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Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

More "Brains Trust"

WHEN the B.B.C. inaugurated the "Brains Trust" it struck something that might have been both interesting and instructive. It would have been helpful, in more ways than one, to hear educated men and women discussing subjects from all points of view. It might have made for humility on the side of the learned ones when they discovered that there was a difference between understanding and knowing, and it might also have made the uneducated have more confidence in their own common sense when they witnessed the fumbling and blundering made by the learned ones. After all, there is a difference between knowing and understanding, although they are very often confused. As it turned out the B.B.C. did little in the right direction, and a great deal of harm in warding off interest in all matters where independence of thought and speech and real understanding were needed. In politics it became a servant of the government in power, and it openly declared its determination to keep intact what it pleased to call the "Christian tradition." It openly declared that free speech in religion would shock the more ignorant section of believers in Christianity. That was a very poor compliment to the British public, but then there is a fairly large section of the people that accepts an insult as a compliment. Tennyson's "Their's not to reason why," became the keynote of B.B.C. policy.

Still it must be admitted that the "Brains Trust" interested many. But the interest was largely at the cost of the "distinguished" men and women who took part in the game. Religion was, of course, excluded so far as adverse criticism was concerned, and praise of the Christian religion was always permissible, but of the many searching questions concerning religion in general not one saw the light; and the foolish plan of testing the general knowledge of men and women who could have spoken well and wisely in their own department, caused much laughter among the public in the way the learned ones muffed questions that in a good school would have come under the head of "general knowledge." No wonder outsiders were surprised when it was disclosed that the selected speakers were receiving for their forty-five minutes labour twenty-one guineas and an expensive dinner to recompense them for the mental strain involved. Later the payment was reduced to fifteen guineas, and still Commander Campbell appears to be standing up against the brain strain involved. We believe that the advertisement was sufficient alone to repay those who went through the general knowledge ordeal. It must have reminded them of their school days.

In sober truth there was something bordering on satire in the title of "Brains Trust." But the principle involved was an old one. As far back as ancient Rome there was a working maxim that providing bread and games for the

people would keep them quiet when they might otherwise become troublesome. And in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther shrewdly remarked that the Roman Church did not tell its people that they must not think, it was enough to see that they thought as the Church wished them to. Said Luther, the people were like a horse that draws water from a well. It is always making headway—in a circle. It marches round but never gets any distance from the starting point. So the B.B.C.—where religion and politics were concerned—saw to it that only "safe" men were offered hospitality. The pay was good, and the advertisement paid writers and public men better even than did the B.B.C. cash. In the long run the speakers censored themselves. Here is a sample case which concerns a well-known writer who had arranged to speak on the occasion of the centenary of a world famous man. The speaker used the sentence, "As in other cases the new idea was hotly opposed by the Churches." The censor cut it to "As in other instances the idea met with opposition." As though there has been anything that had not met with *some* opposition. But the whole point of the passage was that the Churches were at their old game. And the result is that the public never learned its lesson. They censor themselves and so become a party to their own degradation.

A New "Brains Trust"

The old saw that evil communications corrupt good manners, holds good. The success of the B.B.C. led others to follow its example. The "Daily Express," in a recent issue published a report of its weekly "Forum." I cannot say how the others were conducted, but this one was in the true B.B.C. line. The subject was religion, and I do not know whether the participants censored themselves or submitted to the newspapers doing it. At any rate it well illustrated Martin Luther's description of a horse that covers a deal of ground without making any headway. The Trust consisted of a novelist, Miss Rebecca West, of whom I know nothing, Professor Joad, and Bishop Wilson of Chelmsford. There was also a Question Master, Miss Grace Herbert, but as the speakers never touched the essential subject she had nothing to do, and did it with complete satisfaction to the others present.

The question that was to have been discussed was: "To what extent do you think Christian belief will survive World War No. 2?" The question was good enough, provided that it had been stated what was understood by "Christian belief," for the brands of Christianity are varied. They range from mere deism down to the grossest forms of primitive superstition such as is held by the most ignorant sections of the Roman Catholic religion. Even then, if anything beyond providing an entertainment on the "Itma" level had been intended, there should have been one to represent Atheism which has made enormous strides since English Christians began to shake off the poisonous attitude with regard to the quality and consequences of the

Russian revolution. The situation now is such that the superiority in many directions of a nation that has deliberately reduced religion to a personal conviction cannot be denied, even though not one of those prominent politicians and clergymen who did so much to poison the public mind against "Atheistic Russia" have had the common decency publicly to avow they were—we will be charitable and say—mistaken. Professor Joad did, rather timidly, suggest that until they had some definition they could hardly discuss the chances of what would be the effect of the war on Christianity, but none was given and Joad did not persist.

His conclusion was that Christian belief "had practically no effect upon human conduct," was glaringly untrue whether one holds that the influence was good or bad. But he is ridiculously wrong when he rather hastily attempts to evade the charge of attacking Christianity by saying that "there is no reflection on Christian belief itself." Consider what that implies. Here is a system that claims to come direct from God. God also sends his son to be crucified in order to save the human race. The system evolves gradually, not merely establishes itself, and it takes precedence over kings. Under the influence of Christianity, laws are made, and to fall short in professing belief in Christianity becomes a serious offence. This power is exercised over, say, the whole of Europe, and Professor Joad not merely thinks that Christianity has had no influence on Christian conduct but he adds, apparently to avoid giving offence, that complete failure casts "no reflection on the Christian Churches."

But this, of course, is quite false and we do not wonder that many Christian leaders will thank Joad for setting up so useful an apology. But it is not true that Christianity has been without influence on human character and ethical practice. Remember that brutally primitive as early Christianity was, it began with the background of the culture of Rome and Greece. This not only almost fell to extinction, it became a crime to try to preserve its continuation. The historic fact here is that the world grew worse under Christian domination and was set again on the right path of development by the science of the Mohammedans and the revival of Greek and Roman culture. Joad is wrong. The Christian church impressed upon the world intolerance and religious ignorance. That is one indisputable fact.

There is another of even a more deadly nature. Christianity established and acclimatised intolerance to an hitherto unknown extent. It placed a penalty on intellectual honesty and a premium on religious intolerance. In a less direct and open form Christianity is still exerting the same influence. Christianity has stood largely for the superiority of the unfit. Professor Joad has, we believe, ambitions for Parliament. Let him consider a confession that he is without belief in a God and see what would happen. The plain fact here is that the rule of the Christian Church has always made for the survival of the relatively unfit. It still breeds hypocrites where it should encourage straightforwardness of act and speech. Professor Joad will find many examples in the rule of the B.B.C.—with which he has considerable experience. Let him try to introduce a plainly anti-Christian opinion and then note what happens. I have come across nothing quite so absurd as the attempt to save the Christian Churches as by saying that Christianity has had no effect on human conduct. On

reflection his Christian friends will not thank him. His non-Christian friends will just smile.

We need not spend much time with Miss West, save to say two things. The first is that it would be well for her to refrain from quoting either Plato or St. Augustine until she is well acquainted with them. They are good advertising names, but they should be used for higher purpose than appears in this "Brains Trust." It would also be well for this lady to study human nature more closely than she appears to have done by expressing astonishment that since the war people have come forward to help one another. Poor people have always helped one another, and they have done it without any appeals to God, or without looking for payment either in this real world of ours or in the imaginary world of the Churches. Wealthy men also lend a helping hand, but they can never receive the payment which poor people get. The goodness of the poor is an expression of real comradeship. The charity of the poor man carries its immediate payment. We are not so certain about the donations of the wealthy. Their motives may be mixed.

Professor Joad appears to be inclined to place the decline of religion "during the war" to Christian conduct towards the war, and the growth of "a kind of wistful agnosticism." The first is a very old "getaway," but there is nothing in it. The truth is that war is, whether inevitable or not, always a step back to a lower form of civilised existence. As to the wistful agnostic, and his "wistfulness," that is just blather. The "wish I could believe as you do" is born of a mixture of timidity and misunderstanding. No man chooses his beliefs. They choose him. If he has courage he should be proud to proclaim them. If he lacks the insight to see or the courage to say, let him at least strive to be honest to himself, for that is the first step to being honest to others.

Probably the best saying came from the Bishop of Chelmsford. Winding up the meeting he said:—

"Christianity will survive, of course, but it will survive in the lives and hands of a small community. It was probably never intended to be a majority religion. But unless—so far as the majority of people is concerned—there is some extraordinary awakening, both the credenda and the ethics will die."

He means of course the Christian credenda and ethics. And when that happens the Christian God will have trodden the road that all gods have travelled on their road to extinction.

By way of postscript it is worth while pointing out that neither religion nor god were introduced. Joad keeps his god in cold storage and Miss West seemed more concerned with ethics. Poor God! Ignored at a moment when he so badly needs advertising.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE!

MANY people who lack knowledge of the power that still remains in the hands of organised Christianity, or who lack the courage to make an open stand against that power, attempt to justify their indifference to the Freethought movement by benumbing their brains with that old cliché, "Secularists are flogging a dead horse."

Judging Christianity by the numerical support it receives from the public, one might reasonably regard the Christian horse as next door to being dead; but the trouble is that this particular horse has the same curious characteristic as the hero of a comic song of a few years ago: "He's dead, but he won't lie down."

The interesting thing about these "dead horse" supporters is that although they are usually keen to perceive the way in which other governing cliques, even smaller in number than the church clique, dominate and influence the lives of the people, they are unable or unwilling to see how the religious governing clique exercises a similar power over the people.

They can detect the evil effects of a handful of financial racketeers on the economic life of the nation, but they fail dismally to note the similarly evil effects of the religious racketeers on the intellectual and social life of the nation.

They resent the physical exploitation of the young people of the country, in the interests of Capitalism, and support the raising of the school-leaving age, but at the same time they allow an even larger dose of "dead horse" serum to be injected into our youngsters as a prophylactic against the dread disease of thinking for themselves.

Frankly, I think such people are in themselves a solid argument in justification of the need for our work as Freethinkers, for this willingness to allow the further mental doping of our children in an Act of Parliament (designed in other respects to help the children) shows the extent to which they themselves were effectively doped in their childhood. Nothing other than the ignorance of religion which was produced by their own religious instruction at school, or the fear of offending conventions surrounding the god idea, could account for such behaviour.

Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it is these "dead horse" indifferentists, often so active on the political front of the battle for progress, yet disinterested in the psychological reactions to religious instruction, who retard in each generation the measure of progress that might be made if human minds were freed from religious beliefs.

So long as the nonsense about "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world" is continued as a specific teaching in the schools, so long will it be impossible to get the majority of maturing adolescents to think seriously of a situation in which "all's wrong with the world," thanks to man's own mismanagement under the Fatherhood of God.

Trapped in the vicious circle of playing to public prejudice and ignorance in order to catch votes, and compromising with convention to prevent their political opponents from depriving them of those votes, so-called progressives have for half-a-century been running around in rings, like circus ponies; and when Freethinkers have pointed to the spot at which the forces hemming them in could be breached they have snorted in reply, "Flogging a dead horse, old man," and have continued to run around, bursting with self-righteousness at the idea that at least they have kept themselves religiously respectable. What a game! And how the ringmasters must laugh!

Despite the politicians, however, progress has been made in an economic sense. Applied science, even when exploited solely for profit making, adds to human wealth by its discoveries and developments, and some of that wealth must necessarily overflow into the common pool of civil life—at the moment, of course,

it is concentrated into the destructive channels of warfare. Economically, therefore, people have to-day the means of a fuller and happier life at their disposal, if not actually in their hands. Electrical development, the internal combustion engine, radio, cinema, plastics—these and many other fruits of science have, willy nilly, made available to people the means of a broader form of life such as was never before presented to mankind.

But new economic facilities, changing the material aspect of living, demand new conceptions, moral, social and individual, and these have been denied parallel growth with the development of material resources. We live in a new world in one sense, yet remain in the old world in another sense, simply because that Christian "dead horse," which was once supposed to pull the moral load of the community, would neither move along with the new material of the world nor die off and allow a modern successor in the shafts. Like the Aberdonian horse, with its hoof covering a sixpence, it just wouldn't budge.

But it continued to kick! And it still kicks. It kicked the Government into ruining the Education Bill with more religious instruction in the schools; it kicked the bottom out of a possible agreement with Russia in 1939 that might have prevented the war; it is at the moment kicking the stuffing out of the good relations with the U.S.S.R., and out of the possibilities for a quick ending of the war in Europe.

In the home field it is trying to kick away the hard won liberty of people to practise family limitation. The Catholic hoof is just now emitting brilliant sparks in the shape of "filth and horror" stories in the Catholic Press about contraceptives, and a well organised move is on foot to secure a form of control that would tend to abolish scientific contraception for the ordinary people. Under the influence of a decayed Christian morality clever doctors are still being sent to penal servitude for a "crime"—abortion—which can only be cured by sensible sex-teaching, which, in turn, is bitterly opposed by a large section of the Christian Church.

In this connection I have myself recently experienced the hostility of Christianity by having my sex-education book, "We Are Sixteen," described in a youth magazine as "a peg on which to hang his anti-religious opinions," despite the fact that no such opinions are expressed in the book. I was even refused the right to correct the bigoted reviewer (West Riding Youth Bulletin) on this point of fact.

In another direction, thanks to the Christian hangover, all sorts of people can get worked up emotionally about men stealing coffin lids from cremated corpses which can no longer suffer deprivation, but the same people will pass with a shrug of the shoulders really serious cases of racketeering in goods and commodities which form the sustenance of living victims, who can and do suffer deprivation, hunger and pain.

In my own city, when a youth club decided to have Sunday evening dancing, the "dead horse" suddenly came to life and kicked hard against this, just as it kicked hard against Sunday cinemas, despite the fact that these have cleared the streets of the Sunday night promenades which the Church declared to be the breeding grounds of immorality. We know, of course, that anything competing with Christian monopoly of Sunday breeds "immorality."

I could go on with such examples for a long time, but space cries halt. What then, shall we do? Obviously one thing. So long as the "dead horse" keeps on kicking against the interests of progress in human society, so long must we go on flogging it. And the harder it kicks the harder it needs to be flogged.

In conclusion, may I appeal to those politically minded people who have managed to escape being kicked into insensibility by Christianity's "dead horse" to take up the Freethought whip now and again and help us with the flogging—for eventually it will help them in their own progressive efforts.

F. J. CORINA.

ACID DROPS

THE B.B.C. arranged for a series of lectures on the "Four Freedoms," which look far better on paper than they are likely to be in practice. One of the evenings was given over to the editor of the "Catholic Herald," and we were pleased to see a protest raised through the medium of a letter in the "News Chronicle." If the B.B.C. had intended to poke fun at the "Four Freedoms" they could not have managed it better. It almost reached the level of a deliberate insult to the English people.

But to be fair to the B.B.C. it should be remembered that the arrangement was for representatives of the Churches only. Therefore, one has to bear in mind that the insult to its intelligent readers was deliberate. Of course, if representatives of differing points of view had been selected it would be right to give the Churches a hearing. But the selected ones were taken from this and that Christian Church—and their attitude is written in their history. But the B.B.C. has openly declared that it will on no account permit an adverse criticism of Christianity. True it slobbers day after day its love of freedom; in practice it gives the public dishonesty after dishonesty. On occasions when Christianity is on the carpet it shrinks from no lie. The Roman Church as a champion of freedom, therefore finds itself quite at home with the religious section of the B.B.C.

What we have said concerning the B.B.C. gives point to a criticism passed on the presentation of the trial of Charles I by the "News Chronicle" writer. We agree with him that the whole thing was ridiculous. He was the innocent martyr king, put to death by a number of coarse, ignorant, brutal revolutionists. Nothing was said of the character of the King, of his plotting against Parliament, of his lying, and his general unworthiness. Charles I had neither the stupid fanaticism of his father nor the wit and cleverness of his son. All this was slurred by the B.B.C., which presented a Charles I that one would expect to find in a not very advanced, but respectable school of, say, seventy years ago. By the way, it may be noted that Charles II was the last king we have had who could claim to be of any intellectual quality whatever. That is probably why the monarchy has persisted.

Very solemnly the Lower House of Convocation of Canterbury has declared that the doctrine of resurrection does not preclude the practice of cremation. It is said that this decision will "bring peace to the minds of many people." We should feel relieved ourselves if we were not struck by the imbecility of people in 1945 feeling pained at the thought of cremation. They could stand well enough the gradual rotting of the body after death, but to practise cremation shocked them beyond bearability. And a conclave of priests can set at rest the feelings of these people by a decree of a number of clergymen. Yet all of this type of character will have a vote when a General Election arrives.

A very long time ago we were at Dunoon when the first Sunday boat tried to land its passengers. There was a riot with the pious Scots on the land and the boat trying to land its passengers. In the long run the boat-owners had to give up—for a time. Then, soon after, we went to Dunoon to lecture on Free-thought. The Town Hall was crowded to suffocation; but it was not to hear the lecture. What they wanted to see was a real live Atheist. Some, we suspect, wondered if we had horns and a cloven foot. One woman did rub her finger down our coat—probably expecting sparks.

Since then Dunoon has developed. It now sanctions a cinema on Sunday, also high-class music. But the limit was reached when an attempt was made to have a show made up of comedians. Against that the Scots—in Dunoon—felt the end was approaching, or would approach, if such lightheartedness was permitted. Jesus wept, but he is not reported to have worked up a grin. It must have been a Dunoon preacher who, meeting the pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement arriving, cried from his pulpit, "I thank God that no Pleasant Sunday Afternoon had ever been in my church."

Again in Scotland. The Outer Isle Free Presbyterian Church has protested against the B.B.C. giving lessons in English to our Continental Allies on Sunday. That seems rather hard, but if the Presbytery has its way our foreign brothers-in-arms will have each to swear in their native tongues. That probably means a greater strain on native cuss words.

Still Scotland. A strong protest was raised by some Rothsay parsons against having a pantomime on "Christmas Sunday"; in addition, it appears that Sunday entertainments are becoming common. Naturally this affects attendance at church—although it is not put that way. They put it that it is violation of God's Sunday. But the other way of putting it sounds better. At any rate, no one is compelled to go to the theatre, and while we are all raving so much about freedom, to put it into practice in Rothsay would not be a bad start.

Roman Catholics in England are ordered to have a special weekly prayer for peace until the war ends. Now that is quite good. It is no use praying for the war to end within a given time. But to have official prayers every week until the war ends are bound to have an answer. Meanwhile the Papacy has to put up with seeing Atheistic Russia getting victory after victory without prayers. It looks like a slander on our own troops to say that they must have supernatural help to do anything; we do not believe it. In spite of what preachers say, we believe our men are as good as Russian soldiers.

In his latest speech Hitler again repeated that he was carrying out the will of God in seeking to break Russia and the Allies generally. We have insisted long before the war broke out that Hitler was essentially a religious fanatic, and that the new generation of Germans was also saturated in religious fanaticism. Hitler still claims that he is carrying out God's work, which is exactly the claim of the Christian Church in its most flourishing days. Whatever other factors are operating, the religious historical Christian spirit is unmistakable in the Hitlerian Movement. If anyone has doubt on the religious character of Hitler, they will find ample evidence in the recently issued "Der Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power," by K. Heiden (published by Gollancz). It should be to them an eye-opener.

It is surely about time that the Allied generals ceased to offer arranged prayers to the soldiers. Their religious opinions are their own, but they should remember that religion ought to be regarded as their own private business. Just after Christmas one of the American leaders, Lt.-Gen. S. Patton, circulated a printed prayer in which God was asked to "Restrain these immoderate rains with which we have to contend." The result has been just as bad as it could be. Some of our own generals are just as foolish when they come to their religious expressions. The unmistakable conclusion is that if God has anything to do with the war he takes sides alternately.

Year by year the Church of Rome reports the number of converts it ropes in. No one may test their accuracy, and the certain thing is that year by year the Church loses more than it gains; but now it has to confess that since 1938 the figure has been steadily dropping. We wonder how many worshippers have been lost in Rome alone. And it must be remembered that the Roman Church does not make any allowances for losses. Once a Roman Catholic always a Roman Catholic, unless there are cases of excommunication. The Papacy lives up to its historic quality as "The great lying Church."

We wonder whether, when the war ends and settlements are made for Europe, the Allies will have the courage to wipe out the deal with the Vatican when the Pope received a huge sum of money. In other directions the Allies have announced their determination to consider all the changes that have taken place under Fascism as void. If that were carried out the Pope would have to refund the money paid by Mussolini. Yet if there is one change that should be made it is this one.

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SUGAR PLUMS

A DISCUSSION on the question of religion in schools has been going on in the "Manchester Guardian." We think the following—written in reply to the claim for Bible teaching in the elementary schools hits the nail on the head. In answer to one who signs himself T. W. M., his critic writes:

"In my opinion you miss the whole point of the opposition to religious teaching in schools. By the inclusion of the latter (that is religious instruction), you are trying to do two very opposite things at the same time. On all subjects save one you are trying to teach a child to use his brains upon factual evidence—in short to think for himself. Upon one subject and one only you are teaching him to accept things on trust."

That puts the situation plainly and tersely, and the reply of T.W.M. is quite out of order. For example, he replies that if in the end the pupil prefers what "we" consider to be inferior, he has had his choice and the responsibility is his. But that is sheer nonsense, and so plainly so that it is hard to credit T. W. M. with honesty. The Bible is not taught as other things are. The pupil is told first of all that it is true, then it is placed in a class by itself. Finally it is a sin not to believe it. And he is not told the truth about the Bible. He is not told that millions do not believe in the Bible as containing historic facts, save so far as many discarded superstitions are historical facts. The child's mind is poisoned and in many cases it simply cannot read the Bible as it would read other books.

Quite blind to the declaration of the Bible that man's allotted time is somewhere about seventy ex-Dean Inge goes on writing, and interesting writing even when one completely disagrees with him. When in office he was called "the gloomy Dean," but that was, we fancy, due to the fact that he sometimes let out a truth that was awkward for his brother clerics, and thought that the world—his world—looked like falling to pieces. But then he came from a family that for two hundred years had been enjoying privileges, and privileges are much more frequently due to an accident of position, rather than to personal merit. One of the chief features of our "public schools" is, not the brilliancy of those who go to them, but the way in which they get positions

with no discernible qualities that lift them higher than an errand boy.

Writing in the "Evening Standard," the Dean dealt with the British sense of humour. We do not know that it is greater than others, and not many Englishmen would claim it. But they do not hesitate to say it of each other, and remain quite blind to the difference between humour and clowning. We fancy it was Heine who said that a great deal of English humour was a mere sneeze of the intellect. There is really a difference between wit and clowning. If one has doubts he should study a great deal of the B.B.C. humour, particularly while the "Brains Trust" session is on.

The ex-Dean says he would not go to the Jews for humour. He has in mind the Jews of the Bible. But for that matter the New Testament is still more barren where humour is concerned. Some of the gods of antiquity were quite jovial fellows, but the Christian God is quite free from the charge of joking, and as far as his son, he was "a man of sorrows" and never was known to laugh. In the main his most serious worshippers have followed his example. And we ought to remember that the great Aquinas believed that one of the chief pleasures for the saved was to look over the battlements of heaven and watch the torments of the damned. Still it should be kept in mind that there is a counter theory that it is the inhabitants of hell who smile when they think what a damned dull place heaven must be.

On the whole we do not think that ex-Dean Inge makes his case good. The form that humour takes depends upon a variety of circumstances. With many adults—the majority—the sense of humour is not of a much higher quality than that of a child who shrieks with laughter when father burns his finger, or grimaces when he is suffering from acute toothache. And when we come to consider people as a whole one may note that mere incongruity of position or incident is enough to produce screams of laughter. And its chief claim for notice is that it forms an escape from the strain of serious and unpleasant situations.

The "Church Times" has been shocked. It seems that a supporter of Everton Football Club expressed a desire that his body should be cremated and his ashes scattered over the playing pitch. Soon after games were played over the ground and the C.T. is shocked. It says this is "another example of the increasing irreverent paganism in this country." But this shock. The dead man expressed the desire to have his ashes scattered over the ground. He injured no one in so wishing, and the club carried out his wishes by playing on the ground. Who was injured? The only thing that is injured is the standing of the clergy. If he had had his ashes scattered over the sea, no one would have complained of ships sailing over the spot. It is quite common to have ashes scattered over a field, quite open to cattle or humans walking over the ground. If it were possible we should like to see some seeds of common sense scattered over the "Church Times" office. But probably that would undermine the purpose for which the journal exists.

The debate arranged by the Keighley Branch N.S.S. between the Editor of "The Two Worlds" and Mr. R. H. Rosetti, went off very well. The large Municipal Hall was filled with an audience which closely followed each speaker with an interest maintained to the end. Mr. H. Wall carried out the duties of Chairman in an efficient and pleasing manner, and the Branch officials seemed to have been well satisfied with the afternoon's work. From the point of view of debate it would have been better if the opposition could have entered into a discussion of the scientific aspects of life and death.

Volume IV of "Essays on Freethinking" and "Revenues of Religion" can now be had. All outstanding orders have been despatched. Volumes I and II of "Essays in Freethinking" are at the binders and will be available in about a month.

ATHEISM FOR BEGINNERS

I.

DURING the past year or two I have often been asked by readers to deal in a simple way with some specific points on the question of Atheism. What was wanted were not just generalisations with their more or less vague appeal to modern science, but how to reply to the blunt questions which a clever Christian might put.

It is not everybody who can turn at once to specific arguments from Tylor or Frazer, or show how genetics or bio-chemistry have no use for a Deity. And I can quite sympathise with a Free-thinker who has become convinced that religion is not true, and yet is not able quite to hold his own in an argument with a believer who cleverly mixes up Christianity with Theism and Idealism. One has to be exceptionally well read in recent scientific discoveries to be able to meet and beat a cultured Christian.

The truth is, as in so many other things, a mere reading of texts is not quite sufficient for debate; one has to live with one's subject, soak in it, so to speak, turn it inside out, carry on discussions with it, read the other side, and even work out particular problems before one should rest satisfied. Let me give an example.

You can buy the most expensive camera on the market, study the best textbook written on photography, have the finest apparatus, and yet fail to turn out decent photographs. It requires the practical experience of facing photographic problems and working them out undismayed by failures which bring success—and even then that cannot be guaranteed.

So in the case of Atheism. The reading of a few articles or pamphlets is just not enough. They should be constantly supplemented with as many books as possible, dealing with the problems which the Atheist has to face, and these problems have to be turned over in one's mind so that both sides are fully known.

Of course, there is a simple way out of all difficulties. You need only say: "I don't believe it," and leave it at that. Don't enter into serious discussion and nothing need trouble you. But if, like myself, you are not satisfied with a mere negation, then you must study for yourself; and, believe me, it is well worth all the trouble.

The question which seems to have troubled my correspondents most is how is one to answer when faced with the direct question: "Do you believe in God?" or "Do you believe that God exists?" How can these questions be answered without "hedging?"

How did Charles Bradlaugh, who clearly and unequivocally proclaimed his Atheism in mid-Victorian days—and it required some courage then—deal with these questions? They are of course the fundamental ones. In his "Plea for Atheism," he says:—

"The Atheist does not say 'There is no God,' but he says 'I know not what you mean by God'; the word 'God' is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me."

Now the usual reply of the "affirmer" is: "You know quite well what I mean by God," and it is from here that the young and inexperienced Atheist is apt to be caught. He will find he is arguing perhaps for the conception of God fostered by Christianity, while his opponent may be taking the Theistic position, pure and simple; and a God envisaged by a Theist is not necessarily the same as that of the Christian. That is why Bradlaugh asked for a "definition" of God, and in this way sought to trap his opponent.

The reader will find if he gets "A Plea for Atheism" that the latest discoveries in science or anthropology or bio-chemistry are not in the least dealt with or, for Bradlaugh's argument, are in any way necessary. The problem is discussed in terms of thinking or logic or philosophy, and it does seem to me that makes a very good beginning.

Bradlaugh refused to deny something the definition of which made no sense; but, and it is a big but, he certainly denied the conception of God or the definition of God coming from either a Theist or a Christian. It did not take me long to see this and from that moment I have always denied God not by merely saying I did not believe in him, but by a clear, positive denial. I made that very plain to opponents.

The truth is that as soon as you press for a meaning of the word God, or insist on a clear definition, you will find neither is forthcoming. What you get, as Bradlaugh showed, was a confused, incoherent and contradictory number of words associated with a "Being" which, directly they were analysed, made no sense. To call God a "Creator" for example, means nothing whatever unless you can define the word "Creation" in the cosmic sense. And that is quite impossible. Indeed it is on this question of the meaning of words that Theism so often breaks down, and if the young Freethinker carefully weighs his definitions and uses himself only words the meaning of which he thoroughly understands, he will go a long way to support his Atheism without calling in the latest discoveries in physics or biology.

So we find Bradlaugh writing:—

"When the Theist ventures to affirm that his God is an existence other than and separate from the so-called material universe, and when he invests this separate hypothetical existence with the several attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity, infinity, immutability and perfect goodness, then the Atheist in reply says: 'I deny the existence of such a being.'"

And that is the proper attitude to take.

But it would be a mistake to imagine that the Theist then generously retires and leaves the victory to the Atheist. He is quite prepared for this reply—if he is a well read and cultured Christian—and he brings in two very famous arguments, both of which have filled thousands of volumes in discussion. They are known as the Design or the a posteriori argument, which argues from effect to cause, and the a priori, which argues from cause to effect. The former is the popular one—in fact, ninety-nine people out of a hundred always use it and imagine it to be unanswerable. It is put crudely something like this: "Well, who made the world if God didn't? Somebody must have made the world, we say it was God. If you deny that, how did the world come—it couldn't have come from nothing, or made itself. God must have created it. Only God could have done so, and unless you can show somebody else as the Creator, I shall continue to believe in God."

When a believer talks like this he usually refuses to discuss definitions which he considers a waste of words. Here is this world of ours—how do you account for it? And I have been astonished sometimes at the mess into which both sides have got themselves when in the heart of the problem. It requires however, some clear thinking, and few writers have contributed to that more than the Editor of this journal. Any reader who wants thoroughly to understand the fallacies in the Design argument should study and master the arguments under this head in "Theism or Atheism," "A Grammar of Freethought" and "Materialism Restated," as well as the two pamphlets on Atheism and Agnosticism and "Deity and Design" in the series of "Pamphlets for the People." It is not enough just to read them—they must be studied and mastered.

H. CUTNER.

THE CRADLE OF CHRISTIANITY—4

THE ascendancy of Christianity, declares Lecky, was followed by a condition of depravity that has seldom been surpassed.

Corruption had reached classes and institutions that appeared the most holy. The Agape or love-feasts became scenes of drunkenness and riot. The commemoration of the martyrs soon degenerated into scandalous dissipation.

"Fairs," he continues, "were held in connection with these celebrations; gross breaches of chastity were frequent; and the annual festival was suspended on account of the immorality it produced."

"The ambiguous position of the clergy with reference to marriage had already led to grave disorder."

"In the time of St. Cyprian, before the outbreak of the Decian persecution, it had been common to find clergy professing celibacy, but keeping, under various pretexts, their mistresses in their houses; and after Constantine the complaints on this subject became loud and general."

"Virgins and monks often lived together in the same house, professing sometimes to share in chastity the same bed."

"Rich widows were surrounded by swarms of clerical sycophants, who addressed them in tender diminutives, studied and consulted their every foible; and, under the guise of piety, lay in wait for their gifts or bequests."

"That which strikes a student in perusing this literature is not so much the existence of these superstitions as their extraordinary multiplication—the many thousands of grotesque miracles wrought by saints, monasteries or relics that were deliberately asserted and universally believed."

"The low level of intellectual cultivation—the religious feelings of half-converted barbarians and the custom of compounding for all crimes by pecuniary fines—combined in their different ways, with the panic created by the fear of hell, in driving men in the same direction, and the wealth and power of the clergy rose to a point that enabled them to overshadow all other classes."

There was, however, another doctrine which exercised a still greater influence in augmenting the riches of the clergy and in making donations to the Church the chief part of religion.

"I allude," says Lecky, "to the doctrine of purgatory. The fire of purgatory, according to the most eminent theologians, was like the fire of hell—a literal fire, it was sometimes said, for ages. The declamations of the pulpit described the sufferings of the saved souls in purgatory as incalculably greater than any that were endured by the most wretched mortals on earth."

"The rude artists of mediævalism exhausted their efforts in depicting the writhings of the dead in the flames that encircled them."

"Innumerable visions detailed with ghastly minuteness the various kinds of torture they underwent, and the monk who described what he professed to have seen usually ended by the characteristic moral that, could men only realise those sufferings, they would shrink from no sacrifice to rescue their friends from such a state."

"A special place, it was said, was reserved in purgatory for those who had been slow in paying their tithes."

"Whatever may be thought of its other aspects it is impossible to avoid recognising in this teaching, a masterly skill in the adaptation of means to ends which almost rises to artistic beauty."

"A system which deputed its minister to go to the unhappy widow in the first dark hour of her anguish, to tell her that he who was dearer to her than all the world was now burning in a fire, and that he could only be relieved by a gift of money to the priests, was assuredly of its own kind not without an extraordinary merit."

Lecky refers to the fulsome laudation by Christians of Constantine, "a sovereign who, shortly after his conversion, put to a violent death his son, his nephew and his wife"; declares

that "no language of invective was too extreme to be applied by Christians to a sovereign who opposed their interests," and "no language of adulation too lavish to be applied to a sovereign who sustained them"; and in proof of the Church's flagrant, revolting hypocrisy goes on to say: "Of all the Emperors who disgraced the throne of Constantinople the most odious and ferocious was probably Phocas."

"An obscure centurion, he rose by a military revolt to the supreme power, and the Emperor Maurice, with his family, fell into his hands. Phocas resolved to put the captive Emperor to death. But first of all, he ordered Maurice's five children to be brought out and to be successively murdered before the eyes of their father, who, himself a convert, bore the awful sight with a fine mixture of antique heroism and of Christian piety, murmuring as each child fell beneath the knife of the assassin, 'Thou art just, O Lord, and righteous are Thy judgments.'

"But Maurice, who had been a weak and avaricious rather than a vicious sovereign, had shown himself jealous of the influence of the Pope; had forbidden the soldiers, during the extreme danger of their country, deserting their colours to enrol themselves as monks and had even encouraged the pretensions of the Archbishop of Constantinople to the title of Universal Bishop; and, in the eyes of the Roman priests, the recollection of these crimes was sufficient to excuse the most brutal murders."

"In two letters full of passages of Scripture and replete with fulsome and blasphemous flattery, the Pope, St. Gregory the Great, wrote to congratulate Phocas and his wife upon their triumph."

"He called heaven and earth to rejoice over them; he placed their images to be venerated in the Lateran; and he adroitly insinuated that, with their well-known piety, they could not fail to be very favourable to the See of Peter."

J. Y. ANDERONEY.

OBITUARY

MRS. CLARA BARTRAM.

In the death last month of Mrs. Bartram, of Newcastle, our movement has lost one of its most loyal members. With her late husband (John Bartram) she worked hard for our cause, and many newcomers to the movement have reason to thank her for encouragement and help. Almost up to her death, at the age of 79, her house gave open hospitality to fellow workers in our movement. A secular address was given by Mr. J. T. Brighton, who paid tribute to her staunch loyalty to the ideals of Secularism. We extend our sympathy to her surviving son and daughter.

J. T. B.

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., Professor G. E. G. CATLIN, M.A., Ph.D.: "Religious Guides"; (3) Gandhi.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. FRED RATCLIFFE: "Economic Contradictions of To-day."

Glasgow Secular Society (25, Hillfoot Street, Dennistoun).—Sunday, 3 p.m., debate: "Materialism Restated." Messrs. J. GRANT and E. LAWART.

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.: "Union of Democratic Control."

THINK — IF YOU DARE

(Continued from page 46)

A POPULAR substitute for thinking is the slogan. "*In hoc signo vinces*" was an effective slogan for the Christian crusaders in the twelfth century. Accoutred with bludgeon and breviary, these benign followers of the gentle Jesus went forth prayerfully on their murderous mission. "No taxation without representation" aroused the valour of certain wealthy Colonial gentlemen, who succeeded at least fairly well in explaining the meaning of it to the majority of the people, who were too poor to buy the taxed articles. "Give me liberty or give me death," spoke one of their number (who owned slaves). Whereupon they proceeded to knock hell out of King George—which was no more than he deserved, although it was not exactly the orthodox treatment for a people to accord their ruler, and it has usually been frowned on by practitioners of polite statecraft. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" is a slogan more venerated than heeded, for, although all men presumably desire freedom, it is dreadfully bothersome being eternally vigilant about it. Besides, many big interests regard it as an impertinence to be made the object of even so casual notice as that implied by a congressional investigation.

It has been rudely suggested that eternal vigilance is also the "price of stupidity." Shocking as it may be to realise it, the restlessness of our times has endangered the security of our platitudinous philosophy, our antediluvian morals, and our great private fortunes, as well as many other of our time-honoured stupidities. The preservation of these blessings is no task for the squeamish; it requires an heroic sort of imbecility. For, in order to safeguard stupidity, it becomes necessary at times to burn heretics and to correct the thinking of other wayward minds by the threat of similar therapeutic treatment. It is also desirable that the public school textbooks be occasionally purged of any such facts as might induce the youth to question the beliefs of their elders. The heritage of genteel prejudice must be passed on pure and unadulterated!

Another very handy artifice for the elimination of thinking is the generalisation. The generalisation sounds like a whole library of bona fide wisdom done up in a small package. It is so compressed that a dozen neat generalisations, good for a lifetime, may be tucked away in the mind in the same storage space that would be required for one significant truth. Generalisations are easily remembered and the appropriate one can readily be brought forth and applied without your having to do any thinking about the problem. Soon the process becomes automatic so that the applicable generalisation comes bobbing up of its own accord. A favourite old-time generalisation declared that the only good Indian is a dead Indian. Now once you get that simple formula well in mind, you never have to do any more thinking about Indians. The moment you meet one, you know what sort of Indian he is. If you have a godly interest in his moral welfare, you will probably kill him in order to make a good Indian of him. At any rate you will be sure he is not a good Indian because he is not dead. This generalisation is founded on historical evidence, for we know that the only Indians who did not wickedly resist having their homes taken from them and their children sold into Christian servitude were those who had been made good Indians by the bullets of their white saviours.

But perhaps the scientists are right in their contention that the human brain was meant for thinking. This is difficult of proof since, in those Christian countries where a few families own or control practically everything and the people have been trained to believe that this is God's own plan, it is not permissible to test out the belief of the scientists. For it is obvious

that if ever the people should begin to think about it, no such diabolical lunacies could continue over night. As it is, history seems to indicate that every step in the course of human progress away from ignorance and misery toward intelligence and well-being has been initiated by those who had courage to free their minds from orthodox control and to follow their own thought. Always in the minority—many of them imprisoned, exiled, lashed, crucified—they have at length been raised up to honour and immortality by the generations which they foresaw. If history means anything, then the better to-morrow which is the pathetic but deathless hope of humanity will come not from orthodox thought, but from the thinking of heretics. For in an improvable world all real thinking leads to heresy, and only heresy can challenge the stubborn thraldoms of the past by an irrevocable allegiance to a more humane future. The true saviours of mankind are not the wardens of orthodoxy, but the persecuted thinkers; not the laurel-crowned, but the thorn-crowned.

HUGH ROBERT ORR
(from Humanist Monographs).

POLITICS AND RELIGION

THERE can be few Freethinkers who have not realised the close relationship which exists in these days between politics and religion. The anti-Semitic antics of Mosley; the admiration of the vast majority of Roman Catholics and High Tories for the brutal Franco; the way in which Fascism and Roman Catholicism march hand in hand. These should be ample indication of the close inter-relationship which still holds between outmoded religious superstition and extreme Right-wing political views.

For that reason I make no excuse for recommending to all Freethinkers a recent Penguin Book entitled "Politics Made Plain," which has been written by Mr. T. L. Horabin, M.P. It is a survey of recent political history, and it demonstrates, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the Tories have quite invariably "backed the wrong horse" in the democratic sense.

Spain, of course, demonstrates this fact most clearly, but elsewhere the same rule applies. The religious bigotry which refused to recognise the advances made in Communist Russia is really to a very great extent responsible for the plight in which the world finds itself to-day.

Freethought is therefore seen, by every observant reader of Mr. Horabin's excellent book, to be absolutely fundamental to the new world which optimists hope may be born after this war is over. Only if religious prejudices are totally destroyed can any sort of political amelioration be anticipated.

Now, there may be some Freethinkers who disagree with my diagnosis of the situation. I am not attempting to hitch the Freethought Chariot to any political star; I am merely trying to point out the necessary advance that must be made by Freethought before purely political measures can hope to succeed.

Mr. Horabin's book exposes for all to see the pitiable political record of British Toryism during the years between the wars, and his case is quite irrefutable. It must therefore follow that some really fundamental change is necessary before the world can advance politically. The recent disturbing train of events in Belgium, Italy and (worst of all) Greece, shows that the heart of the religious Tory does not alter. Only if his power is destroyed can the world improve. And the sole way to destroy that malignant influence is to make Freethought a greater power in the land.

S. H.

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

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