

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXV.—No. 4

Sunday, January 28, 1945

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

For God's Sake

I LEFT off last week with a question. It was directed primarily to Christians, but I do not think for a moment that any leading Christian holding a responsible post is likely to come forward with an answer. Why should he? He has everything to lose and nothing to gain. There was a time when Christian leaders rushed into controversy, but then the enemies were mainly of the deistic order. Atheists were met with here and there, but in the main Atheism was confined to the upper intellectual classes, and they were not usually in a hurry to publicly confess themselves. As late as the end of the eighteenth century the conflict was mainly of the Christianity versus Deism order. But with time the real, the ultimate conflict began to express itself, and curiously enough it was a leading Christian priest, Bishop Butler, who unconsciously transformed the issue from "Deism versus a Revealed Religion" to one between Theism and Atheism. The opponents of the Christian Churches argued that the Christian Bible was full of flaws. The God of the Bible was cruel and partial in his favouritism; the Bible was full of faults, etc. Butler argued that if the God of the Bible was also the God of nature, one would expect to find the same marks with both. Butler not merely argued his case, he proved it. The two gods were identical; the logical conclusion was, of course, Atheism. It would not be fair to Butler to say that he did not see this, but in the latter half of the eighteenth century Atheism was such a terrible thing that Butler counted for at least silence on the part of those who were dissatisfied with revealed religion. Still, Butler was right, the real issue was God or no God, Theism or Atheism. There was no other issue.

Then came the evolution period. The representatives of the Christian faith realised that they had no case. Science was able to explain, in a growing measure, *how* things happened; *why* they happened was ruled out altogether. "Why" could only exist on the assumption that the God of Bishop Butler really existed.

So far as controversy was concerned, the alternative before the clergy in this country was simply Atheism or Theism, and the odds were heavily against Theism. But debate with a wide-awake Atheist was a boomerang kind of policy. Silence was the only policy that could be adopted, not with profit, but with a probable smaller loss of followers. So I do not expect that any responsible Christian is likely to answer the question I asked. This was: "Assuming that our ancestors of 2,000 years ago had possessed the knowledge we have to-day concerning the origin of religious ideas, would the Christian religion have ever existed?" The question was a searching one, but it was an honest one, and the answer must be No. Religion would have been recognised as merely a phuse of folklore.

Even as the matter stood 2,000 years ago Christianity had nothing to offer that was new to the pagan world. The story of gods coming down from heaven to help, or order, man was quite common. Gods had consorted with earthly maidens exactly as the Holy Ghost did with Mary. They had performed all the miracles attributed to the New Testament Jesus, and had said all that the New Testament character said. The sacrificial character of Jesus was a mere repetition of other gods or semi-gods. The whole story of the life of Jesus is to be found in Egyptian records generations before the Christian episode was written. And if we are to follow the course of history, it was at one time touch-and-go whether Christianity survived as a conquering creed or as one of the many superstitions that existed throughout the pagan world. Mithraism was running Christianity very closely for first place. In the end it was the decision of the Emperor Constantine that established the Christ legend, although it is an open question whether world culture might not have benefited if the God Mithras had superseded the God Jesus. We believe this would have been the result.

Let us take a case to illustrate what has just been said. It is taken from Tylor, although similar examples could be found among the semi-savages we have in our midst. Tylor gives an illustration of a missionary encountering an uncivilised African brother medicine man who had been indulging in a religious fast. The missionary soliloquised:

"It has always appeared to me that these rogues, from long fasting, contracted a weakening of the brain, a giddiness, a kind of delirium, which makes them imagine that they are gifted with superior wisdom. They impose upon themselves, and afterwards on others."

Now the conclusion of the missionary was quite sound. An Atheist will agree here with the missionary. But why call the man a rogue? He fasts, not from roguish motive, but because he believes that the visions which follow his self-torture offer direct evidence that he has got into touch with God. Roman Catholics and Jews can be found all over this country who also practise fasting in large numbers, as do the more devout of the members of the Church of England. As religion becomes more rationalised, fasting is regarded more as an act of self-punishment for whatever sins that have been committed. Ordinary "sins" are too common to be bothered with; if these were taken seriously the devastation among Christians would depopulate large numbers of our churches.

But in the history of religion the original reason for fasting was that it brought those who practised it nearer to God in the shape of visions. For example, the Zulus have a maxim that a stuffed body cannot see sacred things. In the New Testament Jesus fasted for forty days as a preparation for encountering Satan. George Fox, the

founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers), confesses that he "fasted much" and worked abroad in solitude—two excellent methods for creating hallucinations. It was after much fasting that he heard a voice saying to him: "There is one, even Jesus Christ, that can speak to thy condition." Catlin, in his "North American Indians," relates that when a boy reaches puberty he is sent away to some secluded spot where he abstains from food until he has a vision of some animal which becomes his "totem." Most of the American natives followed this practice. One may put at the side of these cases the numerous visions of Jesus or of some saint. India gives us a shoal of rules on fasting, and the Christian Church furnishes a multitude of similar practices. Thus, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa were both devotees to the practice of lengthy fasts, and were in due course rewarded with visions of Christ or the Virgin—mostly Jesus in the case of the women and the Virgin in the case of men. Fasting is to-day a set practice in the Roman Catholic Church.

Brady, in his "Clavis Calendria," gives what is perhaps the most peculiar of justifications for the practice of fasting. It runs: "As a coach goes faster when it is empty, a man by fasting can be better united to God; for it is a principle with geometers that a round body can never touch a plane except in one point. . . . A belly well filled becomes round; it cannot touch God except in one point, but fasting flattens the belly until it is united with the surface of God at all points."

Tylor, the creator of modern Anthropology, well sums up the matter by saying: "So long as fasting is continued as a religious rite, so long the consequences in mental exaltation will continue the old savage doctrine that morbid phantasy is supernatural experience. Bread and meat would have robbed the ascetic of many an angel's visit; the opening of the refectory door must many a time have closed the gate of heaven to his gaze."

The missionary was right. Long fasting created the conditions which enabled the African wizard to get into touch with his god. But why call the man a rogue? Was he really more of a rogue than those who saw, and those who still see (if we may trust the published records of the oldest Christian Church), visions of saints in the Christian heaven? Unconsciously that African wizard was giving a much-needed lesson to the Christian missionary in religious deception if he had possessed the wit to realise it. Had he read the lesson aright he might have well said, paraphrasing Bunyan, "There but for the enlightenment of modern science, go I." He might have helped to convince his brother medicine man that he was deceiving himself. He had before him a chance to see himself as many others would see him. He could only wonder whether the man before him was a fraud or not. And if so, we make it that the native would place his white visitor in the same category.

But in sober truth one has no need to explain the persistence of the most stupid of religious beliefs as frauds. Frauds there are beyond question. But there must be large numbers who are honest, and it is with them that the problem lies. We say "problem," but there is really no problem with regard to religion to-day. The origin of religion may be known by all who wish to know. The problem before us to-day is to determine what are the

factors which, in the midst of a society which claims to be civilised, yet uphold ideas and teachings that belong to our primitive ancestors.

Well, the problem is many-sided, and the answers correspondingly many-fold. The intellectual dishonesty of our official leaders can hardly be denied, nor can this fundamental dishonesty be set aside because some of these people have told the lie of religion so often and for so long that they have brought belief to themselves. Where intellectual positions are at stake we are not a courageous people. We do not ask what is true, so much as to ask what is safe. But some of us felt a great contempt for our religious guides for a great many years.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

ANOTHER BOOK ABOUT BOOKS

ONE quality which distinguishes Mr. E. E. Kellett's "Ex Libris, Confessions of a Constant Reader" (Allen and Unwin, 1940) from many other books about books is that he does not insist on reading only the masterpieces of literature. He knows quite well that actually there are many "masterpieces" of a kind among the books considered as second or even third rate.

Mr. Kellett goes back into Victorian times, and his account of the many books that came his way from childhood is to me, also a constant reader, most fascinating. Indeed, it has come quite as a surprise to find him giving the titles of scores of books I had thought quite forgotten—except to people like myself whose hobby has been to read pretty nearly every book that has come our way.

How many readers of this journal remember Hesba Stretton, whose "Jessica's First Prayer" and "Christie's Old Organ" must have had hundreds of thousands of readers in my boyhood days? True, they are fervently evangelical, but—like Bing Crosby's "Going My Way"—I found them entrancing. Mr. Kellett does not mention Mrs. Walton's "A Peep Behind the Scenes" of which though reeking with Christianity, I certainly read and re-read every line. Perhaps every book in those far-off days was enchanting to me—as they appear to have been to Mr. Kellett. He certainly enjoyed a far greater variety of reading than I did for he was lucky enough to have a father whose appetite for books seemed insatiable, as well as a mother, and whose house was thereby exceptionally well stocked with books. Side by side with Hesba Stretton and A.L.O.E. and other popular evangelical writers were Schlegel and Kant, Milton and Wesley, and his father was broadminded enough to allow his children to roam about the bookshelves at will—with only one veto. The reader will smile if I mention the work not allowed to be read—it was "Don Juan."

I was glad to see Mr. Kellett has a good word to say for Thomas Day's "Sandford and Merton," and even for those much sneered-at school stories of Dean Farrar, "St. Winifred's" and "Eric." I never saw eye to eye with their many critics and I believe that for what it is worth, my independent attitude on books these days is due to the fact that I, even as a boy, refused to accept judgments unless they appeared to me to be just.

Mr. Kellett is very grateful for that once famous series Chambers' "Information for the People" and "The Book of Days." Even with all our tremendous advance in knowledge I feel Chambers would take a lot of beating. I only came across a volume or two, but how I devoured them! In a recent appeal for more books for the Forces we were asked not to send "Victorian" books—more modern stuff was wanted particularly modern detective stories and crime thrillers. Well, this would

rule out sending many books which Mr. Kellett—and I—have enjoyed, like the "Schonberg-Cotta Family" by Mrs. Charles or "Letters from Palmyra" by W. Ware, or "Barriers Burned Away" by E. P. Roe; and what a soldier would say to "Queechy" and the "Wide Wide World," if he ever got them, I shudder to write. Yet their circulation must have run into millions.

Mr. Kellett has no use, strange to say, for Harrison Ainsworth whose historical romances, like "The Tower of London" and "Old St. Paul's" I found immense—to say nothing of "Jack Sheppard" and a dozen others. Some of these I feel far superior to many modern historical tales. Did he ever read, I wonder, Leitch Ritchie's "Magician"?—all about Gilles de Retz, the companion of Joan of Arc, accused of all sorts of crimes by the Roman Church and eventually "liquidated."

I was also glad to see that Mr. Kellett is not one of those writers who imagine that the only women novelists one should read are the inevitable Brontës, Jane Austin and George Eliot. There are others like Mrs. Oliphant and Mrs. Riddell, to name, but two out of scores. After all, even in painting, a constant course of Rembrandt, Titian and Da Vinci would tend to pall a little. There are other painters.

Side by side with "Frank Fairleigh" and the books of Whyte Melville, Mr. Kellett would read Borrow's "Bible in Spain" and Xenophon, the "Epic of Hades" with Poe's wonder "Tales," Spenser with the "Pilgrim's Progress" and Dryden's "Hind and the Panther," as well as Pope, "Alice in Wonderland," and Scott, whom he places very high. Scott is out of fashion these days, but I am on the side of Hugh Walpole on Scott, who he claimed, was one of the very greatest novelists in the world. "Waverley," "The Antiquary," "Old Mortality," have a greatness for which I search in vain among most modern writers. In Mrs. Henry Wood's old "Argosy," I once read a "marvellous" thriller, "In the Dead of Night"—and often since I have wondered whether anybody else living had read it. I was not altogether surprised Mr. Kellett had come across it too—though he thinks it one of "the two worst novels" he had read till then. The other was Lytton's "Alice." I am afraid I do not agree with him.

Of course, Lever and Kingsley were read—with Shelley and Macaulay and Virgil. Trollope and Cuthbert Bede's "Verdant Green," Douglas Jerrold and Charlotte M. Yonge, all were mixed with works like Saint Beuve's "Causeries du Lundi." All was grist that came to the mill—history jostled with belles-lettres, fiction with the Roman and Greek classics, poetry with a New Testament Greek grammar. I wish I had space to give a more detailed account.

And of course, Mr. Kellett came into the religious book world and had to face Christian apologetics. He was brought up as a Protestant, the kind so well known as "Victorian" and he soon discovered that he had to contend with Carlyle and Mill, Kant and Buckle and Locky. They appear to have made mince-meat of his religion. At all events, he was not taken in by Butler's "Analogy" which he rightly saw could easily be turned into "an argument for Agnosticism." He should have said Atheism. And naturally a reading of Frazer's "Golden Bough" made him realise that his ideas of religion must be revised. It is clear also that neither Newman nor Pascal nor even Nietzsche influenced him as did Spinoza, who comes in for some of the greatest praise given in the whole book.

"Spinoza," says Mr. Kellett, "might seem to have done his utmost to repel readers, fit and unfit alike, from any desire to make close acquaintance with him. But the fact remains, that during the last three centuries he has never wanted an audience, and from the moment I received his book . . . I have been a humble but enthusiastic member of that audience." He is compared with Lucretius, "who was happy like him in searching out the causes of things, and in casting beneath our feet all fear and inexorable fate; who in the midst of horrors, and with

worse horrors impending, found serenity in thoughts that passed the flaming bounds of space and time."

Mr. Kellett "scarcely shares" a hope of immortality, which proves how far his omnivorous reading has carried him from the more or less narrow evangelical environment of his boyhood. His books "swayed his thoughts and feelings" as they do all lovers of books—to them he says: "I owe, first, a strengthening of my love of liberty." And it is necessary, "if one's opinions are to be worth anything, of studying at least some books, and these if possible the most authoritative, on all sides of controversial questions." But he warns us that he hopes no word in his book "will suggest to its readers that I imagine reading to be everything or indeed the main thing. Unless it stirs thought, or heightens feeling, it is nothing."

There has never been such a demand for books and reading as in these strenuous days. They have given in the past, and are doing so now, some of the greatest happiness human beings can enjoy in this sad world of ours. I am sure that Mr. Kellett's books about books will help to guide many people in a further search for that happiness, and they will not be disappointed.

H. CUTNER.

A MARXIST CRITIC

NO reader who has followed my writings in these columns and elsewhere, will have any doubt of the admiration I feel for the work of Mr. Jack Lindsay. I am, therefore, reluctant to subject any of his books to adverse criticism, but I feel that his essay, "Perspective for Poetry" (Fore Publications; 2s.) exemplifies one of the worse tendencies in modern critical writing.

Ostensibly this is a study of the development of poetry, largely in relation to political and economic events. But it tends, when carefully analysed, to become a denunciation of poets who do not toe the party line in docile obedience. I cannot see any other reason for the deliberate rejection of Mr. Herbert Read as a major figure in poetry or the "debunking" of Mr. Alex Comfort, who is quite certainly one of the most promising of the youngest generation of writers.

Mr. Lindsay also regards all "Left-wing" critics who are not orthodox Communists as being almost beneath contempt. He quotes derisively from Mr. Arthur Koestler, who wrote, early in 1943, "The coming victory will be a Conservative victory, and lead to a Conservative peace." When Mr. Lindsay wrote, this may have appeared an unduly pessimistic forecast, but in view of recent events in Italy, Belgium and Greece, it looks like being only too well justified.

Readers may wonder why I inflict these random jottings on a Freethought audience. The point is that only Freethinkers (as far as I know) really appreciate the value of true freedom of expression. A poet must be free of State patronage. As I have already written elsewhere, neither Father State nor Mother Church should be permitted to exercise any rights over the individual. As Herbert Read has so wisely said, the artist is not a special kind of man; the man is a special kind of artist. And only when the rights of State and Church have both been totally destroyed can the artist hope to come into his own. If this is called Anarchism or Trotskyism or any other unpleasant names—well, most of us who call ourselves Atheists or Agnostics will know well enough that hard names are not in themselves sufficient cause for denunciation.

Mr. Lindsay is a very deep and thoughtful student of literary trends. That is why I, for one, must explore his hitching his waggon to the Communist star. Literature, he says, must be propagandist, and there one is inclined to agree. But the only propaganda worthy of a permanent place in our literature is that for the dignity of man, preserving his freedom from all possible encroachment.

JOHN ROWLAND.

LAYING OFF HANDS

I.

"Far down the ages now
Her journey well nigh done."

SO sings the hymn-writer. Whether he knew it or not, Bonar was expressing historic truth and nearly accurate prophecy.

The Medieval Church had enormous powers. As Matthew Arnold commented, its claim to control faith and morals meant in practice, control of at least three-fourths of life. By possession of great wealth, the repository of most of the accumulated knowledge of the period, holding the instruments for disseminating that knowledge, the marvel is that the Church was not absolutely supreme. How secular organisations succeeded in wresting from the Church any authority at all is a cause for wonder. To explain it one would have to examine and study many phenomena.

Speaking in general terms it appears as if all human institutions reach a stage when further expansion is impossible. Next they shrink. Nothing remains static; existence is a condition of perpetual change. Coming generations act like the waves on the coast, eternally crumbling down even the hardest rocks.

That comparison is a good one. The record of humanity on the earth resembles the seashore, for ever strewn with debris of man's endeavours. It is a melancholy fact that mankind expends enormous labour on creating complex institutions; then time comes when those same institutions have to be destroyed or reformed by even greater labour, accompanied by suffering and often bloodshed.

So the Church. Also rebellion is innate in human nature. The fantastic wealth and display of the Church invited attack for plunder; its piling up of riches and luxury excited envy and resentment from those not possessing so much of the world's good things, and finally, the Church's employment of and dependence on material forces made inevitable the employment of material forces against it. The Church came to living by wealth and force; by them it fell.

Perhaps it may be laid down as axiomatic that all organisations contain within themselves the seeds of their own dissolution; or are superseded because of ceasing to be efficient for their purpose. We can feel little but pleasure in the realisation that nothing is permanent; all things will pass. The Church is doing so visibly and inexorably.

II.

Consider what the Church formerly controlled: nearly everything. It was the largest landowner in England, one-third of the country being its estate, usually also the best quality. Going about England and seeing the ruins of ecclesiastical buildings, one notices they are on the finest sites; to find a monastic relic is indication that the particular stretch of country was fertile and pleasant.

Before industry became mechanised the ownership of land meant holding economic power, and the Church held it. Possibly we may concede some praise to the Church for developing farming, but it was not progressive. Chief improvements in English agriculture are owing to the lay successors of the Church in more recent centuries.

One is inclined to think Henry the Eighth should have taken from the Church the whole of its wealth and property. A Church which professes poverty to be a virtue should be compelled to practise that virtue. As it is, "The Church's one foundation" is financial, but it does little with its lands and properties except draw rents from them, a generous portion of which goes in salaries to dignitaries and officials.

Being in the position to pay for them the Church was able to command the work of artists. So huge buildings arose, largest

and most elaborate of the period, outvying nobles' castles or princes' palaces. In them were stained glass windows, carving decoration, sculpture, mosaics, frescoes, encaustic tiles, gold and silver vessels, bells; every form of current art. Resultantly cathedrals to-day are not places of worship but massive museums.

Gorgeous needlework was stitched for priestly vestments, banners and altar cloths. Composers wrote music on religious themes and singers sang it. For the secular music of the period was folk song and dance, entirely different and remote from the specialised music demanded by the Church, the popular music and mime still bearing in its spontaneity and gay freedom a paganism older than Christianity.

Those who could write and draw were likewise enrolled in the service of the Church, so literature was hymns, prayers, lives and legends of saints, and priestly records like the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle." Beautifully written and illuminated, those pious productions were hit mortally, both in content and artistry by the invention of printing. For years the Church strove to control the output of books, but printing proved an emancipating agency, setting men's minds free from hieratic dominance.

Drama had its Church period in the miracle and mystery plays, but the growth of towns with their population's crave for amusement secularised drama. That is briefly the summary of European history for the last thousand years—the escape of man's activities from the dead hand of the Church; the growing triumph of secular business over sacred.

III.

One finds it in all aspects of national life. For long the Church was the chief department of State, reluctantly yielding to King and later Parliament. Abbots as well as Bishops sat in the House of Lords, whose authority to-day is but a shadow of what it was. Canon Law could promulgate and enforce its edicts as effectively as Civil Law. Till towns received Charters Local Government was a Church prerogative. Many monasteries had their stocks and pillory, whipping post and gallows for punishment of offenders condemned by Abbots acting as Magistrates. Poor relief and treatment of the sick were in the care of the Church, which also exercised wide influence by baptisms, weddings, funerals, confession, penances, excommunication and other ceremonies.

Being the only people to read and write priests kept the Parish Registers, drew up wills and other documents, often profitably to themselves. They practised crude banking; hence the triple-locked chests found in churches, which were repositories of funds and valuables. Charities were administered by the Church. It is less than a century since civic government in this country was taken away from parish vestries and vested by acts of parliament in the various councils we now elect.

For about five centuries, from Lanfranc to Wolsey, the Prime Minister of this realm was a churchman, usually Archbishop of Canterbury. Reprehensible as his method and action might have been, Henry II was right in principle; he was unconsciously speaking warningly when he cried: "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?" It was a forecast of what was bound to happen.

In some of these things the Church might argue its influence was good, the main dispute, as in art and agriculture, being the current of development and its subsequent arrest or diversion; whether the Church subordinated arts and crafts and accomplishments too much to its purposes and propaganda.

Regarding science and medicine there is less defence. Unless one sets out long and complicated and documented details—their existence—all one can say briefly is that when the Church was most powerful medicine and science barely subsisted. Their emergence is simply one long struggle and belated triumph against the suppressive efforts of the Church.

IV.

Through preaching and other activities of priests and monks and nuns, as well as by music, colour, processions and all the immensely varied paraphernalia of the medieval period, with the ceaseless activities of the wandering friars the Church held great control over men's minds. Among many of its agencies it was the newspaper and radio of the middle ages, biased in its own favour.

So it is with astonishment and dislike one notices how much religious bodies are allowed to use radio for their proselytising mission. Radio should have been a purely secular institution. Inexplicably the British Broadcasting Corporation has taken a back somersault into medieval ideas, operating on behalf of the Church.

Fragments of the old Church pre-eminence crop up everywhere, as chaplains in army and navy and prisons, but the general tendency is to take material matters out of the hands of the Church and entrust them to popularly elected bodies employing trained specialists.

This makes it more extraordinary that one great department of public life, Education, is yet largely controlled by the Church. This should not be in the twentieth century. As Law, Government, Politics, Literature, Art, Music, Science, everything else has been taken over by laymen and run on secular lines; it is time Education was treated likewise. Church direction of Education is an anachronism, a medieval fossil, harking back to the dark ages, a museum exhibit with no practical and usable value.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

THE "V" SIGN

WHEN I was nearing this point in the writing of these memoirs I was asked to weigh in with a short article to serve as the prologue to a little book which the Eastbourne committee of "Salute the Soldier Week" was getting up as a programme and souvenir of that local effort, which proved so gratifying a success to its devoted organiser. Thinking over what I might contribute that would best fit the occasion, and be least of a task at a time when I was more than customarily pressed with work, I hit upon a subject which I feel deserves a place here. I headed the little piece "The 'V' Sign in the Sussex Sky," and by the simple process of abridging it here, it adds one more personal note to my reminiscences of the war years. The reader will have his own reflections to make upon it, and may, perhaps, help to discover who was the originator of the "V" sign, which, for a time, dislodged the age-old "thumbs up."

Often has it happened that the origin of some great popular expression of feeling which has swept around the globe cannot be fixed with certainty; there are always those who would claim to be the first and "onlic begetter" on the flimsiest of evidence. I am told for instance, that some colonel has claimed the honour of originating the sign of "V" for Victory, and I should not for a moment question that claim; but I feel that a recorded experience of my own is worth re-stating, more for the honour of Sussex, let me add, than for any personal satisfaction that might attach to it. In Arthur Mee's famous journal, "The Children's Newspaper," for August 9, 1941, I read with some surprise the following from his pen:—

"As a stroke of cleverness the palm for propaganda must be given to the ingenious mind which has spread the Victory 'V' all over oppressed Europe. As far as we have been able to trace, the idea of the 'V' was first suggested in print by our old friend, Sir John Hammerton, who saw or imagined, a great 'V' in the sky over the Sussex Downs last autumn; linked it up with the Victorian 'V' of trees which stand out in that green paradise round Firls and wrote of it on November 9, in a diary Messrs. Cassell have now published as a book called, 'As the Days Go By.' Little can Sir John have imagined that

as the days went by the Victory 'V' would cover all Europe, appearing on walls in stricken France . . . tapped out in morse . . . until it has become the symbol of the vast underground movement in all the oppressed lands."

Now as Arthur Mee well knew, no one is more a sceptic of signs and portents than I am, and the occasion of my writing on November 9, 1940, in the "War Illustrated" was actually to discredit the story of a fantastic vision of Jesus, supported by twelve angels, which certain housewives at Firls assured a London newspaper reporter they had seen in the sky above that charming little downland village. I then went on to say: "I wonder what the Firls wives are saying to-day of the strange thing I saw in that same sky—for it could well have been over the Beacon itself, which in the days of Drake, contributed to 'Fire over England.' A vast 'V'-shaped blaze in the sunset sky."

The letter must have been a mile or more in height, and the left limb of it thinned away at the top into white vapour, but the letter as a whole stood solid and vividly aflame, thanks to the red tincture of the setting sun.

An amazing phenomenon. I saw it retain its volume and density for nearly twenty minutes of my journey. If that national daily will send its reporter to me I can give him no end of a "story" about it. But mainly, I would enlarge on "V" as the first letter of Victory, though a few miles distant there is another vast "V" in the South Downs, and well within sight of the fiery "V," being a plantation of trees put there to commemorate Victoria's Jubilee of 87 or 97. But Victoria and Victory come from the same root. A bright young Hurricane pilot had shot down the enemy bomber I had also seen earlier that afternoon and in his ecstasy of victory traced this gigantic "V" by making a dive of a mile or so and zooming up to the same height again at the appropriate angle. Only a theory.

The only "imagination" applied to my story was the theory which I thus expounded; the fact of the "V" sign cannot be questioned. But was this the very first time the idea was put into print? That I don't know, nor have I sought to verify any earlier claim to it. What matters is that so long ago as that November day of 1940, my chauffeur and I were witnesses of that luminous "V" sign as it hung above the Downs, while we were on our way from Lewes to Wilmington where I had moved that very week from my Eastbourne home and where I am writing this to-day.

J. A. HAMMERTON.

(from "Books and Myself")

ACID DROPS

ARCHBISHOP DOWNEY gives the Education Act a thorough slating, and protests that it would have been best for everybody if education had not got mixed up with politics. "I think it deplorable," he says, "that the education of the children of this country should be in the hands of politicians who have never taught anybody anything." We wonder how teachers will tackle that one. For our part, it is news to learn that children are taught by politicians. We always imagined that they were taught in the main by properly qualified men and women following a curriculum with which politicians, as such, had nothing whatever to do. But we live and learn.

"It is no longer possible," says Dean Inge, writing in the "Evening Standard," to say that the Bible is the religion of Protestants. Even the New Testament contains elements of secondary value, and much of the Old Testament is frankly impossible to those who still hold the idea of the religion of the book." The case against Christianity is much more serious than a change of view in the nature and quality of the Bible, but if Dean Inge is right in his view then he and thousands of other ministers in the Church of England have been obtaining money, if not under false pretences, at least for preaching a gospel which is now admitted to be worthless so far as a revealed religion is concerned.

Consider also the following from the Dean: "Miracles can prove nothing; prophecy is discredited; there is no reason for believing that holy men can foresee the future," etc. But if these things are not true, what is the conclusion that follows? Surely that historic Christianity is a living lie, and the army of preachers are getting a living under false pretences. It is rather a pity that the Dean did not speak as plainly when he appeared in the pulpit. For it is in the churches that these things need saying. Evidently Heine's "great lying Church" has a much wider application than Roman Catholicism.

In a truly Pontifical manner the Roman Catholic "Universe" says that "A Catholic cannot contract a religiously valid marriage in a registry office." All we need comment on this is that there is no place other than a registry office that legal marriage can be contracted. The law in this country is that a legal marriage can be performed only by those licensed by the State to do so, and in a place which is licensed for the purpose of the marriage. The "place" may be a church, the operator may be a parson, but the place and the man must be licensed by the secular State. So far as the State is concerned, religious marriages were abolished in this country many, many years ago.

The B.B.C. has publicly, by publication and by verbal declaration, made it quite plain that it will not permit adverse criticism of the Christian religion. And it has lived up to its promise. Christian services are common, as are series of lectures calculated to prove that life cannot be a success if Jesus Christ and his churches are left out of count. A new series by the Rev. Eric Fern has commenced under the title of "The Four Justices." And, of course, the aim of the addresses is that real freedom can never be achieved if we leave Christianity outside. Well, we have just now a war on, one of the most bloodthirsty and the most unscrupulous the world has known. And it is a people who have been saturated for generations in the Christian mythology that are responsible for the war. The moral is obvious.

The Educational Correspondent of the "Church Times" wishes the clergy to take their duties seriously when the new Education Act comes into force. We can assure everyone concerned that they will. No one who understands the clergy could think of them doing otherwise. They will do what they can to prevent any teacher who is not a Christian to reach headships; they will, in fact, do what they can to keep non-religious teachers out of the schools when it is at all possible. Apart from this, we do not see why clergymen of a particular religious breed should interfere in any way in the education of the people.

It is reported in a U.S.A. paper that Howard Johnson and his wife and four children have been driven from their home because it is haunted by a ghost. A reporter who visited the house after it was vacated says that he heard footsteps and saw a "ghostly form" which wrote something on a wall which he could not decipher. Now that is just like a ghost. If it wants to come back, why on earth does it bolt directly someone offers to have talk with it? And why wander about scraping on walls when they might ring the bell of the front door and make their appearance in a respectable manner? The ghost while it was human would, one expects, be just about as sensible as other "mortals," why do they adopt such cranky methods as to scratch a wall and then bolt? As to the house, well, if anyone offers us a comfortable house that is haunted we will gladly take it on—rent free.

Some years back there lived in Bristol a man—we think his name was Muller—who ran a Mission, a Christian Mission. There was nothing strange in this, but his plan for gathering the money was. He never asked anyone for a shilling. He left it entirely to God to move the hearts of people to send along the cash. And they did, time after time, sometimes in solid chunks. It was a proof that God lives, that Muller lived, and that God looked after his own. We ought perhaps to add that Muller always advertised in the Press how much money he wanted, and trusted to God to send it. And the money came, plenty of it. It was evident that those who trust in the Lord will not go unrewarded. We have seen in religious papers Muller held up as an example to be followed.

We were reminded of the Muller case by an article on a front page, signed by "Ubiquitous." There is a duality here as there was with Muller. The other person is the Editor of the "Hartland Deanery Magazine," and we shall be greatly surprised if he is not the chief parson of the area. The Editor of the magazine writes that he would like to see everyone before he dies leave a legacy of some kind to the Church. Some have done so and have left a sheep, valued at 6s. 11d., another left 3s., some as little as a shilling, but they did remember the Church when they were dying. Some gave fowls, one gave £5. But we wish to classify the parson with Muller. They both trusted in God, but they both recognised that God required a little nudging before he did anything.

We are all aware that the Roman Church will only agree that one of its members may soil its sacred reputation by marrying a Protestant if it is arranged that any children born of the marriage shall be brought up as Catholics. We see nothing to object to in this, so long as one believes in Christianity. For in each case Christianity is of supreme importance, so much so, that Catholic and Protestant cannot agree as to what the devil Christianity is. If the Catholic is right, he will be sitting in the windows of heaven watching with great satisfaction the torments of Protestants in hell. If the Protestant is right, the situations will be reversed. If neither is right, then the smile that comes across the face of the Atheist when he reads these decisions on the part of Christians will be justified.

But the Rev. Dr. Garbett, Archbishop of York, raises in this connection what is, to him, an important point. It means loss of trade. It is as if two grocers opened shops in the same street, but only one of them were permitted to sell the goods. So he warns all "loyal Anglicans" that they must not on any account assent "to such humiliating terms." The Archbishop wants fair dealing, but only of a kind; for when the matter is examined it is the parsons and the parents who are considering their "rights" while the most important party, "the child," is not really considered.

Legally, the parent is in supreme command, so long as he complies with rules that are common to all. This is a free country—that is not observable in a moment, although deeper and more careful examination soon realises that our freedom, as a famous musical star used to say, has frills. For if a man in business does not believe in some kind of God (note the generosity of the terms) he is apt to get into trouble, more or less severe. But while there is no law which protects the child from the blunder, and often the ignorance, against the parents, there are laws—we have recently had a new one—which in substance denies the right of children to freedom of choice where opinion is concerned.

For that is actually what the position amounts to. We are all agreed that children should be educated, that they should be able to appreciate certain scientific, ethical and other matters on which there is a general agreement. But religion cannot in any way be reasonably brought into these categories. Religious leaders are agreed that if religion is not given to children before they are able to understand it, the chances of their becoming religious in their mature years is very, very slim. Religion, they say in effect, is not something you can be reasoned into accepting. It must be forced upon people before they are old enough to understand what is being done. And afterwards there must be brought into play every kind of trick that will prevent their ever knowing and appreciating what has been done to them, and the purpose for which it has been done. We think the Archbishop should reconsider his position.

Says the Dean of Lichfield: "The common worship of a people springs from a common life." That is simply not true, it is one of the greasy phrases that religious preachers love to grovel in. If we were to take a church gathering at random it is about a thousand-to-one that there would be any agreement among the people concerning their sacred howlings except in the sounds made. If fifty worshippers were placed in separate rooms and ordered to describe just what they meant one would get fifty different explanations.

"THE FREETHINKER"

2 and 3, Farnival Street, Holborn,
London, E.C.4.

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. S. DANIELS.—We try to keep "The Freethinker" an open journal, and that involves printing things with which we disagree as well as those with which we are in agreement.

T. M. MORLEY.—Our sincere sympathy. Young or old a break in the family circle remains a break. Thanks for newspaper article. It is poor stuff devoted to a poor cause.

C. M. HOLLINGHAM.—To "Freethinker" Fund, £1.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Farnival 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, Farnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

WE take this opportunity of thanking our readers in Australia, the U.S.A., India and other parts of the world, not forgetting the "Home" friends, for the Press items of interest that reaches us. Press cutting agencies are anything but satisfactory, and even the English newspapers have a habit of leaving out or cutting down items of news that we should like to receive. This widespread news service of ours deserves thanks and recognition. We offer our thanks to all concerned.

The B.B.C. has appointed the Rev. Vine Russell to organise religious broadcasts for the Forces. We do not believe that the appointment is a response from the men in the Forces, nor, to be just, does the B.B.C. say that any such request has been made. We can only conclude that this has been done because the Armed Forces are not showing any great inclination to bother about religion. But the B.B.C. has by every possible means—including misrepresentation—been trying to gain converts for the churches. But it will take more than a series of aerial services to bring back the lost sheep.

Meanwhile we are pleased to note the appearance of a letter by "Josephus" in the "Northern Echo," who asks, bearing in mind the large number of Freethinkers in the Army, Navy and Air Force, why they are completely ignored in the many broadcasts that are made? We suppose the answer is that the B.B.C. is religiously a Christian institution, and where Christianity is concerned honesty of speech and conduct does not exist.

Another case of too much Biblé reaches us from far-off Bundaberg, where a man and his wife were charged with the manslaughter of their daughter, aged seven. There was no evidence that the husband and wife were not good parents. As their light went they did what they could for their child. But there existed—so runs the legend—a man named Jesus, and he told his followers that in his name people who were sick could be "made whole," and one of his chief followers advised that if anyone happened to be "sick" it would be enough if the "elders" of the Church "laid hands" and prayed. It may be added that this is also the teaching of the Christian Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church year stages a number of miracles of the kind named. There can be no doubt of it that this is Christianity in the raw. God sends the disease and God cures it.

But unfortunately in all the countries where the Christian religion dominates, there happens to be another law—from man, not from God—that when sickness comes, and if that sickness is followed by death, and if no doctor has been called in, then the principal characters are open to a charge of manslaughter, and if found guilty may be sentenced to a term of imprisonment. This is the kind of situation at Bundaberg. In the case before us, a man and his wife—good parents, so far as the evidence went—refused to call a doctor, the child died, and when brought to trial the Judge sentenced the couple to two years imprisonment, or the sentence would be suspended if the couple entered into a £50 surety each. They were found guilty of following the advice of Jesus, and were bound over to ignore what he said about the cure of disease. We are not sure, but we believe that the man and his wife refused to round on Jesus in any manner. Of the two, the couple had a more dignified exit from the court than did the Judge.

To-day (January 28) Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture for the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. at 38, John Bright Street, on "Do We Live When We Die?" The lecture begins at 3.30 p.m., and admission is free. In spite of its full share of war-time disabilities the Branch is making a determined effort towards increased activity and influence. The energy and enthusiasm of the local secretary is beyond question and Freethinkers willing to lend a hand should communicate with Mr. C. H. Smith, 93, Willows Crescent, Cannon Hill, Birmingham.

Keighley Branch N.S.S. has arranged a debate in the Municipal Hall, on February 4, between Mr. Ernest W. Oaten, editor of "The Two Worlds" who will take the affirmative on "Does Man Live Beyond the Grave?" and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, who takes the negative position. The debate begins at 2.30 p.m. and is arousing much local interest.

Just a reminder again that Mr. F. J. Corina is paying a first visit to the Glasgow Secular Society on Sunday, February 4. His subject, "The Moral Landslide," will be given at the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, at 2.30 p.m. and should attract a good audience.

Mr. H. Cutner is addressing the Leicester Secular Society to-day (January 28) and we hope to hear of a good mustering of members. His address "Freethought and Culture" will be given at 6.30 p.m. and time allowed for a vigorous discussion.

The following is from a recent issue of "Truth":—

PROTESTANTS IN SPAIN.

SIR,—Col. P. R. Butler writes to say that I need have no fears as to the degree of freedom which Protestants are allowed in Spain if conditions there are as he found them some years ago. There is also a further condition implied in his letter, viz., provided that the cases which he himself saw are typical of Spain as a whole. Unfortunately, that is not the case, despite promises made in "The Times" in 1937 to grant full religious liberty in the event of a nationalist victory. Out of about 200 buildings licensed for public Evangelical worship, about 180 have been closed. Children of Protestant parents are compelled to learn the Roman Catholic catechism and worship images of the Virgin Mary. All Protestant day and Sunday schools have been closed. About 110,000 copies of Scripture (the property of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Madrid) have been confiscated. Some of our spiritual kinsmen have actually been sent to a concentration camp with hard labour and low diet for refusal to attend Mass. In most places it appears to be impossible for a Protestant to obtain employment, since he has to have a certificate of good conduct from the priest. Readers of "Truth" are well aware of the great importance of economic freedom as a basis of other freedoms. Surely I have cause to view with concern the general lack of freedom suffered by evangelical Christians in Spain, even though it may be alleviated in some cases. So far from being the inquisition in reverse, this would surely constitute the inquisition resurgent.

D. BRIAN THOMPSON (Lieut., R.A.).

If that is the kind of treatment measured out to Protestants one may guess the warm welcome that will be given to Freethinkers.

AMERICAN CLOSE-UP

IT is universally recognised that the future peace of the world depends upon the close co-operation of Britain, America and Russia. We are naturally interested in American reaction to us, because we speak the same language, and the Americans are just as interested in finding out what we think of them.

A book published in 1943—"American Close-up," by J. L. Davies, published by John Murray, London; 148 pages; price 2s. 6d., with many illustrations—throws a flood of light on this subject.

Langdon Davies is a man of wide experience and broad humanitarian outlook. He is the author of several thought-provoking books, i.e., "Man And His Universe," "English History—the story of the Common People," while the fine work that he did in the Spanish struggle in pleading the cause of the Republicans, was revealed in "Behind the Spanish Barricades." From such a man one would naturally expect a book of healthy constructive criticism and the reader will not be disappointed.

One of the first things we must realise in our dealings with the Americans is that we must change the British attitude of summing them up as if they were a British people or an offshoot of the British. That would help us a great deal to obtain a truer perspective. The U.S.A. is really a miniature Europe representing practically every European nation who have made their homes there.

The greater number of the fathers and grandfathers of the present Americans escaped from Europe to avoid injustice, poverty and subjection. America gave them the opportunities of which they had dreamed and they handed down to their children and grandchildren a story of a Europe steeped in war and class interest. There is hardly a phase of human behaviour that the author does not touch upon in this book. Take, for example, travelling and food, which is summed up in a few lines:—

"Another difference worth mentioning is that whereas we in England constantly grumble, but rarely lodge a complaint, Americans expect to get their due out of everyday life. The Englishman will grumble bitterly to his fellow travellers because the railway company does not provide proper heat in winter, but you may be almost certain that not one of the grumblers will ever write a letter to the manager of the railway company. The American, on the other hand, when he pays for a thing expects to get proper service, and takes steps to remedy things if they go wrong. It is a constant matter of astonishment to Americans that so many English people are prepared to have their food half-cold and their drinks half-warm, that in fact, our standard of what we expect in daily comforts is so surprisingly low."

The events before the New Deal with the terrific slump in 1929, the emergence of Roosevelt and the carrying out of the New Deal will be a mine of information to many Britishers. The sway of politics, the bitter opposition that Roosevelt had to face in forcing through his New Deal (from big business) and, not alone from big business but also from the Isolationists and the Clerical Fascists was terrific. In addition a ceaseless heavily-financed Nazi propaganda was carried on from Germany.

One chapter of the book deals with activities of the Rev. Father Coughlin, a Fascist reactionary, whose radio audience was reckoned to have reached eight figures. Coughlin was as slippery as the proverbial eel; devoid of principles and an opportunist. From 1932-1934 his theme was Roosevelt or ruin. In 1934 he changed his tune to Roosevelt and ruin. He bragged that he had his own presidential candidate for the 1936 election and boasted that he could swing 9,000,000 votes. His candidate's name was Lemke and he actually received under 900,000 votes

which just shows that a great deal of this clerical Fascist stuff is just bluff, and if politicians only had the guts to fight it, they would find that a great deal of the opposition was just hot air.

The correspondent of the "New York Times" in Berlin, writing in 1936, said: "The German hero in America for the moment is the Rev. Father Coughlin, because of his radio speeches representing National Socialism as a defence front against Bolshevism."

Another enemy of Democracy was Senator Huey Long, who aimed to be a second Hitler. Long was Governor of the State of Louisiana, but his ambitious career was stopped by an assassin's bullet. This is how the author sums him up: "It has been worth while to introduce Huey Long thus briefly to my readers because it would be wrong to paint too rosy a picture of American public life. It is, I think, true to say that the Roosevelt administration has been the most valuable and the most honest Government anywhere in the world during the past ten depressing years, but this should not blind us to the fact that even Mr. Roosevelt has had to use rotten people and rotten machines to retain his majority in Senate and Congress."

In the chapter "What they thought of our war," the author answers the Britishers' complaint that the Americans were more or less lukewarm until they entered the war themselves. For that attitude, however, Americans are not solely to blame and Langdon Davies explains it as follows: "Americans who knew most could not help remembering, first, that a large body of opinion in England, not unconnected with the governing groups, had hoped for years to turn Germany's attention towards Russia, and even to use Hitler as a means of checkmating Stalin, and second, that the British Federation of Industries, in the very summer of 1939, while the Germans were giving a final oiling to their Panzer divisions, signed an agreement in Berlin with German industrialists which was a direct blow against American trade interests. No fair-minded Englishman can surely resent this attitude of the American average man. Why should he have wanted to throw away the natural advantages of living behind great oceans to help save the kind of England which produced Munich? Indeed, those of us who might be suspicious of ulterior financial motives in American support of us in a European war can draw great comfort from the fact that it was not the England of Munich but the England of Dunkirk, which created a virtual alliance between ourselves and them."

This book should be read by thousands if only for its exposure of Nazi propaganda. The author shows that although a great deal of it is clumsy, millions of people in every country have fallen for it, because in many cases it contains the most dangerous lie of all—that lie of the half-truth. Here is an illustration: "That is why Nazi propaganda is already attempting to divide men of good-will in Britain into two camps: that is why we can already hear talk on the one hand of the necessity of close relations between Britain and Russia so as to hold American financiers at bay; and on the other of close relations between Britain and America so as to stave off the ravening wolf of Communism. Both these philosophies are equally fatal. Fascism will not be defeated unless the forces which stand for progress in America, Britain and Russia triumph in their own countries; but unless there is a perfect mutual understanding between the three countries, this will not happen."

Here is a sample of Nazi propaganda which we in England can hear any night by turning on the radio to Germany, quoted by the author: "So England must, in the end, submit to a military defeat in Europe or must be totally beaten by her alleged friend, America. When the U.S.A. has laid its hands on Canada, Australia, New Zealand—isn't that worse than any military defeat? America, not Germany, will destroy the British Empire. Roosevelt, not Hitler, is England's worst

enemy. Think over the price being paid for United States friendship."

It is safe to say that we have, both in England, New Zealand and every other part of the British Empire, loud-voiced ignoramuses who swallow this dope—the type of gentleman who commences a sentence with "I don't think"—which is, of course, quite obvious—but why advertise the fact?

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

THE CRADLE OF CHRISTIANITY—2

"FORTIFIED," says Lecky, "by the belief that by a baptism of blood the sins of life were in a moment effaced—that from this world they passed into an eternity of bliss—the Roman converts to Christianity faced persecution with a transcendent courage.

"Men," he proceeds, "seemed to be in love with death. Believing with St. Ignatius that they were 'the wheat of God,' they panted for the day when they should be 'ground by the teeth of wild beasts into the pure bread of Christ'! Beneath this one burning enthusiasm all the ties of earthly love were snapt in twain.

"The desire for martyrdom became at times a form of absolute madness, a kind of epidemic of suicide; and the leading minds of the Church found it necessary to exert all their authority to prevent their followers from thrusting themselves into the hands of the persecutors."

"These wretches," said Lucian, speaking of the Christians, "persuade themselves that they are going to be altogether immortal, and to live for ever, wherefore they despise death, and many of their own accord give themselves up to be slain."

Lecky declares that the Decian persecution, which broke out in A.D. 249, is the first example of a deliberate attempt, supported by the whole machinery of provincial government, and extending over the entire surface of the empire, to extirpate Christianity from the world.

"It was of a kind," he adds, "eminently fitted to crush the Church. Had it taken place at an earlier period; had it continued for a long succession of years, Christianity, without a miracle, must have perished. But the Decian persecution fell upon a Church which had existed for two centuries, and it lasted less than two years."

A further comment by Lecky is that it may be confidently asserted that the conversion of the Roman Empire is so far from being of the nature of a miracle, or suspension of the principles of human nature, that there is scarcely any other great movement on record in which the causes and effects so manifestly correspond.

Persecution of the Christians was partly political and partly religious.

Perfect liberty of worship, says Lecky, was granted to the professors of all religions in Rome. The many forms of Pagan worship were pliant in their nature. Each offered certain advantages of spiritual gratifications. But there was no reason why all should not exist together. Participation in one by no means implied disrespect to the others.

Christianity, however, was emphatically exclusive.

The Roman convert was bound to detest and abjure the faiths around him as—the work of demons, and to consider himself placed in the world to destroy them. Proselytising with an untiring energy—pouring a fierce stream of invective and ridicule upon the gods on whose favour the multitude believed all national prosperity to depend, and not infrequently insulting the worshippers and defacing the idols—they soon stung the Pagan devotees to madness and convinced them that every calamity that fell upon the empire was the righteous vengeance of the gods.

To permit Christianity to triumph was to permit the extinction of religious liberty in an empire which comprised all the leading nations of the world and tolerated all their creeds.

"Besides this religious motive," Lecky explains, "there was a political motive which rendered Christianity obnoxious to the educated.

"The Church constituted a vast, highly organised, and in many respects secret society, and as such was not only distinctly illegal, but was also in the very highest degree calculated to excite the apprehensions of the Government.

"There was no principle in the Imperial policy more stubbornly upheld than the suppression of all corporations that might be made the nuclei of revolt.

"In such a state of feeling, the existence of a vast association governed by countless functionaries, shrouding its meetings and some of its doctrines in impenetrable obscurity, evoking a degree of attachment and devotion greater than could be elicited by the State, ramifying through the whole extent of the empire, and restlessly extending its influence—would naturally arouse the strongest apprehension."

Lecky goes on to explain that "a further cause of the peculiar animosity felt against the Christians," was the constant interference with domestic life.

The Christian teacher was early noted for his unrivalled skill in playing on the chords of a woman's heart. Wives in multitudes deserted their homes to frequent the nocturnal meetings of a sect which was looked upon with the deepest suspicion. The result was that a husband felt that, to his wife, he had become an outcast—a brand prepared for the burning.

"But there was," continued Lecky, "another form of what was deemed superstition connected with the Church which was regarded by Pagan worshippers with a much deeper feeling of aversion.

"To agitate the minds of men with religious terrorism—to fill the unknown world with images of hideous suffering and to govern the reason by alarming the imagination—was in the eyes of the Pagan world one of the most heinous of crimes.

"These fears were to the ancients the very definition of superstition, and their destruction was a main object both of the Epicurean and Stoic.

"To men holding such sentiments, it is easy to perceive how obnoxious must have appeared religious teachers who maintained that an eternity of torture was reserved for the entire human race then existing in the world, beyond the range of their own community, and who made the assertion of this doctrine one of their main instruments of success." J. Y. ANDERONEY.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

THE cruelty of the law in the 18th century fills us with horror; but on no one did it press so hardly as on the child.

Children were imprisoned and even hanged for offences which the probation officer would now deal with.

"I never saw boys cry so much," said George Selwyn, when he had witnessed the hanging of some miserable lads of 14 who had been concerned in the Gordon riots.

The Annual Register of 1791 gives an account of the execution at Newport of two boys aged 14 and 15 who had been guilty of stealing, and there were instances of much younger children being put to death. Indeed, there is a pitiable case of a baby of six who cried for his mother upon the scaffold.

R. BAYNE-POWELL.

(from "The English Child in the 18th Century")

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ACTIONS OF ANIMALS

IN a recent article on Evolution, I made reference to a book entitled "Animal Behaviour" (Macmillan, 1940) by the late Dr. J. A. Loeser, formerly of the University of Berlin. So interesting and provocative is this work, that it should be read by all who desire knowledge on a little-understood subject. The author endeavours to explain in a natural manner, actions of animals which have previously been vaguely attributed to "instinct." He has no use for this mysterious force, and maintains that the time has come to dispense with it altogether. Dr. Loeser is, of course, not alone in thinking this way, for other biologists and psychologists have suggested that the term "instinct" has outlived its utility; his pioneering work is the systematic study of the causes of a whole range of animal activities. In addition, the compressing of an enormous amount of observation and research in less than 200 pages is invaluable to the interested layman.

Unfortunately, Dr. Loeser died eleven months after coming to Great Britain as a political refugee, and he was unable to revise his book or extend it as he had intended, and it is perhaps because of this that certain parts are—to say the least—rather misleading. Thus, it is not true to say that "the materialistic conception of natural science" considers "that all animals, including man, are really automata, sent into the world equipped with a mechanism which enables them to act in a practical way." Materialists do not regard animals as automata. They say that every action is determined by the causes which preceded it: that the action is the necessary result of those causes, and, therefore, that no action could have been otherwise than it was, under those circumstances. But they fully recognise the powerful influence of the intellect and, consequently, the importance of education. Actually, Dr. Loeser does not—as he thinks—do away with "all mechanistic conceptions," he affirms them when he states:—

"Every impulse is followed by the one suitable reaction rendered possible by all the prevailing internal and external conditions. It is determined by the scope and extent of consciousness and the corresponding degree of intelligence, within the physiological capacity of the individual, and within the limits imposed by external conditions. Every external action is the natural product of all the factors in question."

This is, in fact, pure determinism: the essence of "the materialistic conception of natural science," and the evidence accumulated throughout the book supports the deterministic view.

One of Dr. Loeser's general examples will serve to illustrate this. If an animal feels an itching sensation, it will endeavour to remove it, but "the methods employed must necessarily vary with all the internal and external conditions—that is, they vary according to the particular species and even in one and the same individual." A bird may use its beak or its claws, shake itself or take a bath, but it cannot use its wings for scratching; a dog can use its muzzle or hind paws, or it too, can shake itself; the elephant, on the other hand, can use its trunk to blow water or sand on the irritated spot; the ape will generally use its hands; the horse, however, cannot as a rule, use its limbs, and so rubs itself against an upright object like a tree, or rolls on the ground. Dr. Loeser says that though "these methods are comparatively obvious," each "is a really intelligent action in the more particular sense of the word; it must be learnt by experience, and its usefulness must be tried and proved." This is true, but it should be equally "obvious" that each of these actions is determined.

Dr. Loeser intimates this at times, but at others his position is confused; he clarifies it a little by making a "terminological distinction" between "mechanism" and "pre-formed automatism," but he never suggests that there is any other distinction, and the two expressions are never dissociated. The unwary reader is thereby led to believe that they are synonymous. Now I do not think any determinist (or mechanist) will disagree with Dr. Loeser when he says: "In the strict sense of the word there are never even two identical situations, therefore there can never be two absolutely identical reactions . . . For every living creature each new situation requires new adaptation." I concur, but I hold that the reaction, whatever it may be, is still determined by the conditions, and I cannot see how "From the infinite variety of conditions we deduce, therefore, that psychological reactions are necessarily free . . ." On the contrary, the reactions are always limited by various factors, which are conveniently summed up in Dr. Loeser's own words above, as "the prevailing internal and external conditions." Infinitude of conditions and, therefore, of reactions, makes not the slightest difference!

Nevertheless, whilst there is room for disputation on many points, and much also that requires elaboration, Dr. Loeser has tried "to investigate the animal world and to study animals as creatures which feel and act as individuals" without resorting to any inexplicable agency. A few brief examples taken from the huge field which he covers will suffice to show the value of his work, and will, I hope, induce some to study it for themselves.

Honey bees have long fascinated man, with their apparently amazing "instinctive" abilities. The hexagonal shape of their cells, for instance, seems purposively economical. Instead, it is "the product of a series of almost mechanical basic conditions." Originally the bees make circular cells like the cylindrical holes of other insects, but as one cell intersects with another a dividing wall is erected, and the hexagon, whilst it is due to the bees' work, "is the natural shape resulting mathematically from the mutual mechanical pressure of six cells surrounding one." Cells around the rim and those that are separate are always round, and the exactness of the cells has been exaggerated. "In cell-building," says Dr. Loeser, "we see no pre-formed instincts at work, nor any acts of abnormal intelligence . . . To man, who surveys the whole sphere of animal activity, such specialised acts appear to be much more wonderful than they actually are, the animal's psychological capacity being in reality a very restricted one . . . It is the conditions which do not vary . . . The result must therefore be essentially the same in each case."

Many other aspects of the lives of these insects are similarly dealt with, and the development from the solitary stage of some breeds to the well known social "state" is indicated. With regard to the provision of food for the winter in the hive, Dr. Loeser finds no "collective impulse." "There is only a concatenation of sensation reactions and of physical mechanisms," and when some of these factors are absent the maintainance of the hive becomes uncertain. Dr. Loeser also gives some interesting facts concerning cuckoos' eggs found in other birds' nests, and shows that there is nothing purposive in the laying of them. Out of 273, only 62 were subsequently hatched; in 14 per cent. of the cases the foster-parents abandoned the nest; in 12 per cent. the eggs had been laid in nests already abandoned; while in 5 per cent. of the cases two hen-cuckoos had laid their eggs in the same nest.

"Animal Behaviour," however, treats with numerous diversified organic phenomena, which Dr. Loeser claims to explain primarily on the principle of "free intelligent action," in response to simple sensations, "fixed rigid procedure" (habit) being secondary, the result of more or less uniform circumstances. All evolutionists may not support his view, but they should not neglect his book!

C. McCALL.

CORRESPONDENCE

"IS MR. SHAW BEWILDERED?"

Sir.—It would be impertinent, as well as unnecessary, to try to supplement your own excellent reply to Mr. George Bernard Shaw in the January 7 issue, but there is just a personal aspect on which I beg a word or two. Mr. Shaw suggests I accused him of "a senseless lie." This tends merely to emphasise the faultiness of his capacity of recollection. If he will read my article of December 3, once again he will find that I simply suggested that his own story revealed inconsistencies—quite a different thing from "a senseless lie."—Yours, etc.,

F. J. CORINA.

A CORRECTION.

Sir.—There are two historical points which, not having been already taken up, should be raised. A month ago Mr. C. G. L. du Cann stated that Bradlaugh "refused the oath." Presumably this misstatement refers to the Parliamentary oath, and it might be hinted to Mr. du Cann that his judgments would have greater weight if based on accurate information instead of on Christian "propaganda" of long standing. In a more recent number Mr. F. J. Corina, whose energy is admirable, apparently considers that the Victorian Atheists denied God (or god). I trust this was only my misreading of his lively article on his debate. My excuse for referring to it is that Victorian Atheists such as my grandfather reiterated till they became weary of it that they could not deny anything unknown, unknowable, undefinable or incomprehensible. Immediately definite information as to a specific god became available, e.g., that He showed his back parts to elect spectators, such information could form a basis of discussion and might lead to the denial of the existence of such a deity.—Yours, etc.,

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING.

Sir.—The broadcast last week by the Rev. J. W. Welch, the B.B.C. boss of religious broadcasting, relative to the programme for 1945, calls for serious comment.

The Rev. gentleman stated that possibly no more than 2,500,000 people attended religious services in the British Isles, i.e., not more than approximately six per cent. of the total population. He furthermore stated that double this number listened to religious services and addresses on the wireless.

He positively gloated over the fact that the religionists have a monopoly on the wireless and intimated that this had saved the churches, as they must communicate their message or perish, and the wireless is to-day the most potent means of so doing.

Now this state of affairs must be fought. The Freethinker may ventilate his opinions through the Press, but he is denied the wireless. It is the old struggle of 100 or more years ago over again, except that it is now the wireless instead of the Press. What can be done to put an end to this totally one-sided position, so intolerable to any self-respecting person?—Yours, etc.,

"ALERT."

THE MARQUIS DE SADE.

Sir.—Your contributor "gets away with it" very easily by describing the Marquis de Sade as "the greatest of all sex-psychologists." In more than a page of eulogy he avoids any dispute of the appropriateness of the definition of Sadism as "a form of sexual perversion marked by a love of cruelty."

This quotation is from Chambers's Encyclopaedia ix., page 6. By such a phrase as: "Most popular encyclopaedias and reference books," your contributor takes refuge in the vagueness of the word "popular." The name can be found also in:—

- Nelson's Encyclopaedia xx., page 193.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, xix., page 806.
- The Encyclopaedia Americana, xxiv., page 763.
- La Grande Encyclopedie, xxix., page 47.
- La Rousse-Dictionnaire du xix., siècle xiv., page 26.
- Der Grose Brockhaus, xvi., page 304.
- Salmonsens Konversations Leksikon, xx, page 763.
- Enciclopedia Universal Europeo-Americana lii., page 1192.

These are a few to "get on with." Sade's books and biographies are in the British Museum library. I have read some of them and am ready to "make you a present" of Sade.—Yours, etc.,

(REV.) JOHN W. WILKINSON.

OBITUARY

JOHN RICHARDS.

It is with great regret I have to report the death on January 10, of one of the old brigade of Freethinkers, who for years fought a great battle for Secularism in North Eastern England. Mr. John Richards was 83 years of age, and for 60 years had been a fighter for Freethought. Coupled with this, he helped to found the great Durham Miners' Union. This activity meant a lot of victimisation and suffering for him and his wife. He was a "sacrifice" member of that organisation. His outstanding ability and his fearless manner were things to be admired, and will be long remembered in N.E. circles. He retained his clear vision and determination, and interest in our cause, to the end, and in accordance with his oft repeated wish a secular address was delivered by J. T. Brighton, before a gathering of friends and relatives. He leaves behind a family with whom we sympathise in their great loss, which is a loss to every advanced movement in the North East.

J. T. B.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held January 14, 1945

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Griffiths, Ebury, Morris, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. 67 new members were admitted to various branches and the Parent Society. Correspondence from Blackburn, Blackpool, Glasgow, London districts and the International Committee was dealt with and instructions given. Lecture reports were presented and future arrangements agreed upon.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for February 18 and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

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., ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.: "A Humanist View of Christian Origins."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street).—Sunday, 3.30 p.m., Mr. R. H. ROSETTI: "Do We Live When We Die?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. C. H. BURDEN: "A Pessimist Looks at the Future."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., Mr. ARTHUR COPLAND: "Robert Burns."

Leeds Freethought Society (The Forum, 113, Park Lane, Leeds).—Sunday, 7 p.m., A lecture

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. H. CUTNER: "Freethought and Culture."

Nottingham (Cosmopolitan Debating Society, University College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2.30 p.m., Mr. JOSEPH McCABE: "Does Religious Education Diminish Crime?"

Nottingham (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Mr. JOSEPH McCABE: "Can Science Change Human Nature?"

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

YOUTH AND THE CHURCH

THE "MORAL LANDSLIDE"

An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Modern Youth

By F. J. CORINA

Price 6d.

Postage 1d.

THE BIBLE

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

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. For Freethinkers and Enquiring Christians. Edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Passages cited are under headings: BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS, BIBLE ATROCITIES, BIBLE IMMORALITIES, INDECENCIES AND OBSCENITIES, BIBLE ABSURDITIES, UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES AND BROKEN PROMISES. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

MISTAKES OF MOSES, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; by post 4d.

CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT? By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s.; postage 1½d.

AN ATHEIST'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY, A Survey of Positions, by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH, by Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS, by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS, by J. M. Wheeler. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

FREETHOUGHT

CHALLENGE TO RELIGION (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester), by Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING, by Chapman Cohen. First, second, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d. The four volumes, 10s. post free.

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT, by Chapman Cohen. An outline of the philosophy of Freethinking. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 4d.

GOD AND THE CO-OP. Will Religion Split the People's Movement? By F. J. Corina. Price 2d.; postage 1d. 12 copies 2s. post free.

WE ARE SIXTEEN. The Facts of Life for Young People. By F. J. Corina. Price 6s.; postage 2d.

DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL, by Chapman Cohen. Cloth 2s. 6d., paper 2s.; postage 2d.

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST, by C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; by post 5d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM, by Chapman Cohen. Price 3s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

GOD AND EVOLUTION, by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. L. Du Cann. An enquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT, by Chapman Cohen. Price, paper 2s., postage 2d.; cloth 3s. 3d., post free.

THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH, by Chapman Cohen. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL, by Chapman Cohen. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST, by J. M. Wheeler. Price Cloth 4s.; postage 3d.

SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS, by G. W. Foote. Price, paper 2s., postage 2½d.; cloth 3s., postage 3d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST, by Gerald Massey. With Preface by Chapman Cohen. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

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, post free, 3s. 2d.

PETER ANNET, by Ella Twynam. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR FREETHINKERS. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THE RESURRECTION AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS, by W. A. Campbell. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

REVENUES OF RELIGION, by Alan Handsacre. Price Cloth 3s., postage 2d.

HENRY HETHERINGTON, by A. G. Barker. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Deity and Design. Did Jesus Christ Exist? Agnosticism or . . . ? Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live. Atheism, Freethought and the Child. Christianity and Slavery. The Devil. What is Freethought? Must We have a Religion? Morality Without God. Gods and their Makers. The Church's Fight for the Child.

Price 2d. each.

Postage 1d. each.

THE PIONEER PRESS
2 & 3, Fumival St., Holborn, London, E.C.4