

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXV.—No. 47

Sunday, November 25, 1945

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Are We Christians?

IN all my reading I cannot recall a case of the established religious Churches in this country preventing a war. The constant picture is that when we go to war the vast majority of Christians do what they can to keep the war flame burning brightly. Of course, some Christians are against war, but the same proportion of non-Christians may be found. On that head Christians and non-Christians may be considered equal. The world war in its main features offered no exception to the general rule. In it the Churches can true to form by opening with a thundering lie that the war was being fought for the preservation of Christianity. Then we followed with the usual prayers to God to give us victory. But the replies were not obvious. Several special days of prayer did not bring any result. Some non-stop weeks of prayer followed—still without results. Other prayers by night as well as by day finished the efforts of the pious. The faith in God dropped considerably.

It may be that God had noted that the people were of a very mixed character. There were those of men of strong religious belief and others who had none at all. There were men of all shades of colour and with all sorts of gods, with yet others of no god at all. Still, led by the Prime Minister, the cry went up that we were fighting for the preservation of Christianity. . . . In great religious issues one lie more or less is of small account.

Then Russia that had been painted as filled with unbelief and wickedness, joined us in the war. She became our ally, and of course, the scene changed. The new Russia was praised, its improvement was undeniable and our religious leaders altered their tone. The Roman Catholic papers alone insisted that our relations could only be for part or the duration of the war, then the old position would be resumed. Then came the news that we had entered into a twenty-year arrangement with Russia and the praise for Russia increased. And the English people are not really great haters. But meanwhile the strength of Christianity was surely declining.

Now for many years we have been protesting at the description of this country as a Christian land. Certainly we are not legally a Christian country. It may even be questioned whether in a legal sense we ever were. It is true that in their history the Churches have been given powers of control they never should have had, but this power was given to the Churches by the secular State. This distinction between the secular and the religious has always been maintained, and as we shall see later, the secular powers have made great sorties into the Christian area of power.

That seemed to me from my youth a fair reading of English history, and for a time I remained just a voice in the wilderness, but never did I dream that my opinion would

be endorsed by Mr. Richard O'Sullivan, K.C., whom a friend informs me is one of our prominent lawyers. But even that surprise was eclipsed when his opinion came to me over the air. For the B.B.C. had said over and over again that it would never permit anything to be broadcast that cut across what it describes as "the Christian tradition." I never succeeded in getting from the B.B.C. what exactly was meant by the Christian tradition, but so far as I could get it seemed to stand for taking a form of Christianity that was popular with the most ignorant and to take care they are not disturbed by new ideas. The rule seemed to be, "They are happy in their ignorance, why disturb them?"

With this in mind I was greatly surprised to find in the "Listener" for November 1, an address by Mr. O'Sullivan in which he asserted that England had lost all right to be called a Christian country. On legal grounds I believe he is right, and the only explanation I can give for this startling lapse of the B.B.C. into truth is that Mr. O'Sullivan is a Roman Catholic. If my conjecture is right it will explain a lot. The Roman Church will never consider England as a full-blown Christian country.

Mr. O'Sullivan reaches his conclusion by noting two changes in our law. The first is the complete abolition of the legality of a religious marriage. It is not forbidden, but it is like a man writing out a cheque for a thousand pounds when he has only a few shillings to his credit. His second point is the House of Lord's decision in favour of the full legality of "The Secular Society Limited." That Society was planned by G. W. Foote, founder and editor of the "Freethinker," which is now, with the exception of the New York "Truth Seeker," the oldest Freethought journal in the world. Foote had spent twelve months in prison for "blasphemy," but he took his revenge in the House of Lords in 1917. I shall be dealing with this outstanding feature in the history of Freethought later. What I wish to stress now is that it is openly broadcast by a K.C. of repute that we cannot count England as a Christian country, and he bases this on the abolition of the legality of the *Christian* marriage and the House of Lords in the case of *Bowman v. Secular Society Limited*.

It should be said that I am taking it for granted that the speech as printed was the one that Mr. O'Sullivan wrote. The B.B.C. is very expert in cutting copy, and the advertisement appears to be sufficiently valuable for men of standing trimming their own writing to avoid offending the B.B.C.

Mr. O'Sullivan is, as I have said, a distinguished lawyer. That may account for some of the things he says being legally right. But if my conjecture is right that he is a Roman Catholic that will account for some of his statements being not exactly wrong but decidedly misleading. It is, for example, right to say that the Ecclesiastical Courts

had to do with all that concerned marriages. But it is misleading *not* to say that this power was given by the secular State. The State could, and in the end did, withdraw that power when it liked. But the really startling thing is to be told that "The State was founded on the institution of the Christian marriage." But that is not history. It is not even sensible romance. It is just nonsense. There were marriage customs in Britain long before the Romans came here; and they brought their own marriage customs with them, and there are binding marriage customs in Scotland to-day that are based on the ancient Roman practice. In sober fact there is not a group of human beings that has taken steps along the road of development that has not its own tribal marriage customs that are carefully practised. Moreover, the Church could only practice a religious marriage by the consent of the State. A form of marriage with religious ceremonies may be the one that is in operation, it may be the only one permitted, but these features do not support the statement that the English State is "founded on the Christian marriage." Historically the community grew from the herd, the State grew from the community, and the secularising of the State has been in operation for many generations. And let us mark in passing that a great many of those privileges have been taken from the Christian Churches because of their tyranny and injustice.

There is one other note we may mark in passing. The Roman Church did control marriage for a time, but the Catholic Church never had a very lofty idea of marriage. The attitude of the Church was that of St. Paul's, "better to be married than to burn," and the Roman Church—which stands to-day without a woman in its pulpits—has always considered the unmarried state as the "purest." Marriage was a concession to human frailty. We suggest to Mr. O'Sullivan that he should spend a few hours with Henry C. Lea's two volumes on "Sacerdotal Celibacy," and he will begin to realise how much the Church degraded marriage. The Church has always held that virginity was the higher form of Christian life. It does so to-day.

What did happen in this country was that the State at a certain time abolished the religious marriage altogether, and substituted the secular or civic marriage. But it did not do it hurriedly or without ample provocation. I am quite sure that if Mr. O'Sullivan were to accept a brief to justify the State in abolishing the religious marriage and establishing the secular he would be able to state a case that would make the cheeks of most clergymen turn scarlet. Of course, there would be many who could withstand such a "show up." But even clergymen are human.

Mr. O'Sullivan, by the way, cites some unnamed law Lord who says of divorce, "What was once a holy estate enduring for the joint lives of spouses is steadily assuming the characteristics of a contract for a tenant at will." That comment on divorce shows neither wit nor humanity. Nearer to a humane attitude it is for the law to say that when a man and woman find they cannot live together with trust and affection—without which marriage is a farce, or worse—it is better that they should be completely and legally separated.

My space is nearly filled but I present to Mr. O'Sullivan the following, from Lecky's "History of the Eighteenth

Century," as an idea of what the marriage in the hands of the clergy came to.

"A multitude of clergymen made it their business to celebrate clandestine marriages in or near the Fleet. They performed the marriage ceremony without even knowing the names of the persons they united. . . . Almost every tavern or brandy shop in the neighbourhood had a Fleet parson in its pay. . . . A more pretentious and perhaps a more popular establishment was the chapel in Curzon Street, where the Rev. Alexander Keith officiated. He was said to have made 'a very bishopric of revenue.' He himself stated that he had married many thousands. . . . Young and inexperienced heirs fresh from college were thus continually trapped. . . . Among these the more noted instances of clandestine marriages we find that of the Duke of Hamilton with Miss Chudleigh, Henry Fox with the daughter of the Duke of Richmond, and the poet Churchill, at the age of seventeen."

Cases of abuse and downright robbery connected with these religious marriages could be given. I have offered a sample from the bulk, and they are not by any means the most outrageous of offences under the shadow of the Christian Church. Lord Hardwick's Bill did something to remedy this glaring evil, but eventually the State was compelled to set aside the religious marriage, which Mr. O'Sullivan appears to think should be reinstated, and make the secular marriage as the only legal one. If a married couple wished to have a religious ceremony in addition, that was left for the parties interested to have it. But it has no value at law. I repeat, the only legal marriage in England is that performed by one holding the power given by the secular State. It must be in a building that is licensed for the special purpose, and that applies to the Church. It *must* be licensed by the secular State. That the holder of a licence may also be a priest in "Holy Orders," is of no consequence whatever. In English law the religious marriage simply does not exist.

I have given a very meagre outline of the law of marriage in England, but it is done to make plain a fact that many clergy still try to keep the truth of from their followers. I agree with Mr. O'Sullivan that we are losing, if we have not lost, all justification for calling England a Christian country. The correct description would be that England is a country where the Christian religion still gets a deal of clandestine benefits from the State, but which are gradually sinking to decay. And the evil of it is that religion separates men and women where they should be working together to create a healthier social life. Differences of opinion there will always be and should always be. By suggestion certainly, and also by statement, Mr. O'Sullivan distorts the facts. Next week I will deal with his handling of the formation of the Secular Society Limited. Curiously enough Mr. O'Sullivan does not mention the Society by name. That might have led to people inquiring the aim and meaning of that Society. I will only say now that it is one of the most important gains ever registered by the Freethought Movement. The creation and justification of the Society involved much labour and time. But we won. It was a great fight for a great purpose, and I am proud that I played some part in securing that measure of fair play for freedom of thought and speech.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

REBELS

Mental—, Material—, Merely—

II.

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY: It must be thought on. If it pass against us,

We lose the better half of our possession;

For all the temporal lands which men devout

By testament have given to the Church

Would they strip from us; etc.

BISHOP OF ELY: This would drink deep.

CANTERBURY: 'Twould drink the cup and all.

ELY: But what prevention?

CANTERBURY: The king is full of grace and fair regard.

ELY: And a true lover of the holy church.

CANTERBURY: The courses of his youth promis'd it not.

The breath no sooner left his father's body

But that his wildness, mortified in him,

Seem'd to die, too; etc.

ELY: We are blessed in the change. (!)

CANTERBURY: Hear him but reason in divinity,

And, all admiring, with an inward wish (wink)

You would desire the king were made a prelate.

"HENRY V.," ACT I., SCENE 1.

THE quoting is rather long, but it seems to have some sort of a shadow of a Moral for the present time, when so many "Interests"—Ideologic cum Economic—in Pulpit, Press, B.B.C., Literature, Art, Music, and in more than one section of more than one Political Party, are doing their utmost to turn the mental eyes of Youth backward some 400 years—when the Reign of Predatory Trading Enterprise was born, out of a dying Feudalism. The Ideologic Cloak of mental dishonesty and hypocrisy, which covers its more revolting features, is little more than 100 years old; but it's "a thing of rags and tatters" now—in spite of the B.B.C.

Some may also say that the quoting is but fiction, at best; but "Will" himself was near enough the birth and early growth, to know how it was regarded by the rising and—more or less—prosperous Private (the "r" is important) Enterprisers, from whom successive Monarchs got their "rake-off." And, to anticipate, "Will" was a Freethinker and a "Mental" Rebel. His work gave the story, as it was seen by those who were a-doing of it. In much the same way—when I was young—Henty, Ballantyne, Gordon Stables, Marryat, etc., gave me the story, in fiction form, of the Nineteenth Century Enterprisers, for whom W. E. Gladstone was the Political Administrator and Defender of the Faith, once given to Henry VIII. (Gladstone's Defence was less successful than Henry's!). I saw those British Enterprisers, throughout the Human World, as they saw themselves, in the pages of Successful Fiction writers. Happily, being what I am, by the time I was 22, I had found another and non-fictional picture as photographed by Freethinkers—of more than one type. Aye! Methinks there is more than the ghost of a shadow of a Moral for Youth of to-day, in my Preface Quoting. "So; let it be."

In Part I., "Freethinkers" were classified in two Categories: 1st, according to the "General" or "Popular" Idea; 2nd, according to the "Scientific" Idea, i.e., of those born with a Biologic "Something" which is a Compelling Urge to seek the "Truth," not merely in any specific Science, but in any and every subject. "Freethinkers" in both Categories together, have been and are a small Minority; but, inside that Minority, the "Scientific Freethinkers" are a still much smaller number. As I learnt in Logic, 1893-4, about "terms" or "words": the more they Denote, the less they Connote; and, the more they Connote, the less they Denote. In relation to the "Principles and Objects of Secularism," Chapman Cohen, in Annual Con-

ference, has more than once, in different words, emphasised the same Principle.

After that Classifying, another Factor was introduced; namely, the, to us, at present at least, "Innumerable" Variety of Biologic personal characteristics in Individual Humans. So, when the two Categories of Freethinkers are taken in relation to the Individual Personal Characteristics, there is an "Innumerable" variety of possible "Permutations and Combinations," in terms of Biology. In terms of Biology and Sociology together, the variety of possible "Perms. and Combs." is "more Innumerable." And, when the three Categories of "Rebels" are "put in" as factors in the Problem, the Variety becomes "most Innumerable!" So far, so complex; but not "Incomprehensible," as is the Three-in-one Dope of Christian Intolerance.

On the one side, we find many a Simple Simon, of average intelligence, knowing nothing of Analytic Psychology, married for years to a Simple Susan of similar nature, who can tell, with considerable accuracy, what his Old Woman will say or do in given circumstances; while Simple Susan can do the same with her Old Man—perhaps more so! Evidently there is some Basis in Practice, to make a fairly reliable estimate—without any Spiritual Powers.

On the other side, there is the difficulty of expressing these "most Innumerable" Varieties with any Mathematical accuracy—as yet. 'Twas said that Bertrand Russell was one of the only six Mathematicians in Europe who understood Einstein's Theory of Mathematical Relativity; therefore, being "infinitely" below that level of ability, I need not try to express the possible degrees of Variation in exact terms of Mathematics. At the same time, B.R. seems to be as "backward" a person in Evolutionary Sociology based on Evolutionary Economics, as I am in Higher or Highest Maths.; otherwise he wouldn't dream of trying to solve a Sociologic Problem by shouting in Print, "Ya! That was Totalitarianism—That is!" Sociologic "reasoning" of that sort resembles that of a Mathematician who would multiply every quantity by Nought; then the answer is the same as the Vatican's "ersatz" divorce for Privileged Christians—Nullity. We can leave it at that.

Now for the "Rebels"—as someone somewhere somehow said, yesterday. In dealing with the "Varieties" among Freethinkers, the one characteristic, common (more or less) to them all, is that they are basically "rational" in their mode of reacting to external or internal impressions, this tendency being "inborn" or resulting from training. The varieties arise from the modifying effect of other Biologic and/or Sociologic factors. Amongst the "Rebels," some types have something of the Freethinker in them; but most Rebels are predominantly "Emotional" rather than "Rational." (Here, by "Emotional," the reference is not only to the "feelings" in the whole individual body, but includes the effect on separate muscles and organs).

It should be noted that all this "Classifying" is in terms of Scientific—not Metaphysic—Abstract or Theoretic lines of dividing. Such are not "Absolute" lines: there is overlapping and crossing, as in other Sciences; but effort is made to describe, as exactly as possible, how these "Classes" have been marked-off. Scientific Abstract or Theoretic lines are not only useful, but necessary, in Science generally; but particularly in the Social Sciences which make-up Evolutionary Sociology. Yet, to-day, there is probably, relatively to Population, a smaller proportion who understand, and can use correctly, a Scientific Abstract than there was fifty to sixty years ago. Many of the "Incapables," too, are high-up in the Ranks of Journalism, Politics, etc. Well might Bain warn us: "The Abstract name is the last product of generalisation ('generalising?'); alike the facility and the snare of general expression."

There are other modes of Classifying Humans which are interesting and useful in Sociology. For instance, in terms of Reason. 'Twould be safe to say that the Majority of Humans,

in all Classes and all Lands, are not guided by Reason at all. They "think"—when they do—in individual and concrete terms. In relation to the conditions of their Social Existence, they react almost automatically, according to the habits into which they have been moulded. Then there is a Minority who use Reason, but only to justify what they have done or want to do. The great Mass of Humankind, especially the Young, are Conditionable or Mouldable by influences of a Sociological nature—and therein is the Tale of 6,000 years, at least, of Godism.

Apart from them there is always some small Minority who cannot be pressed into the Mould imposed upon them from above. They are the Freethinkers and Rebels of various types: many of them activated by erroneous Ideas: many coming to an untimely end; but they are the Spearhead in the Human Advance to greater Freedom and fuller Life—Individual and Social.

The many Varieties of Freethinkers and Rebels may be better understood by examining Concrete Individual Specimens out of the Past and Present. This I shall try to do; but, before closing, I would urge all to re-read carefully the second last paragraph in our friend Corina's Article "God, Cod, and Education" (October 28, 1945). For more than many a year Philosophy has not been a search for "Truth" in a Scientific Sense, but a means by which Corporate "Interests"—Ideologic and Economic—can be defended in Power or advanced to Power. This applies to Aquinas and Calvin, to Principal Caird of Glasgow and Dr. Temple, late Archbishop of Canterbury, to the Plato cum Christism which has blighted the "Minds" of English-speaking People and the Hegel cum Christism which has been as bad a blight upon German-speaking; but it applies also to almost all the "New" (!) Philosophies. Two recent "Pelicans" of different types, while above the average, are both biased in this way. Godism in all its Forms and "Parsons" of every Variety are, now, merely Phenomena—Pathological Phenomena at that—in Evolutionary Sociology, on just the same lines as Cartels, Combines, and other Vested Interests—National and International—which constitute the Minorities of Privilege and Power over that Great Majority—the Common People of the World. It is in that Field that the New Generation of Freethinkers has to continue the struggle, so well won by Chapman Cohen for the Old.

ATHOSO ZENOO.

FRUITS OF FANTASY

EVERY Saturday the "Manchester Evening News" prints a religious article above the initials "A.D.B.," and under the general heading of "Thoughts for the Times." As a rule, the "Thoughts" are not very brilliant, and they are generally totally unsuitable "for the Times," but I intend to briefly examine a recent contribution entitled "Harvest of Souls" (September 22, 1945), being, as it is, rather typical of a certain type of Christian propaganda.

"A.D.B." starts with reference to the celebration in the churches of "the harvest of earthly fruits," and asks "What are they for?", continuing: "To reply, 'They are for the body,' with no vision beyond man's physical sustenance is a shabby reply. It takes all the romance and meaning out of life, for the end of man's physical being is all too apparent—it is the dust of death."

Now, nothing could be more obvious than the fact that earthly fruits are for earthly sustenance. When prayers are offered to a deity for the success of a harvest, they are expected to be answered in a material way in a material life—this life. And when the first fruits are placed in the church they are a thanks-offering for material benefits received. Among some savage

tribes the god is actually invited to partake of the food,* in this country that is no longer expected, but the interest in the god—as far as the harvest is concerned—is inevitably bound up with the crop as earthly food. "A.D.B." may think this a "shabby" answer, but that cannot be helped; it is the plain and simple explanation of the festival. *He* suggests that the "harvest of fruits is for a harvest of souls" which is singularly unenlightening to me, and it leads him to the question of "What is the soul?", but more of this later.

Returning to the above-quoted passage, I have to point out to "A.D.B."—and to any other Christian who doesn't know it—that recognition of the material facts of existence does not mean that one has "no vision beyond man's physical sustenance." The cultured secularist, atheist or materialist, is quite aware that there is such a thing as aesthetic enjoyment, and is desirous of encouraging the arts. Because I classify myself under one or all of these three heads, is not to imply that I cannot appreciate, say a symphony by Beethoven or a painting by Titian. I may not be able to appreciate them as much (or in the same way) as a musician or an artist respectively, but I do enjoy them. More, I am thrilled by them and the greatness of the men who produced them. This, as I have said before in these columns, is quite independent of belief in a god. To consider that Beethoven was divinely inspired in no way adds to his achievement or to our understanding of it. Nor does the belief that he may now be composing "spiritual" music in some higher realm, increase our appreciation of what was a human product (however above average) in a human society. Music may sound very ethereal but it is a product of man's technical prowess and, like everything else, an evolutionary growth.

This is, of course, no detraction, though I suspect "A.D.B." would regard it as such. He prefers to talk of souls and spirits, and he thinks that atheism makes a poor thing of life, turning "the universe into one vast dust-destroyer." Such a statement as the latter is simply absurd. Atheism results from—and leads to—a realistic attitude towards living. The atheist, considering that "death ends all," finds that an excellent reason for advocating the full enjoyment of this life. It is Christianity that has regarded this life as a "vale of tears" (and, indeed, done much to make it so) to be endured solely as a preparation for a life to come, where those who had suffered here would earn their reward. The atheist endeavours to eradicate or lessen suffering as far as it is possible to do so, and to generally make this world a finer place to live in.

"A.D.B.," however, writes: "Even preoccupation with social ideals only postpones the ultimate futility of it all. If man's body is not for his soul—if life does not stretch beyond our material condition—then, as Tennyson wrote:—

'Life is rotten at the core
And dust and ashes all that is.'

Here, of course, the important word is "ultimate." I am not concerned with ultimates, and that is probably the big difference between "A.D.B." and myself. I am, however, very interested in man's "material condition," and maintain that the improvement of living standards is by no means futile. Moreover, I deny the implication of Tennyson's lines. The innate corruptness of earthly existence is a Christian idea, and I suggest that it is not life, but Christianity that is "rotten at the core."

"A.D.B." proceeds to lose himself amid a mass of metaphysical jargon about the soul being "the character or form that spirit achieves in the course of living . . . It is mind, heart, and will each bound up in the other—a trinity of being one in three and three in one." He tells us that each of these three

* See "Primitive Culture" (Tylor) Vol. II., pp. 364/5 for examples.

"has its ideal. Truth for the mind, love for the heart, right for the will," and he childishly asks how your three-in-one soul is "flaring"; but where does it bring us? Simply nowhere. It doesn't help us in the least. On the contrary, we are left worse off than when we started.

I confess that my reaction to such writing as this is not complimentary to the author. Yet I am afraid that many readers of the "Manchester Evening News" might easily mistake unintelligibility for profundity. I will therefore make one or two critical comments.

In the first place, definitions are needed. I have quoted that of the soul, but what of spirit? "A.D.B." thinks "St. Paul's tripartite division of the human constitution into body, soul, and spirit is still sound," and he warns us not to confuse soul and spirit. Then he writes: "Spirit is the deep essence of man's being—its fundamental energy working out to both soul and body." Here again a trinity is introduced, and it is just about as clear as the holy one. I ask "A.D.B." how "soul" can be one of the three components of the human constitution and at the same time "the character or form that spirit" (another component) "achieves in the course of living." I ask him how he is aware of the existence of anything except through its "character or form," and, therefore, how he knows anything about "spirit" at all, if it only *displays* itself through "soul." Well might he warn us against confusing the two!

The whole matter is, of course, nonsensical. The sooner words like "soul" and "spirit" (in this sense) are dropped from usage, the better it will be, for they are meaningless at best and very often dangerous to clear thinking. They are survivals from the past which are hopelessly incongruous to-day.

"A.D.B." however, finds the mortality of man "such an impossible conclusion" that it "drives us to belief in the soul," and, having been driven to belief in it, he proposes that you "feed your soul on Christ, the living Truth and Love and Right." These, he says, "are all social virtues" which "lose their value when selfishly exercised in isolation," and he claims: "It is this fact that makes Christianity the social hope of the world, for it demands the most complete love our minds can conceive." One is tempted to add Q.E.D., for a theological problem has apparently been solved. Or perhaps—with James Thomson—it would be better to use the term "theo-illogical."

Not that our Christian friend has finished. He tells us that "God's harvest of souls . . . can be satisfied only by the salvation of the whole race," this requiring "universal forgiveness," etc., which is considerably more generous than the orthodox Christian teaching. Then we somehow find ourselves "inevitably" brought back to the "harvest of fruits"; we are told that "the divine goal is clear . . . God will have man as man at last," and the article ends with another quotation from Tennyson.

Thus, the journey is over. A tortuous journey into a religious-metaphysical morass, from which it is impossible to escape without floundering. And the value of the journey has been absolutely nil. We have seen nothing clearly because our eyes have been clogged, and I suggest that the first step towards common sense is to open them again and achieve clear sight. Then we may get somewhere: a journey really worth undertaking. A "real life" journey in a "real" world, with much to see and hear and much to do. Let us embark upon this journey now, and when it nears its close, as all journeys must, each of us may be able to say with Walter Savage Landor:—

"I warmed both hands before the fire of Life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

If this proves to be the case, life will have been full of "romance and meaning." Far fuller than it can ever be when dominated by an antiquated creed!

C. McCALL.

ACID DROPS

Says the Bishop of Woolwich: "All educationalists are agreed that the tone of a school mainly depends upon the head teacher and the staff." We agree with this, but what does the Bishop mean by it? That the head teacher must be one who is "sincerely convinced of the importance of open worship and religious instruction?" But that means not instruction in religion, but instruction in the importance of believing one or more forms of religious practice. Of the history of religion as a whole the pupils will learn nothing. They are to be taught to believe in Christianity much as a dog is taught to carry a newspaper to its master. It learns to carry the paper but knows nothing whatever about the news the paper contains. Actually, the Bishop—with others—is training children on the same lines that one trains a performing puppy. It is a pretty picture, the teacher must have the least possible sense of the need of education, but must have a strong conviction that the pupil must be trained to believe in a religion that it simply cannot understand.

It is very difficult to get professional Christians to tell the plain truth where the interests of the Churches are concerned. For example, the Archbishop of York thinks it may be necessary "for all marriages to be taken at a registry office and the Church to give its blessing only to those who accept its teaching or ask for its blessing." (The italics are ours.)

Of course, the reason for the Archbishop speaking as he does is, first, the desire to account for unfortunate marriages as due to slackness in religion, and second, to disguise the fact that even as Archbishop he has no more power to confirm a marriage than any Tom, Dick or Harry has. So far as legal marriages are concerned a minister of religion is a non-runner.

The Bishop of Chelmsford is very pessimistic as to the future of Christianity. Speaking at Exeter, he said:—

"The facts of the case are very grave and very serious. The rose-tinted view which assures us that all the people of this country are deeply religious at heart and seeking after God in new ways is absolutely all nonsense. I think we have lost God."

May be, but whose fault is it? Surely a father ought to have kept in touch with his children? If a woman took out her baby and the child wandered away and was seriously injured there would be general condemnation of the mother. God should have taken care to keep in touch with His children. If the Bishop is right God seems unworthy of having a family.

But suppose that instead of giving us "absolute nonsense"—to use his own terms—suppose there is no God to be lost; suppose it is just a mirage? After all, people have followed a mirage substantial distances before they discovered it was an illusion. It may be that people have followed something that does not exist and are relieved of a delusion.

So we suggest to the Bishop a very simple test. Are men who have given up the belief in this mirage any the worse for their having done so? Of course, the Bishop may reply that they do not appreciate the value of what they have lost. That reply leads us nowhere. Put it another way. Is there any action, good or bad, right or wrong, that men will not commit whether they believe in God or not? It is no answer to reply that they would miss God. That invites the retort that it is loss of business the Bishop is lamenting, not God. The trouble for the Churches to-day is that, first one must spend a lot of time finding God, then watch carefully lest you lose him, and that leaves the problem, "What in the name of all that is sensible are we to do with him?" We should love a sensible answer.

The atomic bomb is still quite properly filling the minds of many. The latest news is that it is agreed that America, Canada and England will share the secret. And that is a registration of idiocy. Quite capable men are on the trail, and it will not be

long before it is everybody's property. Russia certainly will not be long before she manufactures a bomb "on her own." There are no copyright features that will last very long with any one of the "great" powers, who are rapidly showing themselves as small ones. The peace of the world should be our aim, but there can be no certain peace while one or a group of nations can hold so terrifying an implement as atomic bombs. The only way to perpetual peace and justice is that all put it out of their power to annihilate another nation. That is the only road for a humane and perpetual peace.

Dr. Leslie F. Church, ex president of the Methodist Council, is shocked at the existence of what he calls "pagan children." One illustration he gives is that in a secondary school sixty out of seventy pupils could not repeat the Lord's Prayer. Well, we expect that if that test was applied to a mass of grown-ups one would get the same result. But having assumed that this is a terrible state of things, and the foolish ones having been duly horrified, what next? Why this alarm? Did Dr. Church find that the sixty boys who could not repeat the Lord's Prayer were less intelligent and less well behaved than those who could? If not where is the point?

One does not have to search far to find the reason for this professional horror; for immediately the preacher turns to the question of juvenile delinquency, but without saying it in so many words, the listener or the reader gets the foolish conclusion that this exaggerated juvenile wickedness is a consequence of short-rated religious teaching. That kind of thing is worse than a lie, it is a foolish lie. The alleged young criminals have been brought up amid a population that is largely professional believers in Christianity, and we are to believe that the moment the religious pressure is lessened the result is criminality. Dr. Church is more than in error, he is just foolish—that is, religiously foolish, which is the most foolish form of foolishness with which we are familiar.

One can form some opinion of the degree to which Christianity is crumbling from the fact that within the last eighteen months, according to the "Glasgow Herald" there has been formed an association of ministers of religion—belonging to all kinds of Churches and chapels—with the aim of stopping the religious rot that has set in. With these Churches it is evidently a case of hanging together in order to avoid being hung separately. On the other hand, such combinations must suggest to the more intelligent Christians that the situation is getting very bad—religiously bad—when the differences that separated these bodies are now being sunk owing to the growing strength of the common enemy.

But it will be useless in the long run. The main cause of the churches emptying is not discontent with this or that preacher, or a difference with this or that teaching. If either of these causes were adequate there would be nothing more serious than a difference of religious ideas. But the movement against all the Churches marks something that goes much deeper than church quarrels. The religious landslide of to-day has its cause in the fact that the Christian religion has been found out. The trouble began when a real understanding of religion set in. And there is nothing on earth—we need not bother ourselves in the slightest degree as to what may occur in Heaven—that can undo what is known of the origins of religious belief.

The religious directors of the B.B.C. are to try "a new technique" in religious broadcasting. They seem to have found out that simple Bible teaching, with simple hymns, and the gratuitously simple sermons, have not had the success expected, and so they are going to substitute "dramatic interludes," "simple meditation," and "appropriate prayers"—the basis of all this is to be the lives of six famous missionaries. A Jesuit will deal with St. Francis Xavier, for example, and a Methodist with St. Boniface. We dislike prophesying but we feel we ought to predict exactly the same success with the new methods as with the old. Those who already believe will always listen, while

those who do not believe will always listen to something else, or turn the set off.

After the headlined news in almost all our big daily newspapers that the truth of the Crucifixion had been finally proved by the discovery of some inscriptions in a tomb in Palestine, the "Universe," with that sturdy scepticism which distinguishes our Catholic journals, quotes the Vatican Fr. Bea, S.J., as saying there is no evidence whatever that the Crucifixion is referred to. This must be a blow not only to Christians and Jews, but also to "historicists," who have a yearning for an historic Christ.

One of our staunch Anglo-Catholics, Mr. C. B. Moss, has suggested as a means of awakening interest in Christianity, that the congregation should be permitted to criticise the sermon and to tender their criticism to the preacher. This would be quite a good move, provided that the criticism was made known to the congregation. But there are two objections. The first is that the parson would not stand for it. It would be running too much of a risk. We have always given our free criticism after a lecture. But a criticism after a sermon and a criticism after a lecture are very different things. Why, there is not a church in the country that would permit an avowed Atheist to tell a congregation, in a church, why he was not a believer in religion. A reply to such a demand would be that the Church was a place dedicated to God, and what would He think if He found bunches of His worshippers being encouraged to believe that there were grave doubts whether God existed. No, no! Mr. Moss evidently believes that a church is a place where people go to in order to discover what is true. But it is not. A church is a place where having established a lie, it shall never be exposed.

Who says the Bible is not for all things at all times? A correspondent in one of our religious papers has discovered even the atom bomb in it, certainly in the "original" Greek. The reference is to 1 Corinthians xv. 51-52: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed: in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." The Greek for "in a moment" is "en atomo." If that does not prove that the Bible is inspired, and that Paul should now be considered the veritable discoverer of the atom bomb, we give up trying to convince any blatant sceptic.

It is a pity that Field Marshal Montgomery who has done such good work and won much fame with many honours should, perhaps unconsciously, impose his religious beliefs on the men under his command. In an Order of the Day he compels "all ranks" of the British Army of the Rhine to attend a church service once a month. We sincerely hope this does not mean that those who are registered as having no religion will be compelled to attend the service. Legally they should not be forced, and it will stand out curiously if their legal rights are not regarded. The right for all who are registered as without religion is without any qualifications. Those men in the Forces who have done their share in the war, and those non-religionists who have not registered should do so without delay. It may lead to inconveniences, but rights are neither won nor maintained without vigilance.

We believe that Field-Marshal Montgomery comes from a very religious family, and one can understand his interest in religion. In that respect the right to religion and the right to do without it are mutual. Moreover, the army of to-day is not the army of a century ago. Its soldiers have a much keener sense of their rights—civic and military. We are all indebted to the armies of to-day, and this indebtedness should cover the care to see that the civic rights of these men are protected. A failing of a good many parents is their inability to appreciate their "grown-ups." Wise parents note when their children are approaching maturity, and wise generals should also bear in mind the fact that we are living in 1945, and 1845 petered out a long while ago.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.

Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. J. CARTER.—We fully appreciate your high opinion of this journal, but we fear it is not possible to adopt your desire to see the "Views and Opinions" appear in yearly volume. Some of these articles have already appeared in the five volumes of "Essays in Freethinking" and more may appear when paper is more plentiful. We have also in mind the printing of many of the other articles that have appeared in these columns. They deserve a better fate than burial in a weekly paper.

B. T. TUFF.—Thanks for cuttings. They will be of use. We are indebted to all of our readers who keep us posted on local and other items of interest.

C. L. THOMSON.—You have quite mistaken our position. We have no desire to prevent Christian parents teaching their children to believe in Christianity or in any other religion. What we have said is that parents should not train their children to believe that certain doctrines *must* be accepted, and further, that the State should not use its schools to treat as beyond dispute religious ideas that are, at least, open to serious doubt, and which are rejected as false by men and women whose character and ability is beyond question.

For "The Freethinker."—R. Cronin, 41; J. Buchanan, 1s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

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

Lecture notices must reach 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

In his speech in Brussels Mr. Churchill is reported to have said: "I see no reason why there should not arise the United States of Europe." Good, but that was said by Thomas Paine just about one hundred and fifty years ago. He received for his pains lauders by the thousand. Paine drew that conclusion at the cost of his life. Mr. Churchill repeats it, not as the result of a scientific study of men and societies, but at a time when we have just fought a war of unequalled ferocity, and which has obviously threatened to destroy civilisation, and it is received as a discovery that cannot be praised too much. It is, of course, too much to expect Mr. Churchill to make mention of one of the greatest Englishmen in his day.

But even at that, Mr. Churchill's suggestion is late, if not too late, to be of use to-day. His social outlook was bad when the Russian Revolution put before us a great movement that meant a world movement for good or ill in its ramifications. He is again too late when he digs out Paine's "United Europe." The world has got beyond that. Distances are being annihilated, nationalities are knowingly entangled all over the civilised world. The peace of the world might have been once upon a time brought about by a United Europe. But that vision now is too shallow and too narrow. Before all there is looming a movement for an entirely united civilised world. Nothing shorter will meet the needs of to-day. Nothing else will put an end to the era of bloodshed.

Frankness is notorious for reactionary qualities where religion—and particularly Roman Catholicism—is concerned. A Bill to make divorce easier in certain cases was presented in the Canadian Parliament. It was talked out after much discussion about divorce being "a national curse," etc. Why a man or woman, or both, who have found out that their marriage is a

serious mistake shall not be granted a divorce is neither justice nor decency. In this matter the Roman Church is the greatest "sinner," although we believe that divorces are granted by the Church with comparative ease where the people concerned are wealthy or of good social standing. It must be borne in mind that no one is forced to ask for divorce, nor is any judge compelled to grant one when the grounds on which it is asked appear to be inadequate. Of course, no one is forced to follow the ruling of the Church, but, on the other hand, the Roman Church has methods of making men and women pay for their freedom.

An effort is being made to put Sheffield on the Freethought map by forming a branch of the National Secular Society in the area. Will all Freethinkers willing to help in the formation communicate with Mr. A. Samms, 18, Junction Road, Woodhouse, Sheffield.

We are pleased to note that Mr. F. H. Hornibrook is visiting Leicester to-day (November 25). His subject, "The Vatican in Politics," should prove stimulating and provocative and attract a good audience. The chair will be taken at 6.30 p.m. at 75, Humberstone Gate.

The Bishop of Columbia is bitterly opposed to conscription, and particularly the belief that army life is good for young men. But the statement that, "one week of army or navy life is enough to undo moral teaching and Christian idealism," is an example of the extravagant nonsense that so often accompanies religious pleading. We have enough background to be able to say with authority that it is not the worst men in the Army and Navy who lose their religion, but the best.

The lower and more careless type care little about religion, or anything else of a serious character. The letters that have reached us indicate the better characters. They show concern over things that never troubled them before. Some are just fogged concerning religion, others have taken the plunge or having recorded to the "what religion" question the plain "none"—the official description of an Atheist. For there have reached us a very large number of letters, with many from women. Quite a number write to say that their declaration was marked without any comment whatever.

On this question of the war and behaviour the Bishop of Columbia has grasped one feature of the war, but he spoils his case with the common feature of over-stating, and with an unpopular opinion greater damage is done than would be the case with a matter of small concern. The Bishop says that "one week of army or navy life is enough to undo much of the moral teaching and Christian idealism inculcated in youth by parents, teachers and pastors." That is not true. Evidently the Bishop has no appreciation of the tremendous power of restraint. Perhaps he thinks he will frighten people to support religion by this means. The odds are that his readers will just smile.

The fact of the matter is that the Bishop senses, but does not understand the truth that war-time ethics are of a lower order than conduct in normal social life. That does contain a truth. No body of men or women can go on year after year taking slaughter as normal. No man can go on week after week and year after year slaughtering armed enemies, and often robbing civilians, facing life as something to be destroyed as well as to be preserved, obeying blindly without consideration, without deteriorating. One of our experiences was the confession of a nurse to us that without any diminution of affection to an officer to whom she was engaged, and who had several periods at home, she could see some deterioration in character with every visit. She had not lost any affection for the man, but she was afraid of the war influence. It was probably this phase of war-time life that the Bishop noted, but lacked the balanced intelligence to express it. In this country we are just beginning to realise this. War is a phase that win or lose the price must be paid. Good or bad the cost must be paid. We must pay even for the Bishop of Columbia. Meanwhile we may have outgrown war—and the bishops. Meanwhile we must regard these things as the price we pay for progress.

EDUCATION AND THE CHURCHES

WE were just able in last week's issue to print a few lines concerning a meeting dealing with the Roman Church and the schools. The meeting crowded the Mechanics' Institute Hall to the doors, and the part played by the Bradford Branch N.S.S. deserves full recognition. Mr. Corina gave an excellent speech that was restrained, but the stronger for the restraint. In the end a resolution was carried deploring a further grant of money be made to the Roman Catholic Churches, and that in a place such as Bradford is worthy of special notice. There was a report in one of the local papers which will speak better than anything we could say:—

"A fierce conflict of partisan views soon developed in a public meeting which, held in the Mechanics' Institute, Bradford, last night was called as a protest against the recent decision of the Bradford City Council to make a 75 per cent. grant towards the cost of four Roman Catholic schools in the city.

"Convened by a group of ratepayers, the meeting was attended by more than 250 people, who ranged themselves into two 'camps,' Catholics and anti-Catholics. Throughout the meeting they kept up a barrage of invective against opposing speakers.

"At one point, when the uproar was holding up the meeting, the Chairman, Mr. Harold Day, a member of the Bradford Secular Society, warned the interrupters that he would send for a policeman to restore order.

"Speakers in the discussion included an Anglican minister, the Chairman of Bradford Education Committee (Alderman T. I. Clough) a Catholic headmaster, atheists, and a number of women.

"But most of the time their remarks were drowned in torrents of angry interjections and jeers.

"In opening the meeting, Mr. Day said it was not an attack upon religion, but a protest by ratepayers against the decision of the City Council to make a grant to the Catholic schools in excess of the 50 per cent. which was all the Education Act of 1944 stipulated. It was grossly unfair, in his view, that the non-Catholics in Bradford, representing 92 per cent. of the population, should have to pay for privileges for Catholics, the remaining eight per cent.

"Mr. F. J. Corina, a Bradford Freethinker, said he did not object to religious bodies providing instruction in their own schools, but he was opposed to their privileges being maintained at the expense of the ratepayers generally.

"The Education Bill of 1944, he declared, passed into law when the voice of democracy was silent in obedience to the request of Mr. Churchill, at the beginning of the war, that there should be no controversy to disunite the nation. This Act provided for a 50 per cent. grant to Catholic special agreement schools, but Bradford City Council—by a strange coincidence, just before the first municipal election for six years—turned bad into worse by increasing 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. (Shouts of 'Good' and 'Shame on them.')

"Mr. Corina continued: 'We will grant Catholics the right to keep their own schools if they will pay for them themselves.' This remark evoked an uproar, which was renewed when the Chairman remarked: 'We know what to expect from Catholics, ladies and gentlemen.'

"Catholics in the audience protested that Mr. Day was taking advantage of his position by abusing them.

"Mr. Corina asked the Catholics not to make an exhibition of themselves, as members of the Press were reporting the meeting.

"When the meeting became a little more orderly, Mr. Corina went on to challenge the City Council to prove that their grant was in keeping with any promise made to the Catholics in 1938. In any case, he said, the position had been changed since then by a new Education Act. If every religious minority in Bradford was to be given similar privileges, 65 different types of schools

would have to be built for the religious sects, and another one for the Freethinkers.

"Alderman T. I. Clough declared that the Council was honouring a pledge made in 1938 under the Education Act of that year. It was not a question of providing religious education for all the Catholics in the city. The cost of the scheme had risen from £68,000 to £320,000 since 1938 because of the increase in prices of materials, and additional responsibilities under the 1944 Education Act.

"A resolution was put to the meeting deploring the action of the City Council in undertaking the grant; condemning it as undemocratic because it conferred special privileges upon a minority which did not conform with the State-provided system of education; and calling upon the Council to rescind the resolution altogether, or amend the grant to 50 per cent.

"Amid cheers and jeers, and with a woman shrieking 'We thought Hitler was dead,' the resolution was carried by a large majority."

We print Mr. Corina's closing speech which deserves more than a summary:—

"For years now some of you have played the hypocrite because you feared the votes of Catholics. Well, Catholics have their votes, and very properly use them to serve their own ends. I do not blame them for that. But I do blame politicians, whether in local council or in Parliament, who use their positions to favour Catholic privileges while not believing in them. That is political opportunism carried to a disgraceful degree. And I warn them that whereas Catholics throughout the country have only five per cent. of the total vote, non-Catholics hold 95 per cent, and that if you are not prepared to give democratic justice, but go on taking money from the 95 per cent. to favour the peculiarities of the five per cent, then election shocks will take place on an even bigger scale than we have witnessed in the recent municipal elections, where, as you might have noticed, more than one candidate suffered because he displayed a greater preference for Rome than for reason."

THE METAPHYSICS OF PHYSICS

MOON'S cartoon in the "Sunday Dispatch" was quite good. "It's so simple, you jest git a atom, 'it it wiv a ray, and whoof, up she goes." It is humorous because it's absurdity is patent. It is explicit and concise. This "explanation" also has the virtue of not bemusing and confusing. After all, things are simple, when we know how.

Whatever our mystical scientists may be doing in their laboratories some are certainly hopelessly unscientific before a microphone or in print. It used to be said that the aim of science is to explain the unknown in terms of the known, but here we are given an "explanation" in terms of something which is simply unthinkable, something which, so far from being an observable fact, can only be considered as a hypothetical metaphysical entity. And further, the more we know about this thing the more it changes its form. The latest idea is that it is a nucleus surrounded by a ring of gases, and the great problem is to get through its almost impenetrable defences. Before that it was a proton surrounded by a number of electrons, like a miniature solar system. Then, the supreme mystery, the great question was, what makes the electrons jump? It seems they try to solve a practical problem by putting an intellectual poser. Before that the atom was an indivisible, unbreakable solid lump or particle. With the advent of new discoveries the atomic structure changes. The atom is like the Christian religion, it continues to exist in virtue of persistent modification.

In view of this remarkable transformation it might be of interest to roughly review the development of physical science to see how this came about. There should be no great difficulty

as it is almost entirely a matter of history and nothing in the way of speculation is needed, only a little re-interpretation in the light of more modern understanding.

The basic mathematical concepts are lost in antiquity but the very terminology still in use is a sufficient indication of the origin of the practice of calculation. We have records of primitive peoples counting on their fingers, which is indicated in the use of the term digits, and the counting of digits in tens appears to indicate the fingers on the two hands. The word calculus is Latin for pebble, which shows that men calculated by counting pebbles which was followed by counting strings of beads. The foot as a standard of length, or the hand in measuring the height of horses are indications of the first stage in the development. Different standards of mensuration are needed for calculating different types of experience, and we find weight calculated in stones or grains. The next stage was the combination of length and breadth together to calculate superficial area for land measurement, that is, geometry. The further extension of this gave us cubic capacity so that we have a method of measuring one, two and three dimensional space.

It might almost be said that the ancient Greeks had a geometrical obsession, and it was out of this mathematical development that the idea of necessity arose. Two stones cannot occupy the same space; there is one thing to the gods themselves denied, to make undone things done. The Greeks had a word for it. The word was Phusis, which may be interpreted as referring to the characteristic behaviour of things or the way things happen. Accuracy in observation was needed to account for what a thing is or what it does. Men juggled with words and they juggled with numbers and figures and in doing so devised a variety of methods of calculating. Interesting pieces of word juggling may be considered in Zeno's famous paradoxes: Achilles and the Tortoise, and the Flying Arrow; and Pythagoras' number juggling is also vitally interesting. Much of this was quaintly mystical and magical. Out of all this arose the idea of calculable necessity, which was most definitely expressed by the Sceptics, notably Democritus. Doubting all things as illusory, doubting even our own existence, suggested that we can only be sure of anything by devising our own standards and methods of calculation. If our modern physicists gave a little attention to the sceptic philosophy of Democritus they might have a better understanding of their own atom, for his atom was avowedly suggested as a standard of mensuration to avoid the ambiguity of any analogy, such as water, earth, air or fire, which had been suggested by previous philosophers as basic concepts.

The combination of trigonometrical methods of calculation together with weight, conceived as pressure, were developed by Archimedes, whose principles, notably those of the lever and the screw, gave us the basis on which the science of mechanics was built. Continued progress along these lines was helped by further progress in the realms of mathematics, such as arithmetic and algebra, as well as the use of the "Indian" numerals. But when we get to Galileo, great strides were made. A notable contribution had been made by Leonardo da Vinci, whose camera obscura reversed the ancient conception of vision. This, together with the development of the telescope formed the basis of the study of optics. But the greatest advance arose out of Galileo's experiments with falling bodies. Doubting the accuracy of Aristotle, putting the matter to the test, he formulated his laws of falling bodies. His method was adapted and further developed by Isaac Newton in formulating his universal law of gravitation by means of which he calculated the movement of bodies in three dimensional space. But we can now realise that Newton's "inference" of forces of attraction were derived from his method of calculation he used. With Einstein using different mathematical methods no such "forces" are inferable and we recognise Newton's "action at a distance" as being purely hypothetical.

This dynamic method of calculating movement was further adapted in chemistry as a "force" of cohesion which enabled the calculation of the difference between solids, liquids and gases, thus measuring degrees of fluidity, viscosity, elasticity, these forms of movement being conceived as the relationship of "particles." The application of the same principles to the problems of heat, accounted for the relationship between solids, liquids and gases, the expansion and contraction, permeability and mutability at different temperatures. In their understanding of these forms of movement, conceived as combinations of forces, men learned how to accelerate or retard and utilise them. Dalton's atomic theory was a further extension of this principle, the atomic "particles" being conceived as similar to the atoms of Democritus. This gave us a method of numerical classification of chemical elements and compounds and of understanding the conditions of various forms of chemical action. Thus new forms of movement such as solution, crystallisation and combustion were accounted for; the theory giving a quantitative relationship of chemical composition and combination, so that chemical change is accounted for as atomic movement. So successful was this theory that men mistook its success as proof of the existence of the atom. It was another case of "inference" being deduced from the "method," and we can see something of that Voltairian providence which made rivers flow near large towns.

Now Newton had conceived light as an instantaneous stream of particles. With his prism he was successful in dealing with such things as diffraction and refraction, but Rhomer's observations of Jupiter's satellites indicated the time factor in the transmission of light. This, together with the study of magnetism by such men as Gilbert, the experiments with electricity by Franklin as well as the problems of the transmission of sound and the radiation of heat, necessitated new standards of mensuration and new methods of computation. In these connections men supposed an imponderable medium, an elastic solid or ether. Highlights in the development of the ether hypothesis were the Fitzgerald contraction, the experiments of Mickleson and Morley and the conclusions of Lorentz. Meanwhile the mathematical research of such men as Gauss and Hamilton was making as much headway as—indeed the work of Lobatchewsky and Riemann might be considered more revolutionary than—that in the realm of practical experiment. It was no accident that mathematicians were to the fore in the search for the solution of these problems.

In studying the results of Michael Faraday's experiments, Clark Maxwell developed his famous undulatory theory, by means of which we combine magnetism, electricity, light, heat and sound. This theory forecasted the modern developments of radio transmission. So that the physicist has two theories, the corpuscular and the undulatory, and either may be used according to expediency. Attempts to square these two theories are shown in Planck's quantum and Heisenberg's indeterminacy.

It is argued that we cannot conceive movement, except in terms of something that moves. Quite so, but surely, in the name of all that is sensible, the theory is the method of calculation and the movement is what we are calculating. And now, after all this, in consideration of radio-active substances, to talk about atoms, electrons, alpha particles as physical entities is like confusing the dipstick with the tank capacity or the slipstick with the mathematical computations, for surely what Clark Maxwell said about ether applies also to the atoms. Instead of losing themselves in reverie behind the closed doors of the laboratory, our mystical scientists should come back to earth and realise that we are dealing with another of the facts of experience; that we are dealing with yet another type of movement. Instead of talking about nuclei and neutrons and of splitting the atom, we might realise that what we are doing is finding ways of accelerating and controlling the radiation of substances such as radium and uranium.

But the best part of all this mysticism is the idea of controlling and keeping it secret. Such an idea would occur to esoteric mystics. But if there is any significance at all in this knowledge there is no more chance of controlling it than there was of Hitler controlling radio. History has proved conclusively that knowledge cannot be suppressed. It is only a matter of time for this knowledge to become common property. What is wanted is not more esotericism, not mysticism, but more common sense.

H. H. PREECE.

NOTE.—Slipstick: American term for the slide rule.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALEX COMFORT

IN recent years there has been a general complaint on the part of the more thoughtful type of reader (sometimes contemptuously called the "highbrow") that first-rate novels have ceased to be produced in this country. When we glance back at even ten years ago there seems to be some justice in this claim. Then T. F. Powys was still producing those weird masterpieces of his, L. A. G. Strong was at his best, H. E. Bates was a portent of what he might have achieved in his maturity, and there were other figures of almost equal interest. Powys has now ceased writing novels and gives us only an occasional short story; Strong has not come up to his early standards; and Bates, with the single exception of "Fair Stood the Wind for France," has done nothing in the last five or six years to compare with his previous productions.

There is admittedly the fact that the majority of the younger novelists have been too busy to write novels. They have for the most part been serving either in the Armed Forces or in war work of some kind or another. Some of them have been seduced into writing propaganda for the B.B.C. or one or other of the war-time ministries, and others appear to have stopped writing for no apparent reason. Such novels as have been published in recent years which have not been unashamedly commercial productions seem to suffer from a complete paucity of central ideas. Our novelists have, in other words, either degenerated into mere reporters or have written novels with mechanical plots and cardboard characters. Until the last few months, only Herbert Read (whose "The Green Child" has been recently reprinted) seemed to have shown any sign of maturity of mind—and he is not primarily a novelist in any case.

There has recently crept into the public consciousness, however, a young man who may well be destined to be the outstanding novelist of his generation. During the war he has been a medical student and is now a qualified medical practitioner. His verse has attracted some attention, although he seems far greater as a novelist than as a poet. His ideas are not popular, though they are well argued and logical. And in his latest novel he has taken a step forward which qualifies him, in the opinion of some critics, for inclusion among the leading novelists of any day.

Alex Comfort's "The Power House" (Routledge, 10s. 6d.), was greeted by the majority of the reviewers as yet another of those novels about occupied Europe. And so, on the surface it is. Even taken in this superficial way, it is no mean feat. It is a prodigious effort of the imagination to write a novel placed entirely in France, and describing all the terrors of 1940-44, as seen through French eyes. But there is far more in it than that. Comfort has used his Frenchmen—Fougneux the engineer, Valtin the Anarchist officer, Veltier the indecisive intellectual, Loubain the revolutionary, and all the rest—to argue out the great dilemma of our day. He has shown the absurd contradictions of the world in which we live, that world in which a club-foot or a hunch-back is an advantage, for it exempts its

possessor both from military service and from the endless arguments of the Conscientious Objectors' Tribunal.

Finally, Comfort has perfected the art of putting into an absorbing novel his own philosophy of life. He holds that any organised community which has been personified (especially an organised community at war) is a lunatic. One humours lunatics, he concludes, if they are armed; but one does not become a lunatic oneself in doing so. His own particular brand of revolutionary defeatism cannot be expected to appeal, at this stage in the world's history, to more than a minority of his fellow human beings. But the discovery of the atom bomb, coming after "The Power House" had been published, gives point to its message and shows that it is possible that Comfort's line of thought may well be that which holds out a hope for the world.

If this brief essay is mainly concerned with the ideas in the mind of Alex Comfort and less with the value of "The Power House" as a novel, that must be justified by the fact that few novelists in these days show evidence of having any ideas at all. But the book is valuable enough purely as a novel. It is written in a taut, nervous style which well suits its subject. It is more readable than the vast majority of novels on this ground alone. And future ages of our civilisation (if the atom bomb and its successors allow such ages) will doubtless read it as such. At the present moment it is bound to be taken by the more perspicuous of readers as a tract for the times. And an excellent tract it is.

S. H.

TOLERATION AND THE ORIENT

IN the issue of the "Church Times" of August 10, 1945, under the heading "Summary," a commentator makes the suggestion that intolerance and persecution are particularly oriental failings, and that on the contrary the Christians have been generally free from these vices. While rejoicing over the reconstruction of the Rangoon Cathedral after its desecration by the Japanese, the writer goes on to say "the deliberate desecration of places of worship, even of other religions is not a normal Western, i.e., Christian practice, however much the old and recent history of Asia and Nazi Germany may be filled with hateful examples of it."

We are not prepared to condone the acts of vandalism and desecration perpetrated by the Japanese during their occupation of Burma. Their brutality and inhumanity certainly were their worst crimes. Whatever it is, to imply that the Oriental only has been guilty of desecration, intolerance and persecution is to say the least, belying history itself.

As a matter of fact religious intolerance was a thing unknown in the Orient until the advent of the Muslims and the Christians with their jealous gods! There has always been a medley of religions in the East; Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism and Taoism, to mention only a few. The adherents of these religions lived side by side and there was never the occurrence of the followers of one religion attempting to gain ascendancy over the followers of another religion by persecution or by force of arms. On the contrary there have been instances when extreme materialists like the Charvakas were allowed to expound their atheistic doctrines from the Hindu Temples at Benares and elsewhere.

In Ceylon not only were the Portuguese Christian Missionaries welcomed by the native population, but they were also given gifts of lands by the kings within the capital itself to put up churches. A Christian historian says: "In 1544 the Fathers Pascal and Goncal made their way to Senkadagala itself, and three years later erected the 'Church of Our Lady of the Conception' on a piece of land which was presented to them by King Wikrema Bahu; for tolerance towards every religion which

aimed at the spiritual improvement of mankind still characterised the Buddhist spirit, before the aggression of those whom it had protected and assisted had soured that disposition and compelled it to adopt arms of defence" (Portuguese Era by Paul E. Peries). Nevertheless, as soon as the Portuguese assumed sufficient power the Buddhist temples were desecrated, the Monks were persecuted and the people were forcibly converted to the Roman Catholic faith.

We have the same story repeated in India, China and even in Japan. The Missionaries are at first welcomed by the native rulers, but as soon as they gain a number of zealous adherents they encourage these neophytes to commit all kinds of excesses against the "idolators." Naturally the Missionaries are conscious of the backing they will get from the powerful Christian nations in Europe if the native rulers become too troublesome.

The Orient has its many shortcomings; but religious intolerance and persecution have never been its endemic vices. No country in the Orient has had the parallel to a Spanish Inquisition or a St. Bartholemew's massacre. Neither are there any hateful records of desecration in the oriental history. Charles V. who, in 1527, sacked the Vatican and converted St. Peter's Church at Rome into a stable was a European and a Christian to boot. So were Cortez and Pizarro who desecrated the temples of Incas and Aztecs of Peru and Mexico, and destroyed a whole civilisation. It is a good thing if the Christians follow that maxim: "Those who live in glass houses must not throw stones at others."

GUNASEELA VITANAGE.

CORRESPONDENCE

ME AND THE B.B.C.

Sir,—Those glamour lads and lasses up at the B.B.C. have really played a nasty shabby trick on me. They have that! It was so unkind of them, I must say, and after all, I only did just what they asked me to do, which makes it all the more annoying to anyone gifted such as me with an impish and peculiar flair for sending them "just what their doctor ordered."

Nor was I insulting them in any shape or form. Oh, dear! I wouldn't do that indeed! That would be quite impossible, as for one thing they are scarcely human, and possess a collective thick skin which is as near the thickness of armour plate despite its utter transparency and lack of brittleness, which surrounds them in large expanses of plate glass.

The self appointed apostle of the "Transatlantic Quizz" addressed me, one Sunday night a week or so back and invited me (in somewhat jocular and fatuous turn of speech, which I deplore!) to address any question to them relevant to their particular domain. After recalling the scope and limited extent of the series of cross-fire questions which I had been listening to, I did not forget to take note that the topics touched on were rather vapid, shallow, and of no particular interest either to us or our friends "across the pond," as none touched upon religion, politics or social reform, but this did not surprise me in the least, as I know those B.B.C. birds by now and realise how hard to hit they are, in flight.

So without any cogitation I decided to try an experiment—quite a simple one—but I fear I foresaw that it would be doomed to failure, as one needs to employ an arrow in these ventures, which must possess the attributes of an atomic bomb) "just for fun an' all that."

I asked my American clientele to name the townsmen and name the man whom they voted to represent them at Westminster, not once, but on three successive occasions, when this particular man was refused recognition by our one and only collection of "legal luminaries" in the House of Commons.

I listened in vain last Sunday to the Quizz half-hour, but not one word about Bradlaugh was uttered. My experiment had failed. The B.B.C. sentries and minions of the lord of the mike, exercising their pious soul-uplifting regimen, rang down the

curtain against any performance which would permit the mere mention of our well loved social reformer.

Well, sez I, it's a trick two can play.

As I can't force 'em to accept my questions, they cannot force me to listen to their insane blather at 7-55 a.m. or participate in their mouldy religious revivals, epilogues (plague tak' 'em) and hymn slingin' sessions. I shall "go abroad" instead, and catch a little of the Oirish brogue, and a snatch of the fascinating Spanish castanets—for spite.—Yours, etc.,

ED. H. SIMPSON.

THOMAS PAINE.

Sir,—Some time ago I passed on "The Pioneer of Two Worlds—Thomas Paine" to a friend of mine, a professor of history at the Bingley Grammar School. I enclose his comment which may be of some interest to you.

I may add that some time ago I asked him how many boys at the school (average ages, 14, 15, 16 years) had ever heard the name of Thomas Paine. He was good enough to ascertain. There are about 400 pupils and one boy only had heard about him. This from his father. I am of opinion that this school will be no exception—if indeed not better than most!

I am glad to say that my friend has recently given to the boys a talk on Voltaire in which he quoted and emphasised Voltaire's saying: "I may disagree with what you say, but I will fight to the death for your right to say it." I said, "Yes, and he did, too!"

I said to him, "Of course, if and when a Christian ever quotes Voltaire it is invariably his saying that 'If there were no God it would be necessary to invent him.'" Which of course is quite true—he is an invention.

"I hope this finds you well and hearty. I am glad to note the increased circulation of "The Freethinker." And now, by the way, I wonder if you can find time to do me a great favour. Some four or five weeks ago—I forget the exact date—you quoted at length an exceptionally fine article from a Canadian paper. Each paragraph ended on a kind of "key note," "They are afraid!" I wonder if you remember? I had two copies, but as is my custom, I passed them on, and they have been passed on again, but I would very much like to have one for myself. Can you scrape one up? I am very reluctant to trouble you as I know you are always full speed ahead, but had it not been for my unfortunate (!) habit of passing good things on I should not have had to trouble you. Thanking you in anticipation."

Yours in the Cause,

ARTHUR HANSON.

Vive Voltaire!

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square., W.C.1).—ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., Sunday 11 a.m.: "What Is Man?" Tuesday, 27th November, 7 p.m., Prof. M. POLANYI, F.R.S.: "Planning of Science."

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Belfast Branch N.S.S. (Old Museum Buildings, 7 College Square North).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m., EDWIN KIRBY: "Rackets" (Lawful and Unlawful).

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. DUDLEY RICHARDS: "The Old Testament."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK: "The Vatican in Politics."

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

A Pioneer of Two Worlds

THOMAS PAINE

By CHAPMAN COHEN

An Essay on Paine's Literary, Political and Religious Activities

Price 1s. 4d., post free

THE BIBLE

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

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

DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL? By Chapman Cohen. Price in cloth, 2s. 8d., post free; paper cover, 2s. 2d., post free.

HENRY HETHERINGTON, by A. G. Barker. A Pioneer in the Freethought and Working-class Struggle of a Hundred Years Ago. Price, 7d., post free.

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, by Lady (Robert) Simon. Price, post free, 2s. 8d.

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.

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, cloth 3s. 3d., post free.

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

THE MORAL LANDSLIDE. An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Modern Youth. By F. J. Corina. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

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

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

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.

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

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

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

THE RUINS, OR A SURVEY OF THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES, to which is added **THE LAW OF NATURE**. By C. F. Voiney. A Revision of the Translation of 1795, with an introduction. Price, post free, 3s. 2d.

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

THOMAS PAINE AND TETFORD. Six postcards illustrating Paine's birth-town, including a portrait of the great reformer. Price 9d., post free.

Pamphlets for the People

By CHAPMAN COHEN

What is the Use of Prayer? Duty 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
41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1