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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Mixed Dish

WHAT we said last week on the subject of wishing people a "Merry Christmas" applies equally to the customary practice of "Happy New Year." That '45 may bring better war conditions than did '44; we may hope, but the ghastly background is there, enforced by the violent breaking of family circles and cherished friendships. The thought of what might have been will be always with us. We may learn to laugh, we *ought* to learn to laugh, but there will be a grimness about it, a heritage of pain, of disappointment, the five or more years of warfare; the brutality of the war is not to be completely wiped out by victory, to say nothing of the hardening of human nature; the disruption of the finer aspects of life cannot be avoided. I do not therefore wish all our readers "A Happy New Year." We can in common decency hope only that the years of armed fighting will soon end, and that 1945 will bring the world back to greater decency and to more humane considerations. By force we have sunk into the mire; let us by determination and intelligence do what we can to so shape human society that so great an outrage as our World War can never again occur.

What we Freethinkers may describe as our private war for the public benefit has continued its development. In spite of so many countries—Italy, France, Holland, the northern countries; Germany, China, Japan, and other countries—being cut off our circulation has increased, and our books and pamphlets are in greater demand than ever. Unfortunately, the paper shortage has limited very considerably what we could have printed and sold. But the list of enemies killed and wounded in the battle for Freethought has been steadily growing. This is also shown by the increase in the membership of the National Secular Society; and finally in the case of the buyers of our literature. This is not a case of roping in those who were already with us in thought; they are captures from the other side. This was best expressed in a letter from an officer nearing the forties: "Why did I not become acquainted with you when I was fifteen?" The casualties on the religious side have been enormous. The outlook for Freethought was never brighter than it is to-day, and that means that the outlook for organised religion was never blacker.

Worth Noting

As a sign of the times we may take a recent debate in the House of Lords. The main speaker was Lord Templewood, better known as Sir Samuel Hoare and as a prominent member of that group of political stick-fasts which is a marked feature of our Governments. His love of freedom of thought and speech may be indicated by the fact of his expressing, while Home Secretary, public regret that he was unable to prevent the holding of an Inter-

national Freethought Congress. Now, in the House of Lords, he gives the gratuitous information that Spain had become a mere pawn for Germany. In fact, the Germans have been in moral occupation of Spain for years. That was quite obvious when Germany openly sent large numbers of aeroplanes, manned by Germans, to support General Franco, and he has left little room for doubt as to his Fascist convictions.

All the same, it is not fair to make Germany responsible for the intolerance of the Franco rule, the torture of political prisoners in Spanish prisons, and the general suppression of freedom of thought. These have been outstanding features for generations. Spain was in fact ruined by its religion, and right up to date Franco and the Vatican have worked hand-in-hand to maintain an intolerance, with a consequent brutality, against those who have worked for freedom of thought and speech. If that is doubted we refer all to the chapter on Spain in Buckle's "History of Civilisation," and also a book written with a marked detachment by a man who spent nearly a year in a number of Spanish prisons. The book "An Introduction to Spain" is written by a Belgian, G. D. Ydewall. For cold brutality it would be hard to beat. It is both a first-hand document and a valuable historical record.

But one was a little surprised to find Lord Samuel declaring that what Spain needs is a "religious outlook"—an opinion that was naturally backed up by the Archbishop of York; it is part of his business. But Lord Samuel should have known better. As a Jew, he should have been aware of the Jewish experiences of people who believed and practised religion. What Spain really needs is a strong dose of non-religious Humanism.

Christianity Up To Date

In practice, Christmas is a period of jollification, although it is surprising seeing that the birth of a child who, so runs the legend, was doomed to die a painful and disgraceful death on the Cross would not seem to fit in with merry-making. Often people have wondered why, if God wished man to lead a useful, humane life, if he wished man to be better than he is, did he not make Adam of better texture.

On the lines of Christian reasoning God wished man to behave better than he did: why did he not make him of better material? God made the world out of nothing, a woman out of a bone; and although dust and bones have their limits, there is no limit to "nothing" as a working material, and of dust the supply has always been plentiful. It is a problem that has puzzled many theologians. In a leading article we are given the explanation thus:—

"God can never be taken by surprise. Before he created man, God knew what man would choose; knew also, by man's sinfulness, the creator and his creation would become estranged."

Now that is quite plain, although it reads very foolishly—unless we are to believe that God was just showing off. He designed a problem—man's sinfulness, only to show how great and clever he was in providing a solution. But one wonders what would be said of a man who made sure that a child would push his hand into a fire for the mere purpose of advertising the healing qualities of some ointment he had for sale. Against this obvious conclusion our theologian plays another card. There is man's "free will," the chief quality of which appears to be that of making certain that man would do the wrong thing instead of the right one. Free will, as most theologians explain, was God's great gift to man. Without it he could never have done wrong, and if that were so, the whole scheme of Christian salvation would never have appeared. But one wonders what would be said of a teacher who did not correct a blunder when one of his pupils writes that "six times four equal twenty-two" on the ground that he would not interfere with the pupil's "free will." God knew what man would do, but he let him do wrong, apparently, to provide himself with a reason for "knocking hell" out of his enemy Satan.

But there is a rule of British law that, provided a man is not mentally unsound or simply could not foresee the consequence of his actions, he must be held responsible for all he does. So the "Church Times" leads us to the conclusion that either God did not foresee what would be the result of his planning, or he was incapable of rising to the level of human common sense.

The "C.T." seems resolved to go the whole hog where religion beliefs are concerned. Coming to the alleged birth of Jesus, the editor writes:—

"The mind finds healing in the wonder surrounding the manger, within which there lies the Child, the Son, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father."

There is a real Christmas flavour about this. For Christmas is a time when conundrums and "wisecracks" flourish. The problem set is: "Who and how many were in that 'manger'?" Was there one, or two, or three, or four, or more. We can read it that there was a baby, a son, a heavenly father, an earthly one, a mother, a child, a wife, a husband. Puzzle: How many were there? And what is it about the scene which secured a healing of mind? What is the answer? We give it up.

From one of our leading Protestant papers we turn to the other side of Christianity, that of the Roman Catholic Church, and here we learn that just before the Germans made their unexpected drive into released territory, at Mount St. Bernard's Cistercian Abbey, Charnwood Forest, more than 600 Masses had been offered to God asking him to "give health and strength, grace and guidance to conduct the war to a successful finish and to deliver Poland from its enemies." We know that this message was sent to our Prime Minister, and we may assume that he was pleased to learn that the Cistercian Abbey was on his side, and that 600 messages had been sent to God asking him to "buck up" things, and with the help of God, plenty of planes, guns, ships and skilful workers at home, the Germans will be beaten. It is a question of faith—and other things.

It is only fair to note also the emphasis placed upon God—and the Prime Minister—seeing to it that the Roman Catholic Church in Poland is restored with its previous

power undiminished. Poland is one of the few remaining Roman Catholic strongholds, and to give Poland freedom with the Roman Church reduced to that of one of the numerous Christian sects does not suit the Vatican at all. The Papacy, of course, has no greater dislike to Fascism in Poland than it had to Fascism in Italy; in fact, the Roman Church is the oldest form of Fascist control that exists. Hitler, also a Roman Catholic, built up his control on methods which were substantially identical with Catholicism.

But what good Christians are logically compelled to conclude is that God in his wisdom having, so says General Montgomery, given the Allies his help to drive the Germans out of a conquered territory, thought the game had gone far enough, and so permitted the Germans to retake part of the countries they had lost. After all, one may assume that God has to remember that nowadays he cannot afford to lose the service of, say, forty or fifty millions of worshippers in Germany when, as Ingoldsbey would say, they are getting scarcer and scarcer every day. Hundreds of gods have died from want of worshippers, and the signs are very plain that the Christian God is going the same way that other gods have trodden.

We have space for but one more consideration that we should keep in mind during the critical year of 1945. The Vatican is plainly displeased with the treaty that has been made with Russia and France, which if dealt with in complete honesty by each party may be taken as one of the guarantees of European peace. Apart from Poland, France has the largest number of supporters of the Papacy. The largest proportion of these are women, but the Vatican cannot afford to lose any of its followers. On the other hand, while in Russia there is no bar to those who will follow the Roman religion, no special privileges are granted, and where that is the case religion in general must weaken. But we may take it for granted that all the underhand work that is possible will be brought into play. The Vatican has always insisted that our friendliness with Russia is a military alliance only, for it is not blind to the fact that the existing feeling between Russia and Britain is a direct obstacle to the development of religion in general and of Roman Catholicism in particular. And when we remember the number of Roman Catholics who hold key positions in this country we must look out for trouble when they further the Vatican's game. A lasting treaty between England, France and Russia is a very serious blow to "the great lying Church."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE JACKASS WHO WOULDN'T EAT THISTLES

"DON'T do that again!" growled the driver at the jackass, who had just turned his head around and snipped a mouthful of hay from the cart he was drawing. "It's plain to be seen, that you're no Christian jackass."

The party moved on in silence, except for the jolting of the cart and the crunching sound made by the heavy shoes of the three hirelings as they travelled on in the direction of the Master's barn. But the jackass was desperately hungry, his only authorised rations being the thistles he could forage for himself in the weed patch to which he was consigned when the day's work was done. And he had made up his mind to eat no more thistles. Presently there was another quick lurch of the hay cart.

"Did he do it again?" asked the second hireling suspiciously.

"He did so, the shameless thing!" reported the other. "He took more of the Master's hay."

"The Master's orders are to beat him, then," said the first.

"But," considered his companion, "you may remember the last time you beat him he was so lame that we had to draw the load to the barn ourselves. My back still aches from the strain of it."

The third hireling heaved a sigh. "Perhaps we should first attempt to enlighten him. He has not had the educational advantages we have had."

This being agreed upon, they proceeded accordingly.

"Halt, Sir Jackass! Attention!" commanded the leader.

The animal stopped abruptly and lay back his ears, expecting a thump on the ribs.

"Sir Jackass, we are going to give you another chance. You—"

"Good enough!" exclaimed the animal joyfully.* "I shouldn't have dared asked as much myself." With that he seized an incredible mouthful of the hay and began munching it greedily.

"Stop, thief!" shouted one of the men as he raised his hay fork high in the air.

"Refrain, brother," cried his comrade. "Remember how heavy the cart is for us to draw."

"God have mercy on him if ever again he takes so much as one straw of the Master's hay," warned the irate one. "But if you, brother, think you know better than I how to deal with him, I'm willing you should try."

"Very well, then," answered his companion, "I will do so." Then he addressed the jackass. "Simple one, bethink you, are able to follow a line of orthodox reasoning presented in the authorized manner by pious gentlemen?"

"I doubt it," replied the animal. "Has the feat ever been accomplished?"

"By faith all things are possible," announced the man solemnly.

"Is another bit of clover possible by faith?"

"Now, that's two questions you've asked already, Sir Jackass, before I get started. Please don't ask a third. It upsets my logic."

"Proceed, then, for I perceive the sun is almost down."

"Although the time of day has nothing to do with it," observed the man, "I will proceed. Do you know the meaning of private property?"

"Well, I suppose my hoofs are my private property?"

"Decidedly wrong! Hoof, hide, and hair, you belong to the Master. This cart, all the crop, even the field, all are his private property."

"It seems that private property is a very fine thing if one is allowed to have any. Have you any private property?"

"I own these garments you see me wearing, besides one extra shirt. For twelve years I have worked faithfully for our good Master. All those years he has provided me straw to sleep on and gruel to eat twice a day. On the tenth year he made me a free gift of the extra shirt."

"Doesn't any of the hay or the land belong to you?"

"Indeed not. We only till the land and raise the crop."

The jackass looked mystified. "It seems we do all the work and get nothing, while the Master does nothing and gets everything."

"That's because he owns everything. The law says so. He has papers to prove it. Besides, doesn't he pay all expenses, even the taxes?"

* That an ass may speak like a man is verified by the Bible. See Numbers 21:28-30. That a man may speak like an ass needs no verification.

"With what does he pay expenses and taxes?" asked the jackass.

"With part of the proceeds from the crop, naturally."

This was almost too much for the jackass, and in spite of great effort he could not hold back a gasp of astonishment.

"What did you say?" asked the hireling.

"I merely coughed. The thistles are so dry at this time of year they irritate my throat. However, I might suggest that if taxes and other expenses come out of the crop we produce, it is really we who not only do all the work but also pay all the costs, even the taxes. You call me a thief for taking a mouthful of the hay we produced. What should you call the Master for taking all of the crop he did nothing to produce?"

What the jackass had just said sounded so reasonable that the men felt themselves in danger of being convinced, and they were terrified at the thought. Moreover, they knew that if they were caught listening to a rational idea they would all probably be thrown into jail. As soon as they could summon their wits, one of them made the sign of the Cross. The second jabbed his thumbs into his ears, saying that if he heard any more such talk his politics might undergo a change, which was something he dreaded almost as much as meeting the Devil in the dark. The third, being an Episcopalian, pulled a flask from his pocket and took a nip to steady his nerves. Then he spoke.

"Sir Jackass, all the beatings in the world would be no more than your just due. You even deserve to have sand poured into your ear. Nevertheless we will continue our Christian patience a little longer in the hope of rescuing you from these abominable errors."

"I hope your Christian patience will hold out, for I suppose that when it is exhausted I may expect some more Christian thwacks on my skull."

"I must mention another matter," continued the man, paying no heed to that last remark. "It is the sacred doctrine of free private enterprise. Do you believe in F.P.E.?"

"I do, but whenever I try to practice it, you give me a thump."

"You were practising theft. The law makes that clear."

"But the law was made by our Master for his own private benefit. One doesn't need to break the laws he makes to suit his own advantage. Had we made the law, perhaps it is the Master who would be the thief."

The three men turned pale with horror. At length the spokesman opened his mouth and after three attempts found his voice.

"Obstinate creature, my conscience would not suffer the least qualm were I to break this hickory stalk upon your heathen pate. But the way is too far for me and my companions to draw the cart."

"Thanks," replied the jackass, "for sparing me this once. If I had not already received so many thumps, I might even be grateful for your efforts to enlighten me. I must concede that, although you may not have manifested the authentic Christian spirit throughout, you certainly have very accurately presented the authorized viewpoint."

But the hireling had already ceased to listen and was admonishing his companions in this wise: "Brothers, you perceive the sad plight of this poor creature. He is no longer responsive to reason, probably because he is too old to be persuaded. You see how necessary it is with both men and beasts that they be confirmed while yet young in the opinions their master would have them hold. For if they are permitted to grow up to maturity and the fullness of their mental powers, it is likely that their master's ideas may then appear so ridiculous as not to be acceptable to them—not even to a jackass. However, the sun being set, we must be on our way."

"Agreed!" exclaimed one of the others. "I'm very hungry. The gruel was so thin this morning I feel lank as a gutted rabbit."

"It's your own fault, brother, that the gruel was thin," answered his companion. "You insisted on having salt in it, and in order to afford us such a luxury the Master had to reduce the quantity of the flour."

While they were thus arguing among themselves, the jackass managed very slyly to appropriate a huge mouthful of hay, but in his haste to swallow it he almost strangled himself and consequently was unable to suppress a loud wheezing cough. The men started suspiciously, and one was about to raise his hay fork. Then he paused and averted his eyes from the others. Finally one of his companions spoke.

"Did you hear something, brothers?"

"I think it was the cawing of the rooks coming home to their cawing of a rook or a crow."

"I also heard the small sound," echoed one of the others.

"I think it was the cawing of the rooks coming home to their nests in the willows. My back is still very weak. Let us go."

HUGH ROBERT ORR.

(From Humanist Monographs).

SAINT HITLER

SINCE the beginning of the war the outcry against Germany's Atheism, "Wotanism" or "Neo-paganism" (the latter raised principally in Catholic quarters) has considerably abated, and we now hear more frequently of a "Germany possessed," of her "diabolical mentality" or the "Satanism" of her New Order.

It seems to me, however, wrong to describe the Germans as "possessed" or as "Satanic." They are, what is just as bad, and perhaps worse, a religious people. It is important, in my opinion, to make a proper diagnosis of their case: for "il faut connaître ses ennemis," as Voltaire used to say, when asked "Why do you so assiduously read the Bible?"

Do men of the elder generation (to which I belong) still remember how the first World War started? It was very characteristic and gives us a cue to everything which happened in the last thirty years. Not an economic, nor a political cue, but one that goes to the root of our crisis, because it touches our religion.

When the Emperor William II, the head of the Protestant Church and a religious man himself, from the balcony of his Berlin "Schloss" in 1914 announced the outbreak of war, his "irreligious" people below did not answer him with the popular song "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles," but with the deeply felt tunes of the old Lutheran hymn "Nun danket Alle Gott" (Now let us all thank God).

Not very Satanic that!

And now listen to the "Satan" of World War II:—

"I am a profoundly religious man. I believe that Providence, when she has designed a man for great purposes, does not break that man before he has achieved them. I have come to know the best that is in Germany, and that is the strength of the broad masses. God helps those that help themselves. It would be *shameless ingratitude to Providence* if we lost our nerves. Providence made us master the hopeless situation brought about by the collapse of Italy. That being so, can we despair of Providence? *The Almighty might have tried us much harder.* Even if from the beginning the war had come to German soil, I would have never capitulated. *We have faith in God's Justice* and keep the flag flying in foul weather. I am proud that I have been given the task to imbue my people with strength and faith, that I may say to them: 'Be calm, come what may, victory will be ours in the end' . . . In the last war, in spite of brilliant victories, *our people became ungrateful and lost faith. Providence scourged us, and justly so* . . . (Hitler's speech to the Nazi veterans in the Munich Beer Cellar, reported in "The Times," November 9, 1943).

Not only is this man not Satan: he is a Christian and—what is more interesting—he is also a Jew!

For the idea that defeat in war was a just punishment for unbelievers, is of Jewish origin and pervades the whole of the Old Testament. Whenever anything went wrong with Israel (and it did so pretty often) the cause was never a faulty preparation for war, nor a mistaken move in politics, nor an unexpected stroke of misfortune as with pagan nations: it was always the "guilt," the "weakness," the "sinfulness" of the people—or, to speak with Hitler: their "ungratefulness" and their "loss of faith."

Hitler here is the unconscious plagiarist of the most eminent amongst his detested Jews: the Prophets and Psalmists of Israel, who also admonished their people never to waver in their faith, never to despair of Providence, for, however hard He might try His Chosen people, "The Lord will not forsake those that seek Him" (Psalm IX, 10).

As to the Christians, they should call this ascetic Hitler, who lives without women, wine, meat or tobacco, not a "Satan," but Saint Hitler . . .

This is a strange world; not our evil and criminal people, but our good and religious contemporaries have started that catastrophe which began in 1914.

The French poet, Charles Baudelaire, once said: "The greatest trick of Satan is, that he has persuaded us of his non-existence."

But this is quite untrue; Satan's finest dodge was, that he has persuaded God to take his place.

OSCAR LEVY.

Editor of the Authorised English Translation of Nietzsche's Works.

MODERN ATHEISM AND PROPAGANDA

(Concluded from page 491)

FROM Freethought and pro-Freethought quarters excellent popular scientific books have been produced, setting forth the old and the new facts that man has discovered about himself and life, and the universe. But so many of these have been like a seidlitz powder without water. Splendid ingredients, but nothing to start them fizzing; no driving force to produce the effect of mental "inner cleanliness" which, I presume and hope, was sought after by the producers of such books.

Information of a factual nature we have had in plenty—but too often accompanied by a reluctance to relate the information to the social business of living, and by a hesitancy to point to conclusions, or to draw inferences, that would clash with traditional ideas, and to disturb "respectable" institutions. I know it is not the task of pure science to offer more than knowledge, or to produce more than the text book; but it is the business of writers, speakers and movements, to interpret that knowledge, to draw clear-cut conclusions where they may be drawn, and even to suggest new moral and social concepts based upon the knowledge. There has been a hesitancy about doing this, even in Freethought circles, perhaps because it was thought on the one hand, that people would do it for themselves (as some have done, of course) and perhaps because it was thought that the conflict of such ideas with accepted ideas might produce strong opposition to the knowledge itself—on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread.

Such motives might be commendable because of their tactical judiciousness in at least making safe the new knowledge; but the tactics have not proved eminently successful, because, apart from the fact that strong opposition to the spread of new knowledge has, in fact, existed (witness the position in the schools—even to-day) the presentation of such knowledge without the obvious philosophic or social adjustments in ideas has assured

the constant attention only of the student type of mind, and left the ordinary man and woman still floundering at the mercy of those who, although they shout: "No conflict between science and religion," remain themselves as ignorant of the sciences as the people they try to fool.

Good books have also been produced of a character directly antagonistic to religion—sound controversial and critical works, yet too often lacking in scientific background for the arguments presented. These have, in consequence, frequently tended merely to shift the ground of religious belief, admittedly, as a rule, to a more progressive or enlightened point, but not sufficiently progressive to bring a change of thought in keeping with the progress in knowledge itself.

These two main styles of approach have produced two focal points, each doing good work, but each suffering from lack of co-ordination with the other. Where the rays have intersected, as it were, I think the best results have been obtained. The universities and other higher educational centres, where factual knowledge has been perhaps better blended with criticism of old ideas, have probably produced Atheists in recent years in greater proportion than any other section of the community. On the other hand, a more segregated type of mind, quite familiar with scientific advancement, yet removed from the turmoil of controversy, and without the advantage of sceptical criticism, probably accounts for that curious section of people which can keep science and religious belief in separate and watertight compartments—the people who reconcile science and religion by refusing to attempt such a task, if you will pardon my Irish.

In the poorer and more industrial communities, which undoubtedly provided the bulk of the Atheists of Bradlaugh's time, owing to the then more obvious economic oppression of the churches, and the absence of the modern narcotics of the cinema, the radio and football pools (then they had little but drink and work to drug them) we now find, I think, the greatest sluggishness. Having largely thrown off the oppressive calls of the churches on their personal lives (it is estimated that only 10 per cent. of people are now connected with churches) there has grown up an indifference to religion, while at the same time a traditional "respect" for dog-collars and steeples has been retained. This is no doubt due to the double lack of scientific knowledge and of specific propaganda of a type that stirs their interest. Simple criticism of the absurdities of religion leaves them rather cool; they don't believe all the bunkum of course, but "there must be something." That "something" is hard to shift from their minds because, unchallenged by scientific knowledge, it was pushed into them at school, and has remained there ever since on the authority of an institution, the church, which, though an empty and hollow sham, puts on a face as bold as brass to perpetuate its primeval puerilities among the youngsters, and to strengthen its position in the schools.

But I do feel, from my personal experience, that industrial populations are responsive to a certain approach. It is my own experience that nothing causes ears to cock and mouths to gape with surprise so much as a revelation to such people as to how religion encroaches on their general economic life. Few of them know what it means to be "touched" by the churches in the personal sense to-day, but let them know to what extent the church "touches" them in a collective sense, and they respond as though half-a-crown was at that moment being extracted from their pockets.

Once interest can be awakened in this fashion, which some would call "militant Atheism" or a "frontal attack"—though the name is less important than the method—it is much easier to sustain their interest in the broader aspects of Freethought, and eventually to set them on the path to more involved questions, where simplified science is not only listened to, but understood, for the intelligence quotient seems to maintain a similar average in most sections of the population, despite a supercilious belief to the contrary in some quarters. Once

aroused, scientific interest may be maintained and developed, for men and women who have not had an academic or higher education are quick to absorb knowledge of which they feel they have previously been cheated, either by the Church or any other institution. Few people feel more annoyance than the "working man" when he finally realises that the god idea is preserved to-day, especially in its institutional glory, as part of the policy of keeping him ignorant. Men and women can be awakened from the dopey sleep of indifference which is the prevailing fashion to-day—but the alarm clock must be correctly set. The propagandist bell must be timed to clang co-incidentally with the first glimpses of the new dawning day, otherwise the bell will merely bestir the sleeper, who will turn over in the darkness; or else the faint breaking dawn will be insufficient to arouse without the aid of the bell.

Freethought criticism, with the powerful support of scientific knowledge, can explain the gods away; scientific knowledge, with the powerful support of sceptical criticism, can become knowledge plus understanding.

Just as an armed force co-ordinates propaganda with scientific activity in the field of physical war, so must Freethought co-ordinate propaganda (of a better type, surely than that of warfare) with scientific knowledge in the war of ideas. For, with the defeat of human dictators on the earth, there must also be vanquished the Great Dictator of the heavens and of the human mind, or humanity's latest blood bath will also have been in vain.

If there is to be a brave new world the Freethought movement must enter it with a brave new policy of Scientific Atheism. Our captain for thirty years has time and again indicated the manner in which the two paths join, to form the highway of our future policy. Let us march along that road, to the scientific liberation of the human mind, which will end the successive replacement of one god by another, and ultimately put man himself at the head of life's procession, to find a destiny and purpose for himself instead of for the gods, who may take care of themselves.

F. J. CORINA.

ACID DROPS

PROBABLY the losses that the Roman Church can see will follow the downfall of Hungary induced the "Universe" to give a glowing account of the Eucharistic Congress held there in 1938. There was a fanfare of silver trumpets "heralding God's coming." We don't know whether God actually came, but the Roman Catholics this time will observe the occupancy of Hungary by Russian arms. And that is something the Vatican will not welcome with applause of any kind. Rome showed itself more at home with Hitler and Mussolini than it has ever done with regard to Stalin.

Mr. R. Stokes, M.P., told the British public that the Pope has much love for the English. Well, there is some possible truth here, for the Vatican has for long—with the aid of its friends in high places in this country—been working for the return of the English people to Roman Catholicism. At a time when the followers of Rome grow fewer and fewer, it is glad to find an excuse for encouragement, even though it be nothing but an excuse.

We see that "La Croix," one of the most influential Catholic journals in France, is being charged with "collaboration." No doubt this took place—if the charge is true—when the Germans looked like winning the war. Now that Germany looks like losing it, the Roman Church is busy holding up the flag of Democracy and protesting its great love for the British people as the champions of freedom. For sheer humbug and hypocrisy, commend us to the Vatican.

The Roman Church has always looked with disfavour on the devotion of our troops for "pin-up" girls. The competition between them and "Our Lady," with Mary coming in last, is a very sore point with humourless Catholics, and so they are delighted to be able to report that some soldiers are now pinning up pictures of Mary under the title "Madonna of the Blossoms" rather than Hollywood lovelies. As a matter of fact, the Virgin has always been the glamour girl of priests, just as Jesus has appealed to nuns. The priests who reverently worship statues of Mary, and the nuns who always carry a crucifix, are showing exactly the same spirit as the sex-starved soldier far away from civilisation.

Christian lying has always been plentiful and hard to kill. It may be repudiated by a select body of Christians, but even they do not raise open disapproval of the practice. We have not heard of Christians in high places who have publicly disowned the lies told about Paine or other opponents. The rule seems to be that some good comes from the practice, and in any case there are plenty of Christians who feel their faith strengthened when they hear of the villainies of unbelievers. Here, for example, is a specimen that reaches us in the shape of a periodical, "The Christian Faith." It is not unknown, since it once had a fairly wide circulation.

The Archko Volume, a wonderfully interesting book! Contains a complete account of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ. Taken from Roman court records made in those days. Bound in limp leatherette. Title in gold. Price \$2.50 post paid.

No less a personage than St. Paul inquired why he should be blamed if his lies had led to the greater glory of God.

Bishop Marshall, of Salford, a Roman Catholic, who evidently believes that progress consists in travelling backwards to the Dark Ages, recently declared in his Advent Pastoral: "We Catholics must set our face against any type of explanatory information which enters into what we regard as unnecessary detail concerning the nature and function of sex." He was speaking particularly of young people in the schools, of course, and his anxiety is understandable on the point. As a priest, part of his business is to sell the story of Mary and a certain gallivanting ghost, and too much "unnecessary detail" would tend to expose the quality of the goods he has to sell.

Another Papist intellectual, Bishop Poskitt, of Leeds, condemning the spirit of selfishness, "which leads to the evils of birth control and divorce, and which spells the ruin of the family." We are always amused at the fierce interest which these celibates display in their attempts to stop the growth of a more rational outlook on sex and family matters. While they themselves remain "pure" in the sight of God, being celibate, yet they urge more and more of the impurity they condemn among ordinary people. This rather strengthens the argument we have frequently advanced—that a conception of impurity, and a large number of people practising the impurity, is vital to the successful functioning of the superstition known as Christianity.

After one year of Sunday cinemas in Bradford the Chief Constable reports: "The opening of Sunday cinemas has practically wiped out the street parades, and the action . . . has been all to the good." So the cinemas can do in one year what the churches could not achieve in many years!

It is a feature of all religions that one must believe first and then try to understand. But where one believes very few will try to understand; so instead of seeking to understand there comes into existence a series of excuses for the perpetuation of belief. We see this illustrated in questions that are put by Catholics to editors of the Catholic papers. For example, the Editor of the "Universe" is asked to explain how Masses for the dead will benefit their souls? The mournful reply is: "We have no information, but can only rely upon God's mercy." Meanwhile, the devotee goes on believing something he cannot

understand and provides considerable sums of money to the Church.

The official newspaper of the Vatican has come to the conclusion that the churches that are to be rebuilt after the war must be as comfortable as cinemas. Designers must see that people must not freeze in winter and be uncomfortably hot in summer. There is, of course, commonsense in this demand. But why not have a few professional comic performers such as the "Itma" group to take charge of the whole show? Properly done, one could, at least for a time, guarantee crowded houses. The show would not be more grotesque than many of the "sacred" performances; but there should be no bar placed on the audience laughing and applauding. The Catholic Church has all the material for a first-class comic performance. Why not use them?

"Woman Doctor" writes to the "Glasgow Herald" objecting to those ministers of the Gospel who will not have women placed on the same level as men with regard to their Church status. She thinks that unless the Church discards the teachings of St. Paul the Church has little hope for the future. But St. Paul was very precise in keeping women down; and we would remind the lady that when Jesus selected his twelve disciples he did not pick a single woman. It may be that Jesus felt he could not trust the women with the disciples—or he could not trust the disciples with the women. On that we have an open mind, but it looks as if one of the alternatives must hold.

The Moderator of the Church of Scotland has returned from Brussels, and he is "profoundly impressed with the spiritual influence the Church of Scotland padres are exerting among the officers and men." That is very striking. At home the Churches are losing hand over fist. In the fighting area the head of the Scottish Church is astonished at the influence *his Church* exerts on all ranks. Being very innocent individuals, we accept the story of the Rev. Dr. Hagan and label it a first-class illustration of *Christian* faith.

On the other hand, another Scotch clergyman, Rev. E. D. Jarvis, warns his followers that if the Church is to win the soldiers it would require to revise not only its services, but its organisation. We must leave the two clergymen to fight it out. Meanwhile church attendances shrink, and shrink, and shrink. But there is always room in the churches for those who see things with "spiritual eyes," such as Dr. Hagan possesses.

We must confess that we were unaware, or had forgotten, that there was such an institution as the "Imperial Black Chapter of the British Commonwealth." It looks, at first glance, as though the Imperial, etc., was the offspring of a number of Wild West figures after a thorough soaking in home-made whisky. But it is really an Irish institution with headquarters at Belfast. We are also completely ignorant of who the deuce was, or is, Sir William Allen, except from the information given by the Belfast "Northern Whig," which smells of the early eighteenth century. But there it is. There are many fearful and wonderful things right under our noses of which many of us are unaware. Sir William Allen is the Grand Master of the Black, etc.

But as Grand Master of the I.B.C.B.C., Sir William registers a solemn protest against the new education plans to give teachers liberty of conscience. Ulster had not such a thing in its schools with regard to teachers, and conclusively he points out that "There has been no trouble in getting teachers who were prepared to teach the Bible." Of course not. Hitler found it fairly easy to persuade millions of Germans to become Nazis. The rule was evidently: No Bible, no teacher. Humbugs and time-servers were the only ones that need apply. A brave liberty-lover is this Grand Master of the Imperial Black, etc.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. CARSON.—We hope that your good wishes for the New Year will be realised. We are well, but could do with more spare time.

E. A. WESTON.—Mass opinion is useful as a kind of shock troop operation. But it carries with it no guarantee of correctness. Generally we would say it leads in the other direction. Naturally it is beloved by politicians and parsons.

H. W.—Thanks for good wishes, which we reciprocate. We can all work for the Cause in whatever manner conditions dictate, and your plan is bound to have some good results. The writer of the article you mention has a lot to learn concerning the nature of Freethought.

J. JOHNSON.—That silly forgery of a letter from a Roman governor to the Emperor describing the appearance of Jesus is one of the many forgeries which the Christian Church fabricated and circulated, and is well known. But it takes a paper such as the "Daily Mirror" to report it in such a way for the more ignorant of Christian believers.

BENEVOLENT FUND—N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society, Mr. Fred McKay, 10s.; Thomas Dixon, 3s.; A. Addison, 10s.

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

WILL those who have sent letters and cards carrying good wishes for all responsible for the weekly appearance of the "Freethinker" add to their kindness by taking these notes as recognition of the good feeling displayed. If all the nice things said are only partly deserved we may all begin the new year feeling that our readers are largely made up of friends. "The Freethinker" is not merely our paper, it is theirs; and if it were not theirs there would be nothing to be proud of it being ours. We cannot hope for a happy new year, but we may hope for a year that will at least hold out greater promises of better times than the past score of new years have brought with them.

So Mr. Lloyd George is ending his career by entering the House of Lords under the title of Earl of Dwyfor. We take it that when the time comes to write his obituary one line will run: "Buried in the House of Lords." It is a pity, for every able man who enters the hereditary House of Lords provides an apology for impotency.

We regret that the fourth volume of "Essays on Freethinking" dealing with Mr. Bernard Shaw and G. W. Foote is at the moment at the binders. Orders will be despatched as soon as we receive the bound volumes which will be in about a month. This applies also to "Revenues of Religion" by Alan Handsacre.

There seems something out of place in the rejoicing of Christmas over the birth of the child Jesus. Rejoicing when a child is born is quite proper on the part of parents, and to some extent by friends of the family. Even with outsiders, a birth will rouse speculations as to the future of this lump of animated matter. So if we grant the Bible story that on Christmas Day there was born to a Jewish carpenter and his wife a boy, and that this birth brought the usual congratulations, all well and good. The mother has every right to be pleased, the father—usually pushed into the background—may also timidly demand recognition. A baby is one of the oldest of things, and yet it is in each case new, to those immediately interested; an event, the exact like of which has never before occurred.

But for the modern Christian to rejoice at the birth of the child of Mary and the "Holy Ghost," seems to point to something that gives rise to feelings that are not very complimentary to Christians. For while the people who then lived had only the present to think about, the Christian of to-day looks backward and has the tragedy of Jesus before him. For he believes that Jesus came to die a terrible, painful and disgraceful death. The child was to live a life that was without pleasure, and would never know the real meaning of family joy. The Christian knows all this, and instead of marking the birth as something that should be dealt with, with at least gravity not unmixed with sorrow, the anniversary of the birth of Jesus is converted into a season for jollification.

And that will simply not do. If one had a friend who at some critical moment sacrificed his own life to save him, he would not mark that date, as calling for lavish eating and drinking, songs and games. Nor would he go around chanting his joy at the sacrifice that saved him. One does not mark with riotous enjoyment the birthday of a friend who has met death in such circumstances. The Christian may be callous, he may think that the sufferings of Jesus may be counted as nothing because he saved him. But to be decently human Christmas should be a day of sorrow. There is neither sense nor decency in rejoicing at the alleged fact of one man dying to save another.

The Belfast Secular Society hold Sunday fortnightly meetings at Old Museum Building, College Square, Belfast, at 7.30 p.m. The next meeting will be on Sunday, January 7, with a lecture and debate. Local Freethinkers are invited to help the Society by attending its meetings and making them known to their friends. The secretary is Mr. A. R. Livingstone, 42, Clonlee Drive, Belfast, from whom full particulars of membership, etc., may be obtained.

The "Church Times" remarks that: "Once again the festival of divine peace has been celebrated amid the conflict of human hatreds." What we should like our contemporary to do is to inform us of the place and date when, ever since Christianity was established, it has not celebrated "divine peace" with idle chatter of "divine peace." Germany also adopts the same cant. Hitler has protested time after time that he is an instrument of God in seeking to control the world. We have never yet in all the wars we have waged, big and little, discovered ourselves not acting in accordance with God's desire. War is bad enough at its best, but when it is mixed with the cant of religion it touches the lowest level of humbug.

It is a pity that Christians cannot make up their minds as to what Christianity means. After all, Christianity is put forward as a message that came direct from God, and it reflects little credit on God if he could not frame a message that everyone could understand. God is not protected from this blunder by saying that it is man who has misunderstood his message, for it is the duty of a writer or a speaker to so frame his message that it is understood. If he cannot do this he should keep his mouth closed and throw his pen in the fire. We are told that God can read a man's heart. It is a pity he cannot read his head. Any doctor can give a diagnosis of his heart.

IS MR. SHAW BEWILDERED?

IN your issue of December 3, your reviewer quotes two statements of mine, contending that their inconsistency proves that they are not true, and concluding that they are, in short, a senseless lie of mine which has been repeatedly exploded by Mr. Chapman Cohen. They are not inconsistent; they are precisely true; and Mr. Chapman Cohen is mistaken if he believes that nothing could have happened in the National Secular Society without his knowledge.

In my earlier statement I did not mention G. W. Foote, with whom I was on entirely friendly terms, because it would have been wantonly unfriendly of me to remind the public of his forgotten bankruptcy. Now it does not matter: the whole story can be told without injuring anyone.

Your reviewer is perhaps unaware of how very serious the consequences of a bankruptcy are. A bankrupt is expected to resign all his club memberships and official positions, and has to suffer serious disabilities which I need not detail.

The choice of a successor to Bradlaugh as president of the N.S.S. was difficult; for his tremendous platform personality and heroic force in debate could not be matched. Charles Watts, J. M. Robertson, J. H. Lavy and others were at hand, and had the necessary brains and knowledge, but not the volcanic energy nor the physical strength of Bradlaugh. Besides, they were fully occupied professionally; and the job was a whole time one. Edward Aveling had the voice of an orphicleide and could use it and cut a figure on the platform; but his infamy as an incorrigible borrower and seducer made him impossible. Foote, alone, six feet high and a practised and effective debater, had made Secularism his profession, and had a figure head personality; and to him accordingly Bradlaugh, when he gave up his presidency for his seat in Parliament, handed the presidential gavel, not with the best grace; for great leaders seldom love their successors when the time comes to give way to them.

Bradlaugh's resignation was imposed on him by the first of his two fatal mistakes. Supremely great as an iconoclast and an apostle of Freethought and Republicanism, he threw away that position to fight his way into the plutocratic Parliament at Westminster, where he could never be, and never was, more than a Liberal Yes-man. He broke the barrier of the oath at the cost of a physical struggle which shortened his life; and he helped to pass a long overdue Truck Act which would have passed without him. After that the House found to its surprise that he was a trustworthy Conservative. Then he died, a political nonentity, though in his proper party he would have become Prime Minister. His ambition was to be the first President of a British Republic.

His second mistake was in taking the Conservative side when the great Socialist revival of the eighties suddenly swept the religious controversy into the background and split the National Secular Society from top to bottom. Annie Besant, Bradlaugh's greatest colleague, who could sway congregations as powerfully as he could dominate them, asked me to propose her for membership of the Fabian Society, and became my colleague, having found that she was a hindrance instead of a helper to Bradlaugh in his new Parliamentary standing. Aveling, repudiated by both of them, set up housekeeping with the daughter of Karl Marx, and took the platform as an ultra-Marxist. George Standring, who kept the bookstall at the Hall of Science, and whose veneration for Bradlaugh was so deep that he kissed his hand rather than presume to shake it, joined the Fabian Society, kept the bookstall there, and gave me a devoted friendship that lasted till his death. He had a much higher estimate of me as a public speaker than I had of myself; and so it came about that when Bradlaugh's famous debate with Henry Mayers Hyndman left him and his fellow converts dissatisfied, they asked Bradlaugh to debate the Socialist issue with me. I was

considerably frightened; for I was not only comparatively a novice but in my own opinion only a lightweight with no chance against such a champion heavyweight as Bradlaugh. Still, I could not back out; and the challenge—for such it virtually was—went forward.

I was saved by Bradlaugh himself. He accepted the challenge, but stipulated that I should be bound by the publications and statistics of Hyndman's Democratic Federation, to which I did not belong. I should have taken him on, on his own terms and ignored them in the ring; but I was young enough to be priggishly conscientious; and as I believed that the statistics of the Democratic Federation were exaggerated (Charles Booth's inquiry, meant to prove this, proved on the contrary that they fell far short of the truth) I refused to be bound by any publications to which I was not a party. Bradlaugh would not debate on any other terms; so the duel never came off; and I lost a chance which I have ever since regretted. My impression is that Bradlaugh never intended that it should; for he had backed the wrong horse, and was finding that all his superb platform craft could not conceal the fact that for the first time in his life the facts against him were overwhelming. All he knew about Socialism was that Robert Owen's attempt to impose it on the Trade Unions had, after making a great sensation, reduced itself to absurdity and collapsed ignominiously, leaving some of its apostles with no very savoury reputation. He underrated and even despised the Marxist revival, the command of which he should have seized, and the founding of the Labour Party anticipated.

Foote at first made the same mistake; and Standring's circle challenged him as they had challenged Bradlaugh, and again named me as their champion. Foote took me on unconditionally; and the debate took place at the Hall of Science for two nights. We were fairly matched; and honours were easy. I shared the applause of the Secularists so fully that when Foote's bankruptcy threatened to involve his resignation of the presidency Standring had no difficulty in placing me on the list of speakers in the series of lectures on Progress in Freethought which was really a device for vetting the qualifications of his possible successors. But Foote did not resign; and the threatened storm cleared up. In any case I had no intention of joining the N.S.S. and accepting the presidency, my shop being the Fabian Society. I delivered my address only to wake the N.S.S. up and make its old guard of Individualists aware that Mill's Essay on Liberty was no longer the latest word, and that the Christian Socialist clergymen were leaving them nowhere even as Bible wreckers.

That is the whole story. It may seem strange that Mr. Chapman Cohen lived through it all, and yet took in so little of it that he cannot bring himself to believe that it really happened, and thinks I must be delirious. But I am not surprised; for in my 89th year, learning the history of my own time, I am repeatedly staggered by the movements that have taken place under my very nose, and in some of which I have actually taken part, yet of which I remember nothing.

I am sorry my very explicit Credo in the Rationalist Annual floored your reviewer. I have had no other complaints.

G. BERNARD SHAW.

Rejoinder by Chapman Cohen, President N.S.S.

I FEEL impelled to thank Mr. Shaw for so constructing his article that two-thirds of what he writes, while interesting is irrelevant to the issue. His sketch of Bradlaugh is entertaining, although we may well wonder why a man, a Republican from boyhood, and a staunch Radical all his life, is set down as a "Tory." Nor is Mr. Shaw quite correct in his opinion of George Standring.

a very earnest worker, but I do not think he could be considered in the front rank of the movement. He had a reputation as a "leg-puller," which may explain much. Standing was also a Socialist. So was Mr. Shaw who describes the N.S.S. in an article published in the "Sunday Express" as being "resolutely anti-Socialist" while he was an extreme Socialist, and further, "the N.S.S. was heroically Materialist and Rationalist, while I was an artist philosopher, and a negation of both." (As a matter of fact the N.S.S. was neither Socialist nor anti-Socialist. It took, and still takes, no part in politics). The background pictured by Mr. Shaw is in itself a decisive repudiation of his ever being seriously considered as a possible President. He was not even a member of the Society.

Mr. Shaw was, it is true, invited to lecture in the old "Hall of Science." But it was then quite common for outsiders to be invited to lecture—including clergymen, but it is quite certain that he was not invited as a "try-out" for President. Mr. J. M. Robertson and Mr. Wheeler, both well known writers on Freethought, and both scholars, were there as listeners. Robertson twitted Shaw with having carefully kept his Freethinking in the background, and Wheeler said that the audience felt as though it was being "sermonised on Freethought by a Socialist outsider." No wonder Mr. Shaw said in the "Express" article: "I was not offered the vacant Presidentship." It would have been a miracle if he had been given that offer. For the Presidency was never vacant. Bradlaugh retired owing to ill health, and at the same time proposed Foote as President.

There is also here a curious alteration in statement from the one which appeared in the "Express." (The full story will be found in the fourth volume of my "Essays in Freethinking.") There, the statement ran, that "when Charles Bradlaugh died (the N.S.S.) was casting about for an alternative successor to G. W. Foote with whom some of the leading members had quarrelled. I was invited to address it on the subject of the progress of Freethought. I complied and my lecture threw the Society into convulsions . . . I was not offered the vacant Presidentship." But, there never was a vacancy, save during the time it took Bradlaugh to propose Foote and put the resolution to the meeting, which was carried.

Now Mr. Shaw takes another line—we must assume having forgotten the previous one. Now we have it that the real truth may be told without injuring anyone. Foote had become bankrupt—which was anything but a miracle when the maintenance of a Freethought paper is concerned. But Foote died in 1915. What prevented this being made public in 1929? The news was public property all along. There are difficulties in being bankrupt, of course. An *undischarged* bankrupt must not take the chairmanship of a registered company. He must not take goods on credit without informing his would-be creditors, and so forth. But Mr. Shaw might have bethought himself that the N.S.S. was not a registered body. In the eyes of the law, it was just a loose amalgamation of individuals, free to do as they please so long as they did not break the laws that govern the movements of all citizens. What legal risk, then, did Foote, or the N.S.S., run in retaining his Presidency? I suggest to Mr. Shaw that he consults his solicitor as to the exact working of the law concerning bankrupts, and the risks run by the N.S.S. while Foote remained President. If he does take legal advice he will find that the risk run was just nothing.

But Foote had quarrelled with other Freethinkers. So had Bradlaugh. So had Holyoake. So had every leader of Freethought and most leaders of any movements where the clash of ideas occurs. Why, some people have quarrelled with Winston Churchill and have looked round for a successor.

Now I have stated the reply to the real issue, and if Mr. Shaw prolongs the dispute, I hope he will carefully exclude things that in their relation to the Foote question do not arise.

Mr. Shaw could write a very interesting book on "People I Have Met."

I think I have now answered everything in Mr. Shaw's article that calls for reply, but I hope I shall not be considered boastful when I say that I am not in the habit of permitting myself to be drawn off the real point.

This is simply whether G. B. S., an "extreme Socialist," was invited to stand for the Presidency of a Society to which he did not belong, and with which he did not agree. Mr. Shaw has said that looking at events the Society would not have chosen badly. That, we submit, is irrelevant. For if the young man of 1890, then only known by the few as a young man "of parts," had stood as the representative of an Atheistic organisation, he never would have been the famous personage he has become. He would have spent his life in a cause that brings few public honours and less private cash. He would have been supported by the few, even though he benefited the many. There is no comparison between the struggling journalist, however liberal his opinions, and the avowed Atheist facing the power, the wealth and the malignity of threatened religion. But a full appreciation of history was not the strong point of G. B. S. It is not to-day. But why, oh why, should the N.S.S. go out of its way to secure the leadership of a man who did not agree with its policy? The leaders of Freethought may not always have been as wise as one might wish, but they have never suffered from insanity.

There are two remaining questions of a personal matter. Mr. Shaw says I am mistaken if I can imagine that nothing could happen to the N.S.S. without my knowledge. That is very petty. I make no such claim. But I do pride myself on having a knack of by-passing the tittle-tattle which some people regard as essays in the study of human nature. I do not care how people dress their hair or fasten their boots. The frivolities of the great are no better or worse than the frivolities of the small. I do not care to make mole hills into mountains. It is more important to be on one's guard against converting a mountain into a mole hill.

The second point is Mr. Shaw's surprise that I should have lived through the events that he says occurred and cannot believe certain things really happened. If I have that weakness I am not aware of it. But very gently I would suggest—for our combined ages would, if they could be put on end, enable us to get ready to see the French Revolution—that we may by reflecting too much upon certain things get our minds out of focus. A mother who loses a baby is apt to see it grow up, step by step, keeping pace in size and character with the children who are left to her. But I do confess that I am not a lover of tittle-tattle. I have rather a keen memory of things that matter, and while I may have buried the trivial happenings that accompany human life, whether in group or in individual form, I have a rather tenacious memory with regard to anything that affects the movement in which I have spent more than fifty years of my life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

HOPES AND WISHES

My New Year's Wish—which I'm sure you share—
PEACE! And an end to Insanity Fair!

My New Year's Wish and fervent hope—
May it be Peace—and to hell with the Pope!

Ecrasez l'Infame!

Vive Voltaire!

A. HANSON.

YOU CAN'T BLASPHEME!

NOTE.—The use of the term "soldiers" does not refer to real soldiers; who are indeed firing at a "target" and—hitting it!—A. G.

BLASPHEME?—'Tis an empty word; an emasculate verb. It is incapable of action, because there isn't anything whatever on which it could act. It's only referent is an emptiness; commensurate only with the corresponding emptiness of primitive and woodenly credulous heads.

To this particular "emptiness" the primitives of the ages have given many names, of which the label, "God," is in fashion here. The term is by no means euphonious, but it comes in handy (at times) as an expletive.

But an emptiness by any other name is just as empty.

All the (so-called) blasphemies that the uttermost resources of language could possibly fulminate would be innocuous as the efforts of soldiers firing at a target which wasn't there. Their officers might tell them (and the soldiers might believe?) that a target "was" there, even though they couldn't see it. Nevertheless, they would merely be shooting at the wind all the time. And most of the "godite officers" know that.

Such peculiar soldiers have for ages been aiming prayers, supplications, plaintive hopes and fears, and all manner of other godite ammunition at a "target" which wasn't there. And even the present day sees a "few" of the type, spurred on by their vested officers, solemnly, expectantly, and woodenly, firing away at a "target" which isn't there.

And anthropologists tell us that all prehistoric types of Homo Sapiens are extinct. Bah! We don't believe it! The Troglodytes are still with us! Alive! and still prayer-firing at nothing. Sometimes singly; sometimes in small groups; and on special occasions, urged by their "godite commanders," in wide but sparsely spread numbers throughout the country—often for a week at a time.

A pregnant instance of a "godite officer" on a special occasion urging and conducting a fusillade of thanksgiving and prayer to Nothing was provided recently by the Bishop of Lichfield, in connection with the tragedy of the R.A.F. bomb-dump near Burton-on-Trent.

In the bomb-damaged village church he conducted a joint "thanksgiving and memorial" service. The thanksgiving act was for the fortunate ones who escaped; and salvos of thankful fireworks were fired for the edification, gratification, and praise of—a vacuum.

And then came the memorial scene for the victimed dead. What of it?—A mumbling, grovelling "godite officer" acknowledgement of the tragedy having occurred; which everybody knew; but nobody knew why it was "allowed" to occur by that to which thanksgiving and praise was being offered for the small mercy of a few it allowed to escape.

After acts one and two, a round or so of prayer-cartridge by way of overweight imploring Emptiness for further aid and protection.

The blithering, illogical idiocy of it!

Enough to make a cat laugh?—No!—to mee-ow-ow in hideous cacophony or, if it could, to perform the feline equivalent of the "raspberry."

One wonders what were the emotions of the relations and friends of the victims as the orgasms of thanksgiving and praise rang mockingly in their ears.

Did they join in? Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion would answer explosively—"!!!". Reader, sit back awhile and consider this modern evidence of prehistoric skull, and consequent, brain formation.

After this tragic, stark, irrevocable demonstration of Nothing's utter disregard of all previous prayer-orgies, and of its stony indifference in allowing such tragedies to occur, this "godite officer" had the effrontery to urge thanksgiving, etc., for those who escaped, while discreetly dodging the issue of blame for the mutilated dead. The praise and the blame should be on the balance-sheet, as are credit and debit in all honest transactions. And what of the dead?—A grovelling, uncomplaining "godite officer's" acceptance of Nothing's decision that a horrible death be their portion in what it had decreed.

Decreed! yes!—and no amount of casuistry, quibbling, or circumlocution on the part of godites can invalidate the word. They preach Nothing's omnipotence and omniscience, therefore "it" knew about it beforehand, as it was part of the sequence of events ordained by itself to unroll. We repeat, "decreed!"

Then, after a slobbering acceptance of Nothing's decree, and in prayer-mockery of the bereaved, was urged more incenses of prayer-smoke soliciting it's "continued" help and protection.

And the miles of devastated countryside glooming around the damaged church!

And the newly-filled graves, still unsettled, staring them in the face! And the pall of permanent ruin and grief shrouding the homes and hearts of the bereaved!

And, after the service, the bishop riding home to his palace, there to be lost sight of until a next "parade."

Reader, you have been asked to sit back awhile and consider, but—keep awake!—If you have read your "Sartor Resartus" you might experience a dream phantasmagoria.

Neanderthal, Java, Piltown, Pekin, or Cro-Magnon skulls, stripped of their erstwhile rich vestments, might appear to you floating and mouthing round pulpits and altars. African Ju-ju and American Indian Medicine-men posturing and prancing in forest clearings to the howlings of their dupes. Priests perpetrating human sacrifices on their altars; sacrifices of blood and of sexual lust.

Egyptian sacred bulls, crocodiles and cats. Sacred elephants, Grand Lamas, and a host of other nightmares born of craftiness and superstitious credulity might crowd around.

In this wild, jumbled dance-macabrisms, Hitler and Mussolini would have a place among the Mumbo-jumbos, mouthing and injecting their brainless hysteria into their "believing" and deluded listeners.

And then, just before awakening, the Grand Panjandrum himself might have a fling—the Pope!—blessing the arms and banners of Italy's battalions before their setting out to the destruction of Abyssinia and its peoples.

And all these contingent horrific protagonists are born of spurious "belief," that cancer of the human mind! The mythical Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil isn't in it with the real and poisonous tree of Ignorance and Credulity, whose fruit is blind Belief.

To speak disparagingly of any or all of these many varied idiosyncrasies is to be stigmatised as a blasphemer, according to which "bee-in-the-bonnet" you asperse. . . . And now, to emerge from this floweriness and hyperbole, let us ask: What, then, is the result of all this bastard belief and prayer-mongering? Ask the derisive world of non-godites and indifferents—90 per cent. of the people.

ARTHUR GODFREY.

(To be concluded)

WANTED URGENTLY.—Glasgow or suburbs, accommodation for couple with 1 year old child. Currie, 16, Wallacefield Crescent, Troon, Ayrshire.

WANTED TO PURCHASE.—Conway's Life of Paine, price to V.C.A., c/o "The Freethinker" office.

GOD AND HIS UNIVERSE

... WE set off along the road to Kasindi on the Belgian Congo border, a hundred and ten miles away, bearing mostly south to skirt the Ruwenzori.

Since Cezaire had lived in the Congo, I began drawing him out on the subject. I had heard a great deal about the atrocities supposedly committed by the Belgians under Leopold II. The Belgians had always denied these charges vehemently, and, according to several well-informed people with whom I had talked, they seemed to have a valid case.

In fact, the Belgian Government had very wisely realised from the beginning that the only way to govern a country one-third as large as the United States and eighty-eight times as large as Belgium, with only a handful of whites, many of them Swedes, Germans, English and Americans, was to make use of the existing hierarchy.

The chief of the tribe, therefore, was held responsible for law and order and also for the ivory and rubber tribute to finance the budget required to open the country.

A white official would arrive in a district and say to the chief, "I'll be back in a month. You say you have so many people. Set them to work. When I return, I want so much rubber." The chief would procrastinate for three weeks and then try to collect his quota in the remaining stern measures of the type immemorably in use in Africa, and the Belgian Government had been unable to suppress many barbarous cruelties. Armand Denis, a Belgian by birth, said wherever he went in the Congo, procuring material for his remarkable film "Dark Rapture," he inquired whether there were any mutilated people in the vicinity who had been victims of the atrocities. He saw many natives without ears and hands, but in each case these had been cut off, not by the Belgian Government but by their own chiefs. In Northern Uele, one native, Monga, minus both feet and hands, travelled twenty miles in the hope of getting a small tip for being photographed. He made the journey by strapping a third section of a Goodyear tyre to each knee and propelled himself by means of sticks held like crutches between the stumps of his arms. These amputations also had been his chiefs' doing.

As the years went on, the atrocities ceased, and the custom of utilising the chiefs became systematised. Wherever possible the Government confirmed the hereditary chief in his power, hung a medal as large as a melon around his neck, authorised him to have a Belgian flag carried in front of him, let him keep ten per cent. of what he collected in taxes, and announced to all and sundry that he was the chief.

Generally speaking, Catholic missions do very fine work, teaching, healing the sick and working for native betterment. Yet explorers are often wary of hiring mission boys as porters or in any capacity. The fathers themselves recognised that educating the native did not always bring happy results. Ask them for boys and they would reply: "Well, we'd like to have time to send for some from the forest. We're afraid if we give you anybody from the mission you'll have trouble."

If he failed to follow instructions, they deposed of him, sometimes with the curious result that his successor could rule only by making a deal with the legitimate chief whom all the people still obeyed.

Cezaire said the Belgian Government was a great believer in the benefit of work for everybody. For a time they were confronted with the problem of creating a demand for European consumer goods among the natives who had no conception of the value of money. The Belgians were remedying this situation rapidly. In some districts each native was ordered to grow one acre of cotton, which the Government would buy from him. If he failed to comply, he was sentenced to the road gang,

a much worse fate. After several years of this violent sort of education, he learned to like what he could buy with his money and usually preferred to put into practice what he had been taught rather than suffer the consequences. In this way the national economy was being radically changed.—From "Passport to Adventure." L. N. COTLOW.

CORRESPONDENCE

A SUGGESTION.

SIR.—In "Freethinker," page 481, December 24: "It would be a good thing . . . a similar volume on the New Testament. The latter would be a perfect bombshell."

Would not the chapters, or rather Book 12 with the Appendix of Gerald Massey's "Ancient Egypt," which exposes the most primitive roots of the Jesus legend, be a V2? You probably know that this work is very rare (only 500 copies were printed) and also expensive. Such an excerpt would take some 190 pages, 10 in. by 7 in., and would afford a minute and startling dissection of the Jesus myth.

CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

[We should very much like to see carried out what is suggested, and we will bear the matter in mind. The question is *paper*. We have already a number of things hung up from that cause.—EDITOR.]

OBITUARY

MR. JOHN KENNEBURGH

We have to record the death in his 71st year of one of the oldest members of the Glasgow Secular Society.

Mr. John Kenneburgh was of a quiet, unassuming, modest and gentle nature, ever ready to do all in his power to give active assistance to the Branch at outdoor and indoor meetings, sometimes when in poor health.

John Kenneburgh was unquestionably a well read man.

He left behind a carefully chosen library of books with instructions that the G.S.S. choose a selection to help stock the Society's library.

In his lifetime he gave a selection to the library which was much appreciated.

His wish that his remains would be given a Secular Service was carried out by the G.S.S. Mr. R. M. Hamilton officiated at the Crematorium, many Branch members attending.

J. D. M.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., C. E. M. JOAN, M.A., D. Lit.: "On Re-reading Hardy."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Secular Society (Old Museum Building, College Square).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., lecture and debate.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6.30: "Alert." Questions and answers.

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. T. L. SMITH: "Gospel according to Judas Iscariot."

Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N.S.S. (Socialist Cafe, Pilgrim Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON will lecture.

Quarrington Hill (Church Hall).—Tuesday, January 9, a public debate: "Is the Bible Trustworthy?" Aff. Rev. Mr. BEDDRESS, Neg. Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

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