each of the combatants will sit at home, never even seeing the "enemy," and comfortably smashing each other to pieces; and the lavish use of poisonous gases will add attraction to the method. Bad as it is, the wars of the future may make those of to-day look like the amusements of a handful of children.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

- A. WALKER.—We did not say that we should reap great advantages from the war, although we need betterment, and the close of the war *might* render opportunities for betterment. But it is clearly to our advantage to avoid being dominated by such a religious movement as German Nazism.
- C. F. WALL.—Certainly this paying special and official visits to the Pope is a practice which should be abolished. That the Pope has followers, or worshippers, in all countries has nothing to do with the issue. At its best, the visits of politicians is with an eye on the voters of whatever country they belong. At its worse—we leave everyone to fill the gap.
- A. R. OWENS.—Thanks for order. We will reserve you a volume.

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

IT is hardly a "Sugar Plum" to announce that we have had another visit of the enemy at "The Freethinker" and N.S.S. Offices, but there is no other part of the paper for a note informing our friends that we have again had a taste of enemy bombing. Fortunately, we came through with nothing more serious than damage to windows and inner doors, with a fine scattering of books and pamphlets, and a devil of a lot of dust about the premises. So we go on as usual.

It must be about nearly forty years since we first wrote in these columns an article stressing the point that the only way to secure permanent peace would be by the agreed abolition of national armies and the creation of an international armed force at the orders of an international court. The old slogan, "In times of peace prepare for war," means war sooner or later. We are the more pleased to see that a step in this direction has been taken in the form of a request of the Russian Delegation to a United States Conference as to how far Britain and the U.S.A. are prepared to go in creating an international force formed by Britain, Russia, China and the U.S.A., with France to join as soon as possible. Smaller nations could also be invited to form a membership of a consultative body. The lesson before us is that national armies means war sooner or later.

We are indebted to that fine work just issued, "English Social History," by G. M. Trevelyan for the following illustration of the manner in which our noble families have worked to create a great nation. It is actually an epitaph:—

Here rests all that was mortal of Mrs. Elizabeth Bate,
Relic of the Reverend Richard Bate.
A woman of unaffected piety
And exemplary virtue.
She was honourably descended,
And by means of her alliance to
The illustrious family of Stanhope
She had the merit to obtain
For her husband and children
Twelve several employments
In Church and State.

She died June 7, 1751, in the 75th year of her age.

We have only to look at the record of Parliament to-day to realise that alliance to "illustrious families" is still a sure way of securing highly paid posts in this "Democratic" State of ours.

And here is another passage from the recent fine piece of work by G. M. Trevelyan, "English Social History":—

"The habits of thinking about the past as divided into watertight 'periods' is most dangerous of all in economic and social history. For periods have usually been assorted, as their names imply, for purely political reasons—the age of the Tudors, 'the age of the Louis,' and so forth. But economic and social life takes little heed of the death of kings or the accession of new dynasties; absorbed in its own daily task, it flows on like an underground river, only occasionally making an eruption into the upper daylight of politics, though it may all the time be their unacknowledged and unconscious arbiter."

The book is a joy to read and a pleasure to think about afterwards.

Will our readers be good enough to bear in mind that with the restricted size of "The Freethinker" we find it impossible to print the majority of the letters sent us, chiefly because of their length. Letters should be very brief if they are to be published. When the paper supply will permit we shall be glad to be more generous in the matter.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. has prepared a very attractive programme of events for the indoor season, lectures, brains trust and open discussions make up the items all of which will be held in the Mechanics Institute, Bradford. All Freethinkers and sympathisers within attending distance are invited to apply for a syllabus from the local secretary, Mr. W. Baldie, 2, Kingsley Crescent, Baildon, Shipley, Yorks. To-day (Sept. 10), Mr. F. J. Corina will be the speaker at 6-30 p.m. on "The Minister and the Monkey." Bradford is making for a really strong branch, and asks for the support of all local unattached friends of the movement.

Blackpool Freethinkers interested in the formation of a local branch of the N.S.S. are invited to communicate with Mr. W. J. McMurray, 30, Woodland Grove, Blackpool, Lancs.

Two items of interest: Sunday, September 3, National day of thanksgiving and prayers for the speedy success of our arms. Monday, September 4, B.B.C. announcer in 9 p.m. news, Home Service, "To-day the weather on the French battlefront went from bad to worse, making air activity a wash-out."

Mr. Hannen Swaffer says he "would like to hear Chapman Cohen, the Primate General of the Salvation Army, and a leading Rationalist have a real go," and he wants to know "Why is the B.B.C. so afraid?" So far as Chapman Cohen is concerned, he would prefer a man of a better calibre than the one mentioned. But he might as well ask for the Pope of Rome to hold in St. Peter's a discussion on the value of Roman Catholicism. The B.B.C. is, after all, not more afraid than other leading Christians of a genuine discussion on the value of Christianity than are Christian leaders in general. A fear of open discussion is a marked feature of Christian leaders nowadays.

Here is another example. The Bishop of Worcester says in the columns of the "Church of England Newspaper" that "a most outstanding feature is the demand for religion." Well, who prevents those of the laity having as much as they wish? There is no law against going to church—we hear of no complaints that they are overcrowded. The situation is in direct opposition to any such assumption. The churches are three-parts empty, and are not filled when the most attractive programmes are provided. Still, the declaration that the eagerness of people to go to church is the most outstanding piece of impudence up to date.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

RECENTLY, I was asked to support some war activity, part of the object of which was, as the circular stated, "to restore to the world the system of Christian Ethics."

Apart from the typically impudent attempt of professional Christians to use the war for imposing Christianity on our Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Arab and Indonesian allies, and on the millions of atheist supporters of the Allied cause, it must be pointed out that there is, strictly speaking, no "system of Christian Ethics."

* * *

One of my fundamental objections to the Christian system is that its leaders profess to believe the most extraordinary things, to me the most horrible rubbish, for which there is not the faintest shred of evidence, things which the most cursory knowledge of Comparative Religion shows to be myths invented by panic-stricken, primitive people, making wild guesses to explain the workings of Nature, theories now shown by scientific discovery to be completely false as interpretations of natural forces. Later, a priestly class cashed in on the panic and codified the myths as tabus, which were taken over from generation to generation. Their personalities, places and other factors were given new names at different times and places, and handed out to the gullible public as "Truth." One religious organisation claims to have a kind of truth of its own, different from ordinary truth. Nobody who had studied the history of religion can possibly believe the dogmas of religion, and it is because of this lack of criticism on the part of Christian teachers that I doubt their views. If a man tells me that virgins have babies, by the very preposterous nature of his claim, I require from him in its support proof which is superlatively good. All I get is a paltry few lines in a shockingly untrustworthy book, full of lies, contradictions and forgeries. The evidence for virgin births is superlatively bad and, indeed, completely contemptible. These people profess to believe, also, in a mass of fables and magic which destroys my faith in their intelligence, magical springs, miraculous medals, saintly relics, such as a piece of bone, prayer formulæ, wonder working unctions, and so on, all useless for their alleged purposes.

A code of conduct taught by such people, based on such flimsy evidence, is at once under suspicion. Let us examine the system in detail.

Ethics may be defined as a code of conduct regulating human behaviour and the relations of man to man in organised societies. We can at once disprove the Christian claim to be the original perfect system by noticing the obvious fact that ethical systems are, like all else in nature, the result of evolution. Man has been on earth tens of thousands of years, and in the course of that time, by trial and error, has evolved social systems suited to his needs at any particular time and place. Men do not live in a socially organised way for centuries without evolving some ethical system. In this way different social customs arose; and in this way also evolved what theologians call "Conscience." At this point I should warn you against being tricked by these abstractions, such as "Conscience," "Divinity," "Soul," "Sin," "Inspiration," etc., words which are quite meaningless since they have no counterpart in reality. These words are relics of primitive ignorance, but are still used for their own purposes by uncritical theologians. The word "conscience" is ever personified, as in the phrase, "My conscience told me to do this." If conscience tells things, it must have an audible voice, and therefore animal existence, an absurd idea but one which logically follows from these theological claims. I do not know of anything more abhorrent than this loose habit of personifying abstractions, things which have no existence. The best and completely sufficient reason for stating that the feelings we loosely

call "conscience" are simply evolved, accumulated and accepted prohibitions on certain types of conduct, and sanctions for other types, is that one's "conscience" about "good" and "evil" conduct, will vary in time and place; conscience is simply the personal reflection of current public opinion. A clergyman turned soldier will kill without shame, and even with pleasure; an Anglican turned Moslem may have many wives and possibly enjoy it; a Pope, paid enough money or persuaded of its political importance, will grant a divorce, and so on. In Germany to-day, extramarital sex relations are not only permitted—they have almost been ordered by the State. The "conscience" of a German girl five years ago would have been revolted by what she is so joyfully anxious to do to-day.

So that Conscience and Ethics are a simple evolution, and go on changing as much to-day as for thousands of years past. And in the course of that evolution it is interesting to note that of all the attempts to set down a written code, the Christian, as exemplified in the Bible, is to my mind by far the worst. Much of the Old Testament morality is repulsive and disgusting. All the best codes have been the work of non-Christians—Confucius, Buddha, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Spinoza, Bertrand Russell. Some, such as Plato and Aristotle, advocate slavery, but none descend to the appalling Christian degradation of advocating Hell and Damnation.

It is interesting to examine the ethical teachings of the Christian Bible and see what intrinsic value they have and what effect they have on the conduct of Christians.

At the outset it is important to decide what is specifically Christian—that is, what rules of conduct were unknown before the time of the alleged Christ. Christians specifically claim that their system started the idea of brotherly love and first stressed the importance of individual values. But these ideas are as old as the oldest manuscripts, and ante-dated the alleged Christ by many thousands of years. And, especially as to the second claim—to recognise individual values—one need only mention the extremely rigid tyranny of the ecclesiastical system down to the Reformation, and of the Roman Church to-day, to realise the emptiness of such a claim. The mediæval Christian Church was the first Fascist regime, and all later samples, particularly those of our time, are but copies of the original, no difference in principle, and just as intolerant in practice. The implacable intolerance of the Roman Church is not only evident in, say, Spain to-day, where the ruling clerical caste has made all other religions illegal, but it is cheerfully admitted by its leaders. Dr. Pohle, in the Catholic Encyclopædia, says: "Dogmatic Intolerance (on the part of the Church) is not only a right; it is a sacred duty." To claim for such a system that it recognised human individuality is a hollow mockery. And the intolerance of all organised religions refutes the claim that they recognise the sacredness of individual convictions. A religious group, such as the Christian ramp of the English people, make no secret of their contempt for the rights of other people to attend a theatre on a Sunday, and of their intention to enforced attendance at a theatrical ritual in costume at a church.

* * *

Let us now examine in detail the relationship of Christian teaching, as we find it in the sacred Christian book, to human evils. Of them all, the worst is war. I do not believe that Jesus Christ ever existed, but if he did, and possessed the power attributed to him, it seems more than strange—to me it seems deplorable—that instead of a few paltry "miracles" which mean absolutely nothing to the troubled world of to-day, he did not give us the advice necessary to enable us to abolish war and to promote human happiness for ever. The way Christians hedge about how Christ permitted evils he must have foreseen, and was competent to prevent, is pitiful; even the reputedly most powerful intellect and best "inspired" teacher of Christian Ethics, Thomas Aquinas, fails miserably to explain the problem

of Evil in human affairs. Christ had, so it is said, the power to do anything; why did he not do something to prevent human suffering? It may be, of course, that suffering is pleasing to Christ; statements to that effect are constantly issued by the Churches. If that is so, I must confess that my code of conduct in this matter is different from that of Christ, and that I believe mine is better. Christ is alleged to have uttered some pious platitudes and some curiously objectionable threats. Why did He not, instead of these, announce a programme of social and ethical principles of enduring value? There is an enormous range of social problems which Christ left completely untouched, and for which, therefore, the "Christian Ethical System" is completely useless. Why did Christ remain silent about these extremely important things? We do not know, except that it is certain that the Christian Bible is a collection of documents written for human beings of more than average frailty, who were not above a little faking and forgery.

PROFESSOR J. V. DUHIG.

(To be Continued)

IN PRISON FOR OPINION

IF it is true that an autocracy invariably makes a concordat with religion, then the following account of my experiences in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison will not surprise anyone.

What could be more autocratic than the prison system? And what is more superstitious and religious than the ideology that maintains that because a man breaks the law he shall be isolated from his fellow beings in solitary confinement?

I was particularly struck by the "religious" atmosphere of the prison; the rule of silence which operates—enforced, I should imagine, to enable the prisoners to meditate on their past wickedness, the architecture of the prison, with its "cloisters" and covered walks, and the spectacle of men clad in drab grey ill-fitting clothes slowly shuffling about their various tasks (no one hurries in prison). Also, during the first fortnight of my sentence the mattress was taken out of my cell at night. I doubt if any of the Christian Fathers suffered more in their penances than did I trying to find a soft spot on which to rest. All this reminded me irresistibly of the monks of old.

My offence was no doubt serious: I dared to deny the right of the all-powerful State to coerce the individual—the same State that makes provision for an objection to military service and then penalises the conscientious objector again and again.

On my committal to Wormwood Scrubbs Prison, to serve first a week and then a twelve weeks' sentence, I was taken before the prison chaplain and asked, "What religion?" I replied: "I have no religion. I'm an Atheist." It was almost comical how all eyes were raised; the prison governor stared curiously and the "screws" (warders) shuffled their feet. By this time the chaplain had had time to think of what he no doubt considered a witty retort. He smiled at his colleagues as he said: "What a paradox—an Atheist with a conscience!" I was feeling rather strange and a little depressed, and I hope not too timidly observed that I was not aware that Christians had the monopoly of consciences. It would have been interesting to ascertain how this parson defined "conscience."

On my second visit to Wormwood Scrubbs I was taken before a different chaplain, and on being asked the usual question, "What religion?" I gave the usual answer, "I have no religion. I'm an Atheist." There was an almost audible gulp from the chaplain, who, with a scowl, said: "Do you realise what this means? You will be locked in your cell whilst the others go to church," and turned to the governor for corroboration, who, I think, nodded but did not answer. I felt angry at being thus threatened and replied as coolly as I could.

"I would prefer being locked up to going to church." I had been to a church service in Brixton Prison, and thought that the alternative could not be worse.

It should be noted that to be locked in one's cell is considered by most prisoners to be the worst punishment. It seems that by this threat—sometimes actually made, sometimes implied—the prison chapels are filled. I state this after due consideration, for the cynical attitude that most prisoners have towards religion is obvious; few of them admitted to me that they ever went to church "outside." It was amusing to see the eagerness with which they fell in at church parade, for "inside" the service is regarded as a welcome break in the deadly monotony of prison life. One can also hear the "news" at church, and although "worshippers" have to sit at least three feet from each other it is possible to converse in whispers.

It was a revelation to me to note how prisoners will risk dire punishment (and, remember, the "screws" are all-powerful) for a chance to talk with each other on every possible occasion; and yet this can be understood when it is realised that prisoners are locked in their cells over the week-end from 3-30 on Saturdays to 8-30 on Mondays, except for about three hours for church, exercise and necessary duties.

Reading matter "inside" does not reach a particularly high standard, so I applied for permission to have certain literature sent in. I asked my wife to send me, among others, "The Freethinker" and the "New Statesman." I duly received the "New Statesman," but was informed that I would not be allowed to receive "The Freethinker" "because it is a newspaper." I pointed out that if "The Freethinker" is a newspaper, then so too is the "New Statesman." I observed that the Quakers could receive the "Friend," the Jehovah's Witnesses the "Watchtower," every Christian the Bible, and the Jews the Old Testament. However, it was of no avail. I did not get my "Freethinker" even when I left the prison. I was told it would be destroyed. I could not trace "Almost an Autobiography," which I had sent in to a comrade previously serving a sentence, and so my literary sustenance was very meagre.

During my last two weeks I managed to sneak to the Quaker meetings (facetious "screws" called us "porridge"). I went not only out of curiosity, but our work seemed to be more monotonous than usual and I felt I must have a change. I can fully understand now why prisoners look forward to the church service. These Quaker meetings were indeed a welcome break, and I pay tribute to the organisers of these meetings. The discussions reached a high level. I was only sorry that I, as an uninvited guest, could not put forward the Freethinker's point of view. Even so, I could with a little imagination think I was back at an indoor meeting of the N.S.S.

When the "buzz bomb" raids were beginning we were rushed back to our cells. On two Sundays no services were held; exercise consisted of walking in the stale atmosphere of the prison wing for about ten minutes. I could never find out why the church services were suspended. Perhaps the church wasn't safe; even Christians do not trust their God to deflect bombs from his own house. "O ye of little faith." And yet who can blame them. I did not feel so very brave during an air raid alone in a cell on the top floor, the only communication with others a bell, the ringing of which was usually ignored; and a continual ringing was severely frowned upon. Even prisoners seriously ill were very loth to use the bell.

I wonder if the authorities realise the mental agony of some men during an air raid, denied the psychological solace of companionship. Even the most self-sufficient of us would welcome being able to talk to others in those times of stress.

Solitary confinement in normal times is surely uncivilised; in these times it is barbaric. I have spoken with men who were in concentration camps. All agreed that it compared favourably with prison; at least one had human companionship.

It would be interesting to know whether prisoners are the only section of the community that have no air raid protection. Is this a new field which humanitarians might explore with a view to bringing about a more humane outlook on the part of the prison authorities?

A quotation is always doubly trenchant when it is from an opposing ideology. What better conclusion could I find than this statement by Winston Churchill: "The mood and temper of the public with regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country."
J. S.

A NOTE ON PROPAGANDA

THERE are two widely contrasted attitudes towards the matter of propaganda in literature. First, there is the idea that all literature is necessarily propagandist in its intentions—if not consciously, then unconsciously, with the corollary that a novelist who writes books which accept the present-day social order of Britain is therefore producing anti-Socialist and anti-Communist and anti-Fascist propaganda. Second, there is the view of the somewhat outmoded "Ivory Tower" kind of writer, to the effect that the creative artist who descends to any sort of propaganda is thereby weakening the position of literature, harnessing the chariot of the imagination and restricting the paths along which it may run.

Anyone who has read the works of the inter-war community of "Leftish" poets will be aware that there is something to be said for both these points of view. Some of the works of W. H. Auden, for instance, have gained by the political attitude that they were written to inculcate, while others would have been far improved if the political moral had not been so violently stressed.

In the realm of fiction, too, contrasts of this kind can be seen. That magnificent trilogy of novels of Ancient Rome which were written by Jack Lindsay in the years 1934-1935, and which were published under the titles "Rome For Sale," "Cæsar is Dead" and "Last Days with Cleopatra," undoubtedly gained because the situation of Rome 2,000 years ago was unobtrusively linked with the situation of modern Italy smarting under the heel of Mussolini. Yet, as Douglas Goldring has pointed out in his autobiography, "Odd Man Out," nothing can so easily damn a writer of fiction in the eyes of the ordinary reading public as the label of "propaganda novelist."

What, then, is the poor writer to do? If he writes of the political or social problems which engross him he may be condemned as a mere propagandist; while if he does not stress these, contenting himself with adopting an attitude towards life which is either romantic or realist, in accordance with his temperament, he is accused by many critics who count in the world of being "escapist." This is a dilemma which all writers have to face, and which readers in their turn should appreciate.

A well-known novelist of my acquaintance was recently at a ceremonial lunch of some kind. He happened to sit next to the buyer for one of the principal lending libraries. My friend the novelist happens to be a versatile man who has written all kinds of fiction in his time, and the library representative spoke to him of this, pointing out that his very versatility was his greatest handicap. "Readers know well enough," he said, "that they will get a competent detective story from Agatha Christie or a straightforward novel of English life from J. B. Priestley, but with you one never knows what to expect. The result is that readers tend to fight shy of your work."

The connection of that little anecdote with my theme of propaganda in literature should be obvious enough. All writers who are worth their salt will have occasional periods in which they feel deeply on some political theme. Then whatever they write will inevitably become propagandist in its intentions.

And, equally certain, there will be occasions when almost all writers will be swept off their feet by an idea without deep political implications. Then whatever they write will be marked by an absence of political propaganda.

The solution therefore remains, as always, about equally divided between the reader and the writer. No writer should shirk the task of propaganda or of "escapism," whichever appears to him to be the most vital at the moment of writing. And—equally important to my mind—the reader should not demand that everything written by a favourite author should be on the same creative level. The late Edgar Jepson once said that he wrote a highly successful "thriller" about the beginning of this century, and that he went on writing that book for the rest of his life. That, I feel, is what the reading public has no right to demand of an author. We do not expect a painter to go on painting the same model throughout his career, or a composer of music always to write marches or waltzes and never sonatas or symphonies. There is no case, therefore, for asking writers to turn out the same kind of work for the whole of their lives.
JOHN ROWLAND.

THE SIMPLICITY OF DESTRUCTION

A COMPARATIVELY recent innovation in the daily Press is the publication of little sermons by a tame clergyman which purport to deal with some religious issue of the day. Most newspapers in these days have a resident clerical correspondent who can be relied on to dole out the platitudes with monotonous iteration. It rarely happens that really controversial matters are touched upon, but a recent article in the "Daily Telegraph" by the Rev. L. B. Ashby did for once deal with what must be a perpetual matter of debate between Freethinkers and Christians. His article was entitled "Any Fool Can Destroy," and it was an attempt to draw a parallel between the destruction that is a necessary part of the war effort and the destruction of religion which is the main part of the work of the Freethought Movement.

Not, of course, that the Freethought Movement was mentioned. It is part of the considered policy of the Churches to pretend that no such Movement exists. Only isolated malcontents, our pious friends would have us think, fail to worship within the temples of the various gods. But that is only by the way. Here is the paragraph which I thought would interest readers of these columns:—

"Among the things which are easily destroyed is religion, because you can do it so quickly. How easy it is to raise doubts, indulge in the cheap sneer or suggest cynically that religious faith is an outmoded superstition which the more enlightened people of to-day are rapidly discarding. But how hard it is to build it up again."

I feel that is a real tribute, albeit unconscious, to the work of the Freethought Movement; but those who have attempted to do a certain amount of missionary work among the benighted Christians will feel some doubt as to whether religion is something which is easily destroyed. Supported by money, buttressed by a great propaganda organisation, and now with a new stranglehold on the minds of the youngest generation as a result of a cowardly Education Bill, the great Churches will take a deal of shifting. That religion is "an outmoded superstition" is the considered opinion of a large number of men and women, including many of the best brains of our day; but how long that takes to filter down to the rank and file of the population will depend very largely on the future efforts of the organised Freethought Movement. If what Mr. Ashby says is true, it should not be too difficult for us to show the ordinary man in the street that these clerical gentlemen are feathering a very

pleasant nest for themselves. We can point to the way in which the Nazis recently said that the failure of an attempt on Hitler's life was a sure indication that he was under the protection of Providence, and add that services of thanksgiving are being held in all the German churches. This is, of course, exactly equivalent to what would be done in this country did Mr. Churchill be the victim of any similar attempt. We can show how the Church of England is prepared to make any compromise with the forces of reaction—provided only that its income is in no way endangered. We can demonstrate the logical fallibility of a system which never allows its false premises to be questioned on the radio or in the Press. In fact, the time is increasingly ripe for a new Freehought Crusade. Shall we begin it now?

S. H.

CORRESPONDENCE

MR. DU CANN, HIS CRITICS AND ADMIRERS.

We are giving the above title to these lines because we promised last week to print a few letters from those who had written concerning an article by Mr. Du Cann. Looking them over, we find that the proportion praising Mr. Du Cann is about eight to one. Four letters have already been printed, and the repetition would have been too much, particularly as they were largely, of necessity, repetitionary, and our space is very, very limited. Two actually wrote that they could not further contribute to the paper if Mr. Du Cann's articles appeared. We were really sorry to receive those letters. The writers have mistaken both "The Freethinker" and its Editor. Neither are for sale, either for a weekly payment or for a "lump" sum down. We hope it gives pleasure and some instruction, but that must suffice, and we are mostly pleased to know how many people take pleasure in the reading, even though it may not always bring agreement. In any case, it would not have been possible to print a large number of letters, many of which would have taken up at least a column and a half.

I think an explanation is due to readers why the promise made last week has, after consideration, been withdrawn. Many of the letters would have run to well over a column, and these the most complimentary to both the Editor and Mr. Du Cann. Finally, we confess with fear that many readers have often disagreed with us! But hitherto they have not asked that we should be banished to the world of outer darkness. We are Freethinkers, or ought to be.—EDITOR.

PROGRESS AND THE CHURCH.

SIR,—The Rev. Donald Campbell, of Bradford, has appealed to cinema managers in Bradford to allow Ministers to conduct brief services during the Sunday evening performances. It is as naive an example of cool cheek as anything one can remember. The Churches opposed the opening of cinemas on Sundays, as they have done all over the country, and prophesied that all sorts of bad things would occur if and when the cinemas were opened, and, of course, all the world knows that these prophecies were false. The Churches have failed, either by their message or the personality of their Ministers to attend the people. Now that the cinemas are open on Sundays and successful, the parsons desire to muscle in on the programme with a ready to hand audience which they have done nothing whatever to attract. About these things it must be noted that the Bradford Branch N.S.S. has opened its platform to representatives of the religious bodies, but I have never heard that the religious bodies have extended to the N.S.S. the corresponding opportunity for one of its members to preach a freethought sermon at one of their Sunday gatherings, and let it not be forgotten that the National Secular Society is delivering a real message of constructive moral and social reform.—Yours, etc.,

"ALERT."

PEACE AND THE POPE.

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 is he waiting for to employ them to the benefit of mankind and to 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: is his recurrent failure to perform, under the scant

excuse of "neutrality," his obvious duties as Christ's Vicar and Ruler of Christianity?" The failure can only be explained on the ground of lack of power or lack of God-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 perpetrate a myth they intend to exploit in pursuance of their unholy influence; 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 Canaphas.

ABSENCE OF GOODWILL.—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.

CORRECTING A CORRECTION.

SIR,—Perhaps Mr. T. D. Smith will allow me to point out in answer to his letter ("The Freethinker, 20th August, 1944) in which he asserts that Douglas Reed, although anti-Semite, is also "violently anti-Nazi," that the two "antis" are incompatible. Anti-German, Reed possibly is. But anti-Nazi? When Reed chooses to borrow anti-Semitism, one of the main planks in the Nazi political platform, he and his admirers must not be pained that some Freethinkers, at least, refuse to take his anti-Fascist writings as seriously as the *professional* anti-Semites take themselves.

Also, there is abundant proof that the Strassers were 100 per cent. Nazi until their quarrel with the other Nazi leaders; the "break" came only after—as it happened, a considerable while after—Hitler had decided to implement the monstrous philosophy outlined in "Mein Kampf." I trust that these simple facts will be borne in mind by Mr. Smith when he is using his "own judgment" after reading "Nemesis: The Story of Otto Strasser.—Yours, etc.,

PETER COTES.

OBITUARY

AUSTIN VERNEY.

We regret to record the death of Mr. H. Crossfield, better known to our readers under his pen name of "Austin Verney." He was a man of wide reading and strong opinions with considerable appreciation of differences.

He contributed to these columns for many years, and his free-thought views will be found expressed with vigour in his book, "Rationalist Evaluation and the True Doctrine of Civilisation."

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, 11-0, Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D.—"The Beginning of the Sixth Year."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place): Sunday, 6-45, Mr. J. CLAYTON. A Lecture.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (Mound).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., Mrs. M. I. WHITEFIELD: "Determinism or Free Will."

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner): Sunday, 7-0, Messrs. T. W. BROWN and J. W. BARKER will 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. MOSLEY.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute): Sunday, 6-30, Mr. F. J. CORINA—"The Minister and the Monkey."

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