

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXIV.—No. 39

Sunday, September 24, 1944

Price Threepence

IEWS AND OPINIONS

God and the Army

A FEW weeks ago, after the freeing of a large and important part of France from the Nazi claws, the King, we must assume on the advice of those who really pull the strings, sent a well-earned letter of congratulation to the troops in France, via General Montgomery. In that letter the King expressed his "warmest congratulations on the glorious victories gained in France." So far so good. The congratulations were well deserved, although it should never be forgotten that this victory was a "combined effort" in the fullest sense of the word. It was an effort in which the whole of the people took a part. But the praise had to be expressed, and it was only right for the titular head of the State to say what he did. Men do not work for recognition and, indeed, as George Eliot reminded us, the world would not be the pleasant place it is were it not for the multitude who lead an unknown life and sleep in unknown graves. The best of men do not work for recognition, but it is none the less appreciated when it comes.

But there was another passage in the King's letter which ran thus: "All my people will join with me in thanking God for the outstanding success," etc., and that was not only not true; it was obviously untrue, and although "God" may excuse the departure from strict truth, others may justly "wink the other eye." For it simply is *not* true that "all my people" will join the King in thanking God for the victories achieved by our armed forces. There are many, many millions of people in this war who definitely do not believe in God, and many more millions who are in grave doubt concerning the existence of such a being. It may be granted that such an expression as "all my peoples" has its value, but if we are to create a real democracy it would be just as well if we dropped the lavish use of terms that carry with them ideas that have lost, or are rapidly losing, whatever honest significance they once had.

Let it be borne in mind that I am not placing the blame on the King for the language used. The King is the head of the English Church, and the religion he must profess is selected *for* him, not *by* him. It is not only selected for him; it was selected for him some 250 years ago. The King must defend the established religious beliefs of the Established Church; that is one of the things he swears to do at the Coronation service. Any ordinary person may select whatever religion he pleases, or may repudiate all religions. The King must not. If he has opinions of his own concerning religion, he must keep them to himself, for there is no way of stifling a man's *thoughts*; he can only be prevented from openly and honestly expressing them.

It is one of the consequences of perpetuating worn-out views of life that in some respects the higher we go in the social strata, the more limited, in some instances, is the

freedom of the individual. The King cannot choose his own religion. His children may not marry without his consent. The upper ranks of society are tied down by a lot of fiddling inconsequential rules from which the "lower" ranks are free. One can get nothing in this world without paying for it.

It was a famous English judge who impressed upon all whom it concerned that an Englishman's house was his castle; and he illustrated it by saying of the aforesaid house that "while the wind and the rain might enter, the King of England could not enter without the poor man's permission." It may be said on behalf of the King and our Old Nobility that never have they shown any great inclination to spend their evenings in the poor man's castle. And in fairness it must be recorded that even in the case of the East End German bombing, when the men clearing away the rubbish said that were it not for the loss of life the Germans might be thanked for the bombing, even up to that date royalty and the nobility showed no desire to live in the castles of the poor. To that extent the judge's "poor" remained with unmolested rights.

Before we leave this topic, a further comment upon the "all my people" passage may be made. God was thanked, via General Montgomery, for the help he gave us to secure victory. Here, the King's advisers were on rather dangerous ground. Most will remember how very frequently the weather was directly antagonistic to the movements of the Allies. That was God's reply to the appeal to lend a helping hand. In the case of the landing in Normandy, over and over again the war planes were kept on the ground when they should have been in the air. And in that instance the appeals to God, instead of the usual day of prayer, became a continuous service, with the churches open day and night, and if the number of people who prayed was not very great at least the pressure was constant. It looks as though praying to God ought to be done with discretion. Where there is so much said to God, one can imagine some of our sharp-witted East-Enders commenting, "Blimey, where do we come in?"

Booby Traps Ahead

We admit that this question of keeping God in the foreground is a very difficult one. If he is paraded over much some people are bound to ask, "What exactly does he do?" When Queen Victoria, after the death of the Prince Consort, shut herself from public appearances she was warned that unless she mended her ways her death might mark the abolition of the Crown. She took the hint, resumed her public appearances, and no member of the Royal Family has since taken that dangerous step. An unseen king loses all his, or her, glamour. It is precisely the same with the gods; they are important as they figure in the public eye and, so to speak, function in the people's

brains. That is really the dangerous situation in which those who have a vested interest in keeping gods alive must face to-day. If they do not keep them on the carpet people will forget all about them. If they are paraded frequently there is the risk of the question being raised, "What is it they do?" And we have reached to-day the stage when both policies are dangerous. The gods seem to be facing either a slow death or a rapid deposition.

An example of this difficulty of handling God was shown by the heading to an article in one of our Provincial newspapers. It ran, "Let Us Think About God." That advice was daring, but it struck us as being dangerous. Probably the coiner of the heading thought the advice safe. In sober fact, it was recklessly deep. For if one begins to think about God, or gods, one may think too much or too little; and where the gods are concerned it is not wise to probe too deeply—that is, if one wishes to remain religious. One may easily be led to ask, "Why did God do this or that, or why did he not do so-and-so?" And when one starts on that enquiry dangerous thoughts begin to express themselves. That the road to hell is paved with good intentions is open to criticism, but it is as certain as light is followed by darkness, and vice versa, that the road to hell is opened to those who ask awkward questions of the deity.

It is considered good theology to reply to such questions: "In God's good time things will be set right." But that also opens new avenues for brain exercise. Every preacher in this country believed and said that in God's good time Hitler would be pulled down; but if God could have done that earlier consider the pain, the suffering, the slaughter that might have been saved. Why did not his good time express itself when Hitlerism first showed its head? Surely God ought not to wait until he has enjoyed the sight of the world at war before he will do anything. If a man with the power to control the world had acted in that manner—sitting back and enjoying a damned hard fight—he would be confined in an asylum or shot out of hand. That clergyman who invited his congregation to "think about God" may have been working hard in the service of Satan, for surely when the gist of the advice is recognised it looks like a deliberate endeavour to rob God of his followers.

"Trust in God" at first glance looks as though it were better counsel because "trust" carries with it the implication of waiting, and a longer or shorter wait does not appear as anything out of the way, particularly as the one who has been waiting for God to do something may be dead before his patience is exhausted. Yet there is danger in even thinking about God from that point of view. For while "trust" looks forward for favours to come, it also may easily look backward and consider the value of trusting God. The future may so easily throw one back to thinking what God has done in the past. And the prospect here is not very encouraging. He made man and woman, he said that what he had made was good, and he obviously felt, or hoped, that things would turn out well. But they did not. The humans he created, in the hope they would turn out all right, turned out very bad; and the people who afterwards came into the world were fated to bear the burden cast upon the earliest offender. That kind of thing does not inspire trust in

the manager of the universe. Simple human nature may reflect that it would have been better to wipe out the first effort of man-building and start man-making again with better material.

Of course, there is a passage in God's own book that runs, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him"; but at the moment that has a taste of Hitler's advice to his German dupes. And this act of faith is open to the retort that the person who is slain has not the opportunity of expressing his opinion on the sanity of the advice. We can reasonably continue to trust a man who is not able to prevent someone else slaughtering but on what ground can we trust a third party who merely gives us a lesson in "he would if he could but he didna"? I fancy that when the scribe was inspired by God to write down that text he must have winked the other eye. It was so far clever that it used God's failure to look after his people as evidence that he could have done otherwise.

No, all things considered, the advice "Let us think about God" is not a very wise counsel. In fact, so far as the Godites are concerned it is a very dangerous thing to do. To think about God when people could think about him as a glorified Father Christmas was one thing; but to think about God when we know how multitudes were born, and how multitudes live and die, is a very dangerous thing for any believer in God to think about. For gods are ceasing to be persons and are becoming just ideas; they are not things. The problem of whether gods exist is displaced by the saner one of how did man come to think they existed. I think that the parson who advised his followers to think about God must have been an Atheist trying to educate his flock. He should meet with a measure of success, but he must not be too sanguine.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

BERNARD SHAW'S GOD

YOU can make a god out of anything. Our fathers—*vide* Milton—made them of "stocks and stones": their idols were visible, concrete images. Then people used to make their god out of Scripture texts—choosing the texts they liked and ignoring the texts they disliked. To-day, in England we make our god chiefly out of intellectual salvage, unless we take a ready-made God from the Italian Catholic Church.

Bernard Shaw keeps a pet god of his own, as a boy may keep a pet rabbit of his own. He has made it from pieces of Neo-Lamarchian ideas, bits of the Bible and Common Prayer-Book, chips of his favourite authors—such as Bunyan, Butler and others—and some remnants of his own imagination. Shaw's god is no worse, and a good deal better, than some. He is not anthropoid, a bearded *grandpere* as is Michelangelo's painting, nor entirely like Shaw himself. Nor—though "without body, parts, and passions," like the god of the Anglican "Article of Religion"—is he so vague and nebulous as to be futile and unmeaning.

Shaw calls his god the Life Force—which is more sensible and satisfactory than the algebraic "X"—and his creed Creative Evolution. Well, the Nicene Creed speaks of "the Lord and Giver of Life," so Shaw's heterodoxy approaches orthodoxy in places. His Life Force is not omniscient nor omnipotent, for it proceeds by way of trial, experiment and error. It may be omnipresent, I think. The mammoth and megatherium are discarded experiments of the Life Force; cancer and croup are typical errors. Man may be a failure as

a Life Force experiment and a superman may be evolved in place of mankind.

The whole duty of man, according to Shaw, is not to live for selfish, personal purposes, but to do the work of the Life Force "in its struggle upwards." (This in orthodox creeds would be called "doing the will of God.")

Shaw rejects prayer and praise of the Deity for the same reasons that Anatole France has given more eloquently. Praise is flattery; prayer is beggary. (Yet praise may be heartfelt gratitude and prayer contemplative or acquiescent as in "Thy will be done." Shaw has not thought deeply enough about this.) He equally rejects the bliss of heaven, the torments of hell, and the burden of immortality. But there is "a beyond" further than thought can reach—for the race, not the individual.

Our individual destiny is the scrap-heap; the true joy of life the being used-up for a mighty purpose by the Life Force. All very well; but suppose one objects to usage by anything but oneself. I suppose Shaw's answer would be—as, indeed, the fact is—that we are not in our own power, holding life on our own terms; but in the power of his Life Force, holding life on its terms. Yes; but the inexorable terms are abominable in their uncertainty and brevity, and in the facts of infancy, senility, disease and some kind of death.

Shaw accepts Jesus wholeheartedly as a great teacher, biologist, criminologist and political economist, but as God only in the sense that he, you and I are gods—"children of the most High." His idea that when Jesus proclaimed himself God he had gone mad—as Swift, Ruskin and Nietzsche went mad—is interesting and, so far as I know, entirely original. It is certainly a common phase of insanity: the megalomania that makes a lunatic imagine himself a Deity. Shaw accepts what he regards as the four fundamentals of Jesus' teaching: (1) Unity of God and man; (2) wrongness of private property; (3) error of all punishment, revenge and violence; (4) subordination of family ties to fundamental purpose.

Of pseudo-Christianity, and of the orthodox Churches, Shaw is a fierce, unsparing critic. What fiercer indictment of the English Church has ever been lodged than proclaiming it "a corrupter of youth, a danger to the State, and an obstruction to the fellowship of the Holy Ghost." "Christians to-day have no religion" and "less of Christianity than of any religion on earth"—a truth so plain and obvious that few see it.

Where Shaw fundamentally attacks Christian doctrine (as apart from Christian practice) is in its centre: the base doctrine of the Atonement, i.e., that Christ died to save us from our sins. It is an infamy for us to load our guilt and the punishment upon an innocent victim. He regards salvationism with contempt and hatred, whether preached by St. Paul or any other. Certainly, it is an ignoble doctrine when critically examined instead of being looked at with unthinking faith.

Could Shaw repeat the Lord's Prayer? Almost entirely, I think. He would boggle at "Lead us not into temptation," I also think, preferring to say, with the Apostle Paul (whom he justifiably dislikes as a perverter of Christ): "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good." He would also repeat the three Creeds—Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian—in parts, but would jib at such beliefs as "His Only Son" and "the Resurrection of the Body." I believe I could re-write the Creeds according to Saint Bernard Shaw—and it would be surprising how much would remain untouched. Certainly the Holy Ghost, the Communion of Saints, the Life Everlasting would remain.

Clearly, Shaw is no Atheist and no Agnostic. But clearly, in the widest sense of the word, he is a free-thinker. To the Church he is a heretic and schismatic; his opinions are what Llewellyn Powys called "damnable opinions." He is, of course, a passionately sincere religionist—though most religionists would repudiate him with horror. To my mind he seems very close

to Christ, though not in the sense in which the Christians use that phrase.

Well, such is Bernard Shaw's god. A respectable figure, not entirely unlike the essential Shaw, which is to be expected, since we all, as Voltaire said, "make God in our own image." It is surely better to make God out of your brain and bowels for yourself rather than accept a secondhand, ready-made ancestral God from the Churches. Even those who buy their God dummy, secondhand, however, cannot help altering him a bit to look more like themselves—a queer human trait.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

THE TIME FACTOR IN PRAYER

WE have had prayers for victory as far back as 1940, and now, four years afterwards, we have more prayers; in fact, a Day of Prayer on September 3, which seemed to have been pitched as closely as possible to victory to avoid the actual fait accompli: to avoid the victory becoming something of the past instead of the immediate future.

In all this no clergyman seems to take any cognisance of the time factor, and the following is offered as a way out for religion. The following tale is old enough, but the moral is ever modern—and possibly instructive.

A man went to heaven, and interviewed an archangel thus:—

"I know this is the place of Eternity, but don't you find that time hangs heavily on your hands here?"

"No," replied the archangel. "A minute is as a million years."

"That helps things out," said the interviewer. "But how do you get on for money?"

"Oh," said the angel, "a penny is as a million pounds."

"That's good!" said the interviewer. "Lend me a penny."

"In a minute," replied the angel.

The schoolboy defined a parable as a "heavenly story with no earthly meaning." Perhaps the above is only a parable, but it does tell the prayer-mongers not to be in too much of a hurry in expecting answers to prayers from an earthly standpoint. We should know by experience that if mankind (and especially British mankind) asks the Almighty for any favour, it not only takes a lot of time for an answer (and that is not always favourable, as God may be international) but he seems to demand at lot of assistance; so much, in fact, that it begins to look as if God will do anything if mankind does it for him.

I have recently re-read "Highways and Byways in Normandy," by that cultured parson, the Rev Percy Dearmer, and in describing Mont St. Michel he cites a fable connected with the building of the Abbey on top of the Mount. It appears that on the top was a vast stone which the united strength of the monks was unable to move. One had a dream in which it was stated by the patron saint that they should ask a certain man, with his sons (of which there were eight, of whom one was an infant of two years), to move the stone; and the man duly took on the job with his sons, leaving the baby at home, naturally. They could not move it; and then the saint pointed out in another dream that one of the sons had been forgotten—the two-year-old baby. He was added to the removal squad, and then the huge stone was immediately thrown down the face of the mount into the sea below.

"Fable," you say?; not at all. The stone is even now in the sea below for all to examine; and that, say the faithful, is positive proof that this is not a legend. Much of the Christian faith, especially in miracles, rests on evidences which are just as reliable—just about; but, we are told, "Faith will move mountains." All seems to rest on the quantity and quality of the aforesaid faith.

I like this story as it explains so much—but, of course, only to the faithful. Those who do not deal at this shop can expect no such "enlightenment."

H. CESCINSKY.

ACID DROPS

TRUTH is usually simple, but not always welcome. For example, the Rev. R. T. Brandeth thinks that the Church began to lose ground when it departed from the Book of Common Prayer. That is simply not true. In fact, the necessity for stabilising the Book of Prayer was one of the indications of the beginning of the decline of Christianity. The Roman Church, with its alleged identity, yesterday, to-day and to-morrow was a logical expression of Christianity. It was given by God, and therefore unchanged and unchangeable. But as a matter of fact the whole history of the Christian religion marks a series of changes. Even the Roman Church had to submit to changes, in spite of the fact that it held out for the sun travelling round the earth until 1822. Then came the development of the Protestant Churches, with their attempts at stabilisation. They also did what they could to hold science in check and to strangle common sense. Next we had the complete reversal of the positions of science and religion, with the attempt to reconcile God's revelation with man's discoveries, at the cost of misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Still the progress of disintegration went on, although we believe that men of the Church organisations would gladly plead that the revolution against Czarist Russia was God's way of making his presence apparent to his faithful followers. It is a pitiable and yet an interesting story if one learns the history of the Christian religion from the proper viewpoint.

One of our provincial papers, defending the rebuilding of churches that have been bombed, repeats the plea that it should have the same rights as the owners of other properties. But there are many special considerations that are not noted. First, with regard to the Nonconformists, they paid neither war insurance, nor rates of any kind. This includes the Catholic churches, which are also Nonconformists. (We fancy the Roman Church would squirm at this, although it is the sober truth.) But with regard to the Established Churches, large money grants were given by the government—a tax was placed on coal to provide some part of the expenses of building St. Paul's Cathedral—and they also are free from taxation of any kind, and that is the equivalent of many millions per year. Finally, the need for the number of churches has declined very considerably, and when we shall be hearing of what we can afford, and what we can afford when the building of homes is concerned, it is sheer criminality to squander millions that are needed to supply the opportunity for decent living places.

That there is nothing like leather is a counsel attributed to a cobbler. It has now become a method of pushing personal interests by disguising them in the form of an exhibition of public gain. We were reminded of this by a declaration of our (R.C.) Archbishop of Westminster, that the only thing that will save Europe is "a return to God and to his laws." We rather fancy that this is the kind of sentiment that Hitler and his gang would readily endorse. For both of them would demand as a condition that they must have the decisive say as to how we must understand God's word. All the religious quarrels have centred round this point, and not a few of the most bloody wars have been to enforce a return to "His laws."

For example, there is the plain order of God that:—

"When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it . . . and if it will make no peace with thee . . . then thou shalt besiege it, and when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof. But the women and the little ones, and the cattle, even all the spoil thereof shalt thou take unto thyself."

After reading that one can understand why the Papacy has never excommunicated Hitler.

It sometimes makes one wish that children could select their parents. If they could we feel that it might easily add improvement to the quality of the race. It doesn't feel right that children should have to bear the weight of their parents' stupidities. Here, for instance, is the case of one who writes to the Worcester "News and Times" protesting that teachers have

been hinting to the children that we are now living in the 20th century. For it seems that the child noted the contradictions of certain lessons as given by the day school teacher and by the Sunday school teacher. The father had advised her to believe both, which is not a difficult feat with some Christians, and prides himself on what he has done.

But the child appears to have a little more common sense than her father, and asked him which she was to believe, the day school teacher or the Sunday school teacher? The father replied that she must believe both, and (what a liar!) he says, "I am able to satisfy my child that her Sunday School teacher is right." The smug fool further explains, "Some day she will think for herself." We don't think he need wait until the girl is older, she probably knows already that her father, however kindly, is just a fool or a humbug—perhaps a little of each.

This state of things unfortunately exists in thousands of homes. The parent withholds information from the child that ought to be given, and the youngster grows up, with kindly enough feelings towards its parent, and yet with something approaching contempt of his intellectual ability. This would be avoided if parents would remember that it is an obligation they owe to the child to tell him or her what they know to be the truth, and even then to encourage it to an independence of mind. To wait for the child to find out what is true while holding up to it what is admittedly a matter of doubt is a treatment that is not far from being brutal. We hardly think this particular parent need wait for his child to grow older to have summed up her parent's intellectual value. She has very probably quietly determined that her father is a very decent sort of man, but very, very foolish. More children would look upon their parents with pride, if the parents would in return look upon their children as developing humans.

Mr. A. P. Herbert, who is senior M.P. for Oxford University, has managed to get a few letters recently in the "Times" against the Pope's appeal to Londoners to bear their trials "with Christian resignation and fortitude," letters which perhaps would never have been inserted had they come from mere laymen. At all events, he characterised the Pope's exhortations "as evidence of feeble mindedness," a description of the Pope which has made Roman Catholics breathe fire and fury. They are quoting the Sermon on the Mount against Mr. Herbert, who, in turn, objects to injunctions "coming from a city which, through our efforts, has been spared the real horrors of war, and from a potentate who has said so little about the crimes of Germany." There is a good deal of even stronger attacks on the much-boasted Pope, but unfortunately the "Times" has only a small circulation compared with some of the other national papers, and so the "man in the street" is not likely to read them.

Still, there is always the Church's trump card in reply. It is that the Pope abides by "Christian morals and principles," and if these had not been given up by Europe we should never have drifted into the "soulless materialism," resulting in this war. But apart from some "intellectuals," Germany had a very large Catholic and Lutheran population, all intensely backing Hitler to the utmost. Poland was, and is, fervently Catholic, and so are Italy, Austria, and Hungary. Both Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt are very religious—in fact, the "soulless materialists" are in a very small minority, even in Russia. How, therefore, can it be said that it was the lack of Christianity which caused the war?

A very artful man is the Rev. S. W. Potter, of Bristol. He writes to the "Daily Mirror" that in his church prayers will be handed on to God, via his church, if they will send them to him. Probably the proper form of address would be: "Prayers from A. B. to be given to God by the Rev. S. W. Potter, via St. Katharine's Vicarage, Bristol." We suggest that the writers of the letters add "For God, via the Rev. S. W. Potter. Please, God, acknowledge receipt." Otherwise there will be no guarantee that God ever gets the letter.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

THE GENERAL SECRETARY N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of 11s. 6d. from Mr. Colin Deasy and 5s. from Mr. Fred McKay to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

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

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

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS

THERE seems to be a possibility, if not a probability, that the bombing of London will be tried again, although we do not think it will be as bad as before. But there has been any quantity of prayers—daily prayers, all night prayers, prayers authorised by the Church, prayers delivered by individuals—but our men have not yet been able to quite prevent the bombing. So we go back to our old advice. Why not have one last prayer, then add a postscript informing God that this will be the last prayer until the war is over—and won by the Allies. It is downright silliness to go on offering prayers and not getting any recognisable answer. Even Montgomery, while he thanks God for all he has done, yet insists that he must have enough guns to blow the Germans to hell, or the victory will not be achieved.

The possibility of international peace when this war comes to an end is in everybody's mind. But a guarantee in that direction is to be found by the "Great Powers surrendering the 'cock o' the walk' attitude." For that reason we were pleased to see in a leading article of the "Observer" for September 10 (here it is) an echo of what we were saying in these columns a few weeks ago, and which we have been saying for many years:—

"If an armed burglar is in the house and its owner rings up the police, he will scarcely think that he is getting value for money if he is told that a committee is considering his complaint and will report in due course. That sort of international tutelage was never much more than collective insecurity. Now, by the stark facts of modern *blitzkrieg*, it is made plain lunacy. The only possible policeman of to-morrow will be an International Force, always in being, and ready to strike with a super-national executive which can send it into instantaneous action should the peace be broken. The action may never be needed. The threat of it would, if it is genuinely backed by genuine force, suffice for a bloodless assertion of international law.

"To procure such a policing of the world, nations will have to yield some of their sovereignty, just as individuals do when they submit to law and order for security's sake. There would be no loss of honour or of self-respect in a cession of this kind. There can be no safety without it, as Mr. Wendell Willkie has just told his fellow-countrymen. For single nations, however great, to give guarantees of security to small nations may be now only to bemuse and mislead the latter with worthless pledges. Aggressive devas-

tation has become too big, too swift, too easy for limited restraints.

"The only remedy, therefore, is a Union of all Nations prepared to maintain order. And that Union must be given, as the saying is, teeth. Here is the crux, which is being shirked, in the discussions of the Allies. A League of Sovereign States with no common police-force and no common executive in being, will be unable to show or to use effectively small and separate fangs. It may have some teeth, but they will not be on the spot; as well might a watch-dog be armed with a couple of blunt incisors situated half-way down his throat.

"This is the vital question: Are the Great Allies ready to tread the road of pooled power, and to trust one another? Are they, and the smaller States, ready to live and work together in the way required to give these conditions of peace? If they are not, then in this modern and scientific age, with its ever-faster as well as bigger weapons, security is no more than a word."

The Glasgow Branch N.S.S. will begin its indoor season on Sunday afternoon, October 1, at 25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun, when Mr. T. L. Smith will open a discussion on "Sex Ratio in War Time." Proceedings will begin at 3 p.m. As all those present can take part, it should provide an interesting afternoon.

According to the religious genius who provides a weekly sermon for readers of the "Daily Telegraph," "God speaks direct to every man's conscience without the intervention of any kind of authority." We suppose we must accept this as the case, if only because the Rev. Ashby is understandable when he is not talking religion. God only knows what he means when he proounds religious truth to the world. For the plain fact is that all religious quarrels and wars and ill-deeds generally have arisen from the fact that God does speak to each believer. But each believer understands God in a different manner. What a pity it is that God doesn't dry up and leave mankind alone. In that case there would be a better hope for the future.

The National Church League held its annual meeting with Lord Caldecote, Lord Chief Justice, in the chair. In the course of his speech Lord Caldecote found it "a happy fact" that numbers of our war-leaders are largely composed of men who signed a document which runs:—

"We commend the Gospel of Christ our Saviour, for it alone can effectively mould character, control conduct, and solve the problems of men and nations. Faith in Christ the Lord, and loyal obedience to His will, as revealed in the Bible, ensures peace of mind, and brings satisfaction in service to God and man."

The men named may be quite capable as soldiers or sailors. What we should like to know in what way that bears any evidence whatever of the truth of Christianity? Only a fool would read the message that way; and there is unfortunately many who, while good enough in one direction, are very, very foolish in another. Moreover, we protest against the insult offered to the large numbers of officers in all services, and also men who are not believers in any religion. We are quite certain that if the men who signed the document showed no more intelligence, no greater sense of real dignity and understanding than was displayed in the document they signed, they would never have risen above the ranks.

Reviewing a religious book, the "Church Times" gives the notice a heading, "When Man Meets God." But what has always puzzled us—and still does—is if man does meet God, how will he know that it is God he has met? We can say we have met a negro, or a man, or a woman, or a tom cat. But if we meet God, how do we separate him from other things, and how do we know it was God? After all, "recognition" is re-cognition; that is, we place the thing seen with other things that have been seen. All we should know is that it is something new. But why call it "God"?

RUMMAGING ROUND

"RUMMAGING ROUND" is a rather descriptive phrase for the sort of thing that women do at jumble sales and in secondhand shops when they are looking for spicy little bargains—the snippety sort of purchases whose real value perhaps lies more in the fact that the keen feminine eye spotted them first rather than in any actual practical value in the article itself. But for all that, a bit of rummaging does sometimes unearth little treasures which the tasteful hand of a proud wife will cause to be exhibited in a prominent place in the home for the benefit of admiring visitors.

Recently I did a bit of rummaging myself; but it was not in secondhand shops. My rummaging (and I must confess it is rather a habit with me) takes place in the odd nooks and crannies of various newspapers and periodicals, where little gems are often to be found, almost out of sight of the unscanning eye, often overshadowed by the thick, seamy tripe that surrounds them; but treasures worth searching for all the same, and occasionally worth putting on view in a place of greater prominence.

For instance, how many of us spotted that little bit about old Duncan McGowan, 70 years old Elder of the Scottish Free Church, and his wee lads and lassies awa' in the fighting Forces. Duncan is like a stagnant breeze wafting up from the dead-and-done-with days of Puritanism as he lays down his religious rulings in the Argyll coastal village of tiny Toberonochy. Says Duncan:—

"If it is true that any of our young men and women have been dancing when they have been away in the Forces, there will certainly be trouble when they come back."

Knowing something about the Highland religious spirit—especially as expressed by these archaic Elders of whom Duncan is a fine specimen—I am inclined to agree with him. There certainly will be trouble when the youngsters come back, for undoubtedly they will have been dancing and, even worse, visiting cinemas; and the Duncans of more places than Toberonochy will try to square up the account with the youngsters. But I fancy the trouble that will ensue will not be the sort of trouble Duncan is thinking about. It will not be made *by* him and his kind for the youngsters, but *for* him and his kind by the youngsters.

The days of the Duncan McGowans are passing. They were passing even before the war, when the youth of Britain was rapidly snapping link after link of the slave-chain of superstition; when the restless spirit of youth was breathing defiance to the Duncans even in the Highlands. And now, after five years of war in which the word "freedom" has been a dominant note, the young people in the Forces are in no mood to return to their fetters at home and take their order from dictating Duncans. Awa' wi' ye, mon!

* * *

Another rummaging gem I discovered in an odd corner was most illuminating concerning the attitude of our leading prelates on the question of blood sports. The League Against Cruel Sports conducts a campaign for a more humane attitude to wild animals such as the deer, fox, otter, badger and so on. Recently, a member of the League sent a cheque to the League to pay member subscriptions for the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster.

If the replies that these three dignitaries of the Christian Church sent in connection with the offer are representative of the Church's attitude to or interest in the question of blood sports, then the League had better turn its attention to securing the support of organisations with a more humane turn of mind.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, per his chaplain, replied: "The cause about which you write is not one, among the many claims made upon him, that the Archbishop has felt able to take up." The Archbishop of York "regretted his inability" to accept membership; and the Rival of Rome "could not see his way to avail himself of the anonymous subscription." For once in a way there was unanimity between the Henchmen of Henry and the Puppet of the Pope. Christ's divided Church united at last—on the question of non-intervention where the slaughter for sport of God's hand-made creatures is concerned!

Personally, I suspect the refusals to be the outcome of clear policy in all three cases. Why? Well, because Dr. Temple is quite capable of paying nominal lip-service to anything he may be even only mildly interested in; while the Yorkshire Archbishop could only refuse "summat for nowt" on grounds of policy; and the English Pope's twaddling excuse about "anonymous subscriptions" doesn't impress me at all because he lives on such things. One has never heard of receipts being given for Peter's Pence, together with the name of the donors. But one has heard of archbishops—even Catholic ones—being "well in" with the "county folk," who do the huntin' and shootin' and chase stags into the sea!

* * *

In another odd corner I ferreted out the news that, for the National Day of Prayer, the Minister of Transport had decided to lift the ban on Sunday morning buses so that people could go to the morning services; but, search as I would, I could not find anywhere the protest of even a solitary clergyman against this action on the grounds that it would rob transport workers of their day of rest. Having in mind the solicitous consideration of the Churches for the workers where Sunday cinemas are concerned, this absence of protest was passing strange. Or was it?

However, while the Churches were anxiously seeking the co-operation of the bus companies in this effort to deprive our hard-worked transport people of their Sunday morning "roll-over," it remained for a bus company manager bluntly to point out that there had been no demand from the public, and that in any case bus workers were having too hard a time to rob them of their Sunday morning break.

Fancy talking like that about a National Day of Prayer! There's no wonder that the Churches are empty when bosses are molly-coddling the working classes in that fashion.

* * *

My last rummage to-day comes from the "Catholic Herald," where, in a little corner headed "Answers," all your problems may be solved. "J. B." asks: "For an action to be morally good, isn't it sufficient to have a good intention?" The answer is: "No. This is the doctrine that the end justifies the means, which has always been condemned by Catholic theologians."

There's somebody somewhere inside the Catholic Church who seems never to have heard of the Jesuits; or of an American Catholic organisation whose members still swear death to the infidel—in a guarded sort of way.

F. J. CORINA.

"MATERIALISM RESTATED." By CHAPMAN COHEN. With chapters on "Emergence" and the "Problem of Personality." Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

"FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST." By J. M. WHEELER. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

"THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES," to which is added **"THE LAW OF NATURE."** By C. F. VOLNEY. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an Introduction. Price 3s.; postage 2d.

"GOD HELPED US"

For downright impudence commend us to a clergyman on the warpath. Here, for example, is the Bishop of Worcester, who writes in the "Worcester Diocesan Messenger":—

"We have passed through many grim days—the fall of France, Dunkirk, the submarine warfare, the bombing of London, Coventry, Bristol, and many other places. Looking back we can see that God helped us."

One might think that the Bishop was pulling the legs of his followers, but he really appears to be in earnest. Of course, once upon a time he did things, but he appears either to have retired from business or has joined the "other side."

For consider how he has served us. He did not stop any of the places named being bombed. Yet, if the Bishop is right, he could if he would. When we landed in Normandy our ships were held up by bad weather, airplanes were kept on the ground when they should have been in the air. Over and over again our Generals complained that the weather helped the enemy rather than the Allied Forces. And the Bishop says God is giving us another chance.

There was more common sense in the sailor who found himself "treed" by a bear, and when he saw the bear coming nearer and nearer, drew his knife and broke into prayer. He said: "O God, I do not often ask you to do things for me. And even now I do not ask you to take my side, but if you will not take the side of the bear I promise you the sight of the loveliest kind of a fight you have ever seen."

There is one brilliant utterance from the Bishop which we cannot pass. He says: "We have emerged from the fiery ordeal because God in his mercy is giving this nation another chance." That is a slip; what he intended saying was that man is giving God another chance to make good. But we would warn him that human patience has its limits. "QUONDAM."

CORRESPONDENCE

GIBBON ON CHRISTIANITY

SIR.—I do not know what edition of Milman's Gibbon Mr. Cutner uses. Mine is that of 1846—the second edition of the work. On page 489 I read: "But it was not in *this* world that the primitive Christians were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful." Milman, by way of comment, adds a footnote from a French author, Villemain.

I think it follows either that Milman in his second edition rectified a slip in his first or, if Mr. Cutner's copy is later than 1846, that a misprint has got into it.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

(Mr. Cutner's edition is a late one—that published in the series, Sir John Lubbock's Hundred Best Books.—EDITOR.)

B.B.C. DISHONESTY.

SIR.—You have frequently drawn attention to the dishonesty of the B.B.C. in staging faked discussions, especially where religion is concerned. Another glaring instance of dishonesty was the falsification by the B.B.C. on June 1 of a declaration by King Peter of Yugoslavia.

This falsification was pointed out by the "Nineteenth Century and After" in its July number. A question as to this was raised in the House of Commons, and all that Mr. Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information, was able to do was to abuse the "Nineteenth Century and After."

On August 2 Mr. Pickthorn, M.P., brought up the matter again and, in reply, Mr. Anthony Eden had to admit that the B.B.C. had falsified King Peter's declaration. (Hansard—corrected—August 2, columns 1506, 1507, 1546.)

It is clear that the B.B.C. is not as honest as it should be, and that a careful watch should be kept on its activities.—Yours, etc.,

H. E. LATIMER-VOIGHT.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND ANTI-NAZISM.

SIR.—Since the letter of Mr. P. Cotes ("The Freethinker," September 10), I have read with interest and instruction "Insanity Fair," by Douglas Reed. The fact that, published in 1938, it ran to 18 editions that year speaks volumes. I suggest the work is violently anti-Nazi, and leave your readers to judge for themselves.

May I point out that anti-Semitism is not peculiarly a Nazi doctrine, but is associated with Christianity, and is another example of religious bigotry. I cannot accept Mr. Cotes' suggestion that because the Nazis are anti-Semitic, therefore an anti-Semitic is pro-Nazi. Such careless reasoning is likely to destroy whatever criticism Mr. Cotes may make.

With regard to the Stressors, I have still to read "Nemesis." I shall bear Mr. Cotes' remarks in mind, but I must refuse to be prejudiced beforehand, and any opinion I may arrive at must be dependent upon "my judgment." This may not please Mr. Cotes, but as both of us are Freethinkers I do not see how he can grumble at the position I have taken.—Yours, etc.,

T. D. SMITH.

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 Fascism."

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 6.45 p.m., Mr. J. V. SHORTT will lecture.

Huncoot.—Friday, September 22, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Kingston Market, Memorial Corner).—Saturday, 7 p.m., Messrs. T. W. BROWN and F. SODEN. Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. 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. MOSLEY.

Padiham (near Recreation Ground).—Sunday, September 24, 3 p.m. and 6.15 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Worsthorne.—Saturday, September 23, 6 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—3.30 p.m., Mr. NICHOLAS: "Progress."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Brains Trust. Bring your Questions.

Keighley Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Hall, Russell Street).—3 p.m., Mr. H. STEWART WISHART: "Religion and Life—The Free-thought Challenge."

"PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT." By CHAPMAN COHEN. Paper, price 2s., postage 2d. / cloth 3s. 3d., post free.

"WHAT IS RELIGION?" By R. G. INGERSOLL. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

"THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST." By C. G. L. DU CANN. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; postage 1d.

"ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING." Four Series. By CHAPMAN COHEN. Price each series 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d. The four volumes 10s., post free.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

(Concluded from page 352.)

THE myth about the Christian Eucharist is most interesting to the anthropologist. It has its origin in ritual murder: every once in a while a king or leader was slain and his flesh eaten so that his quality and strength and valour might be absorbed by his consumers. By an extension of this idea, savages eat flesh of lions and tigers and other strong, fierce, brave animals. Zulus, before going into battle, for example, have a communion breakfast of an infusion of rhinoceros horn and scrapings to give them strength, bravery and endurance. Catholics, apparently, think theophagy makes them godlike. Long observation makes me doubt this. I should imagine that a modern, intelligent man, who thinks he is required to pay a priest to make magic for him, would take the trouble to satisfy himself about what he is buying: he would protest against payment for fraudulently damaged goods of a material kind, but the number of men who read up the simple facts about ritual cannibalism are so rare that sacerdotal fake-magic is still a lucrative pursuit. Whether it is an ethical obligation to examine the basis of one's religious beliefs may be debatable, but there is considerable virtue in those intelligent men who do. Invariably they end by rejecting them.

Two aspects of life which have been canvassed for many centuries in Christian circles must be discussed here since they involve ethical obligations of a very serious kind—slavery and divorce. No sane person now advocates slavery, though it is still practised by large numbers of Christians. According to the most authoritative Christian teaching, they are quite justified. The Old Testament and St. Paul both definitely sanction slave holding, and I can find no fault, on the score of Christian consistency, with the English Bishops in the House of Lords, and the Catholic Bishop Ireland in the Carolinas, who so bitterly opposed the abolition of slavery; these men who asserted slavery was approved by their god, were true and, in effect, brave defenders of the Christian traditions in this matter. Christian doctrine about divorce is hopelessly obscured by the suggestion that the relevant reference in the sacred book is a forgery. This suggestion is very difficult either to prove or disprove. It is hard to know what such a humourless celibate as Christ could think about an unhappy marriage. The facts are that divorce is, and has been, an integral part of all societies, and is prohibited only in those communities where the ugly custom of enforced celibacy is paramount, as in priest-ridden Spain and Eire.

As to marriage itself, the repulsive ideas of St. Paul and the Christian view of marriage as legalised fornication, have degraded the most beautiful of human relationships. The effect of Christian ethics on its exponents is obviously bad. The fundamental defect about them is, of course, that they attach all the importance of living to doctrine and not to conduct; their interest is not ethical but doctrinal—an Irish gangster would far rather shoot a policeman than eat meat on a Friday. In effect, religious sanctions are utterly frivolous—to eat meat on a Friday is ethically neutral, to shoot a policeman is an act of the vilest anti-social kind.

It is evident that Christian morality is perverse and socially pernicious. A perfect ethical system in use for 2,000 years should by now surely have solved all the problems of mankind. An allegedly infallible system should be expected, one would suppose, to yield results in that long stretch of time, but not only has the Christian system not solved any social problem, it has actually created worse situations than it has found. The multiplication of Christian sects has increased public hatred and prevented a general mutual understanding, and the attachment of Christian

Churches to monied interests has divorced them from contact with the unemployment, prostitution, starvation and poverty that are inevitable results of the economic system favoured by the Churches. If the mediæval Church had had the slightest conception of human dignity and decency, the Inquisition and the ghastly wars of religion would never have been heard of. The history of Western Europe in the last 2,000 years has been one of religious devotion in the early stages, and at the same time one of hatred, persecution, war, bloodshed and tyranny, and usually those nations most noted for their Christian fervour have been foremost in the criminal system of destroying life in wars waged for no other purpose than greed or dynastic pride. The Christian commandment, "Thou shalt not kill"—a plain, clear, unequivocal statement—has been modified by Christians to mean "Thou shalt not kill except in conditions favourable to us or to the people who pay for our support." The Churches have never condemned capital punishment or military conscription, and one has looked in vain for condemnation by Churches of the periodical massacres of human beings that have swept over Europe for hundreds of years. Not only has no Church attempted to organise **World Peace**, but the oldest Christian sect joined with armament interests in an attempt to destroy by falsehood the only effective peace movement of modern times. The eagerness of the Churches to destroy a peace movement harmonises sadly with that to placate the promoters and makers of more arms for human destruction. Striking examples are to be found in the eagerness of a pope to hasten to Paris to confirm in an adulterous union that bloodthirsty muddler, Napoleon Bonaparte, and in the official approval by a modern pope of Spanish traitors plotting the destruction of their own people by foreign gangsters practising a form of brutality hitherto unparalleled in history. As a result, that "Christian gentleman," Franco, acquires the doubtful distinction of being, in my opinion, the worst criminal in history. When I think of this feeble, fertile, treacherous brute who brought in German and Italian airmen to kill Spanish babies, and when I realise that to the High Anglicans and to the Catholics of the world, this criminal was a hero, I feel proud to know **I am not a Christian**.

The world to-day is a morass of cruelty: it is doubtful if in the course of its history of millions of years, human relationships have been so corrupted as they are to-day. Not only has the Christian system had no mitigating effect on human evils; it can, on the contrary, be held to have contributed to the disaster. Christianity has a long and bloodstained record of torture, persecution and punitive war. To quote again a striking example, the treacherous rebellion in Spain against the legitimate Republican Government in 1936, was claimed by the Church to be a Christian crusade. It was supported by Catholics all over the world, and by the Anglican ruling class in the British Empire. The "crusade," in the long run disastrous to British interests, was waged by criminals specially trained in such callous brutality that the atrocities heaped on the common people of Spain can be equalled only by the Japanese in China, who also received the covert support of the principal Christian sect. "Christian Truth" was not allowed to speak for itself; it had to be administered with high explosive.

These facts are symptomatic. The Christian system is pernicious, and must be superseded. In its place must be put a scientific view of human values, and a scientific control of world resources for the benefit of all men on a basis of complete human equality. Hierarchies and religious castes are an anachronism. We cannot be saved by prayer formulæ, ritual-magic, charms and amulets—the testing time of 2,000 years has proved that. Now is the time to appeal to the intellect and to pity.

PROFESSOR J. V. DUHIG.

(Published by the Rationalist Society of Queensland)