

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXV.—No. 51

Sunday, December 23, 1945

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and his Gods

IN some previous articles I have been arguing that legally England is not a Christian country. It is merely a country in which the larger number of people profess to believe in the Christian religion, but who, taken by and large, are common citizens, conducting themselves much as the rest of the population does. They are no worse and no better than others. No one could tell by their faces, or by their talk that they are members of a church, or just get along following the behaviour of millions of others. Certainly one cannot tell by the faces of men and women whether they are inclined to religion or against it. If a man is looking for a job—in peace times—the fact that he attends this or that church does not abolish the need for the production of a "character." Prison statistics prove that a very large proportion of inmates have themselves registered as belonging to this or that religion. Governors are not surprised at that, neither are preachers of the gospel of "Christ and him Crucified." Finally, if a man is brought before a judge, the court is not at all concerned with one or the other. He judges a man by his experience of human nature.

It is a curious situation, bearing in mind how often one hears the assurance that a man must believe in some kind of a god. There is a curious kind of generosity in this. Your god may be black or white, good or bad, vindictive or generous, anything will do so long as one looks very solemn and falls into line with godites in general. Yet, as among "civilised" people, the belief is general that there is only one God; those who worship the wrong kind of God will be in a nice pickle when the reckoning day comes.

There are some people whose liberality of disposition leads them to believe that if one is honest, upright and kindly to one's fellows, he will be all right when the end comes. God, the real God, will judge him by the kind of life he has led.

God will prefer the honest, kindly and upright Atheist to the narrow-brained, whimpering, dishonest worshipper.

That is also interesting, but really counts God as of no great consequence. His function becomes that of a recorder. The good Atheist will be all right, and the man who repents at the last moment, and who depends upon the validity of the New Testament story of the thieves on the Cross, will go direct to Hell. Salvation by repentance will be simply wiped out. The good Atheist is better than the bad Christian. The good Christian will be welcomed in Heaven because he is a good man. So far as salvation by faith is concerned that is wiped out altogether. The business of the recording angels will be to decide what kind of life the new arrival in Heaven has led. If that were true we should look for all the great Freethinkers in Heaven. The faith-choked Christian will have a front seat in Hell.

But there is another apology for the faith that has failed. This is that Christianity has never failed because it has

never been tried. Well, I suppose we admit that, if proven it would wipe out any and every indictment against Christianity; and if Christianity has never been tried it will be relieved from any indictment for evil. But on the other hand, it can never be credited with anything good. It is true that we have a number of institutions called Christian, and enormous bodies of men and women who called themselves Christians, but if we are to accept the apology that Christianity has never been tried, these stand either as mistaken, at their best, and as gangs of impostors at their worst.

The position here is that essential Christianity has never been practised in full by any human being, or by any body of men or women. So far as the old Bible is concerned most of our accepted Christian scholars have settled down to the acceptance of it as not being an historical record, but in the main a mine where the anthropologist may dig with profit, but which is of little value to the historian save to chronicle the character of primitive superstitions. As for the New Testament, that has never been followed by the mass of people and never will be. Individuals may do a lot that can never be done by people in the mass. In spite of the plain command of Jesus to take no thought for the morrow, people do, individually and in mass, plan for what may come or is likely to come. Even the Churches lay their theological plans and look ahead for their realisation. Society has never turned one cheek when the other was smitten, and the Church has praised those who have given tit-for-tat. Neither have we the slightest working belief that poverty is a blessing or that riches are in themselves a curse.

One explanation given for the Christian divorce between theory and practice is that the primitive Christian doctrine has been corrupted. That is true but the corruption was essential if Christianity was to continue. So we find that the plain teaching "Resist not evil" is corrupted into "Do not encourage the spirit of revenge." "Give to him that asketh" becomes "If he is worthy of the gift." "Take no thought for the morrow" is turned into "Be not over anxious." All this was essential if something called Christianity was to exist. Christianity in practice is and always was a fluid thing, changing its teachings in obedience to external pressure. To-day about the only tie between historic Christianity and current Christians is the name. The rest is ignorance and humbug.

The fact is that religion of any quality, from the primitive Australian to the "advanced" Christian is only intellectually bearable when it falls into line with the current general view of the world and man. There is still in existence a few tribes who believe that every baby born is an incarnation of a spirit. To them the New Testament story of the birth of Jesus the God presents nothing fresh. The difficulty with these people is to persuade them that a child born is an example of what takes place throughout

the animal world. Miracles offer no surprise to primitive peoples; they are so common that with many it is difficult to get them to understand that they are *not* occurring day by day. Jesus could restore a man's sight by a process that may be unpolitely described as spitting in his eye. In a flat earth the devil could take Jesus to the top of a hill and show him all the nations of the earth. To-day, in a round earth, the director of religion for the B.B.C. informs an inquirer that Jesus suffered from delusions.

But the world they saw around them as late as the fifteenth century miracles and wonders, has now almost entirely disappeared. I say *almost* disappeared, but the Roman Catholic Church can still make capital over a scene in which the Virgin appears in the air with the Sun rushing from its position and dancing round a crowd of devotees. But for the thoughtful man—I do not say the *educated* man for experience shows that to multitudes education may lead backward as well as forward—will consider and appreciate the fact that we recognise the growth of knowledge has given us a world in which miracles are out of place and gods are losing their footholds. Virtually, we are living in a new world, miracles do not occur and the gods fade into nothingness.

As I have suggested a real religion is only appreciated so long as it is in tune with our knowledge of the world in which we are living. Beyond that, falsities set in, and the greater the scientific knowledge at our disposal the greater the display of self-deceit and deliberate lying. On the intellectual side a religion is no more than a theory of the world and of man. So long as we think of the world as filled with supernatural powers religion—real religion—may be expressed with honesty. Early Christianity supplies us with ample proof of what we have said.

But the world that men believed in, even so late as the fifteenth century, has now entirely disappeared. The voyages of travellers increased its size and modified its shape. The calculations of astronomers and mathematicians changed its position in the solar system, and reduced it from a primary to a subordinate position. Geologists gave it a new history. Chemists and physicists explained its nature. Botanists gave an account of its flora that accorded but ill with the "inspired" version. Biologists attacked the problem of animal life, and revolutionised men's minds in that direction. Lastly, man himself was placed under the scientific microscope; his pseudo-divinity was destroyed; he was affiliated to the animal world, just as all life was shown to be organically connected with all other terrestrial phenomena back to the point when we lose the earth in the primitive fire-mists. And in this science could allow no breaks, no gaps, no room for the miraculous or the supernatural. The old earth had indeed been rolled up and cast contemptuously on one side. A new heaven and a new earth had been given us, and it was one that was in hopelessly irreconcilable conflict with the religion that had for centuries governed the mind of man.

The reaction of these views on Christian beliefs has been profound, and all things considered, rapid. The general acceptance of scientific teaching, the common habit we have of looking to scientific men for information concerning man and the world, blinds us to the fact that science, in a popular and general sense, is little more than a century old. Within that brief period, religion has not only been

forced back from fields wherein it once stood a law-giver, it has been forced to acquiesce in its own humiliation. And in the light of this remodelled universe historic Christian beliefs became so inherently ridiculous that one after another they have been either modified or discarded altogether. Our ancestors could see the workings of God in the world, because their minds were destitute of any other cosmic conception that could challenge its supremacy. But is it possible for us to see it? At once our minds turn to those theories of mechanical causation, of force, of matter, with which science has made us familiar, and we find we have no room for the more primitive conception of things. Christians themselves, filled apparently with the desire to commit suicide to save themselves from slaughter, point out that nature expresses invariable laws, and that no alteration in natural order is discoverable or thinkable. As a saving clause, they add that there is a God at the back of the whole process. But neither God the creator nor God the substance of natural processes gave rise to religious worship. People worshipped God as the constant manipulator of natural forces in the interests of mankind. A God who merely created the world and who sits up aloft seeing it go, can no more be an object of worship than a parliament that was twelve months in recess each year could arouse enthusiasm at the polls.

A thorough-going belief in a religiously workable deity is rapidly becoming impossible to the modern mind. A mere abstraction such as deity has become with advanced theologians may live for a while in virtue of the existence of traditional feelings to which it appeals, but its final disappearance is a mere question of time. So, too, the same may be said of all superficially Christian doctrines. The mental atmosphere is no longer suitable to their continued existence. The truth of this is seen in the fact that in every direction the *religious* interpretation of these doctrines is placed to social or ethical ones. To not a few Christian preachers, Christian doctrines are avowedly acceptable only so far as they can be made to square with some special sociological theory. It is no longer theology that gives life to life; life is now laying down the conditions under which theology may be permitted to live.

We are not, then, Christians in the sense that we practise Christian teachings. We are Christian in name; perhaps, too, we are Christian in temper. The modifications in our mental outlook are too recent to have yet permanently affected our emotional nature, and we are liable to carry into life a temper that worked only too actively under the impulse of Christian belief. But for straightforward intellectual conviction, for a confession of belief in Christian doctrines without reservation or modification, one looks in vain. As a profession of belief, Christianity is still with us; expressed in powerful organisations it is still active; and it will continue in both forms just as long as the indolence of one class combines with interest of another for its perpetuation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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

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

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

"PALPABLE NONSENSE"

ONCE again the B.B.C. Brains Trust has distinguished itself by its capacity for taking a simple question relating to the mind, and staging a show of pseudo-intellect in which the bored listeners would no doubt be divided into two classes as the radio circus proceeded.

One of the classes (perhaps the largest) would consist of those people who dutifully consider the Brains Trust clever if things are being said that they (the listeners) do not understand. The other class would consist of those who are wise enough to know that when public performers cannot be understood by the public it is probably the performers who don't understand what it is they are talking about.

The question was quite simple. "Is there any limit to the power of comprehension by the human mind?" The answer is perfectly simple—at least, to those people who do not regard simplicity as a crime, and who do not endeavour to cast an aspect of mystery over simple things in order to preserve their own aspect of profundity. But not so simple for certain members of the Brains Trust! Oh, dear, no!

The Brains Trust has a strong flavour of the pulpit about it. The pulpit of modern mystics, who prate and prattle profound piffle in keeping with the best traditions of religion when matters of the mind are being considered. For is it not only in matters of the mind that the human mystical and magical element may now be preserved, and are not our radio-priests the modern counterparts of the dope-dishers of the churches of a past age? Physical magic has virtually disappeared in "this age of materialism." The mysteries of birth and growth, the awesomeness of misunderstood natural phenomena, and the elements, the dread of the biological differences between men and women, and man and the other animals, the magic of the starry heavens, and even the terrors of the microscopically minute—all these phases of magic have gone, generally speaking, in the civilised world. And god has gone with them, pushed outward to the point of absurdity in the astronomical sphere, and inward to the point of stupidity in the microscopic sphere. Materialism has knocked god clean out of the picture in the physical aspects of human activity.

But not so in the mental sphere. It is often said (with truth, I think) that man's physical development has outstripped his mental development. Undoubtedly this is due to failure to recognise the materialistic nature of mental processes, while duly acknowledging the fact in physical processes. Perhaps it paid those who dominated human society to have things thus, for the dual conception has enabled the richer fruits of the materialistic method to be produced for the enjoyment of the few, while the many who made it possible were denied those fruits, because their physical skill was not accompanied by the mental gumption to understand the processes they were using.

Be that as it may, however, the fact remains that god is with us yet—in the mental sphere—and that the philosophical fatuities of our Joads and others, who cast an aura of mystery over quite simple questions, tend to preserve him (or it) from the withering light of understanding. Even atomic fission, which vaporised god from his last stronghold in physics, has not been sufficient to set up, as yet, a continuity of materialistic thought designed to bring mind strictly in line with body, or to emphasise the two processes as factors in one functional unity.

Perhaps Freethinkers may think I am minimising the position we have actually reached, but I would ask them seriously to consider the position.

When a man of the undoubted capacity of Dr. Joad can talk over the air about "classes of experience outside of the human mind" does it not indicate either that he is fooling himself or trying to fool those who are listening? Either that he is a victim of the priests of mental mysticism, or that he has become one

of the priests himself? In the same session—indeed, on the same subject—Dr. Joad talked about "palpable nonsense." One is driven to the conclusion that he somehow senses the true nature of his own expressions when indulging in mental mysticism.

A good deal of palpable nonsense was talked on the question under review, but not by Materialists, who were sneered at in some of the comments, for they, and what they would have to say, are carefully excluded from the Nonsense Circus. More than ten minutes (it seemed like ten hours) of pitiable patter went into the bungling of a question that a Materialist could answer in ten seconds. "Is there any limit to the power of comprehension by the human mind?"

The power of the human mind to comprehend depends on the existence of things that can be comprehended, and the limit therefore is found at any given time in the total of comprehensible things. But limit is a relative term, not an absolute one, and if the number of comprehensible things increases or decreases, then so does the limit.

That is the answer—and it is to use Dr. Joad or anyone else dodging about the universe to try to show how limited man's comprehension may be against the enormous background of existence. Every single individual comprehends that which to him or her is comprehensible. For the rest, one can no more experience another person's comprehension than one can feel the pain of another's toothache.

The limit of comprehension is just what one can comprehend, then. But we must not make the mistake that the Brains Trust seemed to make, of assuming that comprehension necessarily implies accuracy. To comprehend means to take into one's grasp or understanding a sense of meaning, perhaps especially of ideas, which impinge upon the individual as "things" with just the same force as other things. The thing comprehended—from a dog to a god—is intricately bound up in the process of comprehension with the previous make-up of the person comprehending it. In other words, comprehension is simply yourself and something else acting together, and even a comprehension of god can therefore be no more than one's own way of looking at things.

On this materialist-mental basis, if only it were more generally "comprehended," even our Joadist Mystics would not get very far with their fooling, whether it is the public or merely themselves that they are fooling.

But the present phase of mental mysticism is the last ditch of the godists, and they are desperately striving to preserve themselves among the better educated (but not necessarily more intelligent) classes by such Joadist wisecracks as "classes of experience outside of the human mind." There is the ancient medicine man all over, dressed up in the modern garb of deceitful dialectics. If only you can kid educated people with such offals of the intelligence (tasty, as tripe usually is, but composed solely of wind and water) then it becomes easier to fool the masses who will, as a rule, more readily follow the lead of an educated fool than one who uses his education to make them think. And, unfortunately, educated fools are still in a majority in those positions from which the people as a whole are taught and governed.

Joad's statement is hardly worth a further thought, but for the fact that it will certainly impress some pseudo-thinker, who may come and pester me at one of my meetings with it. So let's deal with it now.

To put the cart before the horse is bad enough, because it is not the correct relationship; but to use words that cannot make sense is worse still, for it destroys their relationship by making nonsense. We know what is meant by "classes of experience," by "the human mind," and by "outside of," when these phrases are used in their correct relationships. But when they are strung together to make a sentence, "classes of experience outside the human mind," we are asked to swallow the impossible.

(Concluded on page 476.)

ACID DROPS

We do not know anything concerning the quality of the Rector of the High School of Glasgow, but we see from a Glasgow paper that he is, generally speaking, a capable man at his job. But the most capable of men—and women—will get into trouble when the attempt is made to rationalise an absurdity. Mr. Talman, the rector of the school named, has evidently noted that in spite of all he can do, his pupils after being taught religion drift away from the Churches. He thinks this results from there being a special teacher reserved for the religious lesson. Mr. Talman thinks that this cuts the religious lesson from the other lessons and so "makes the pupil antagonistic towards religion." He also says:—

"In my opinion nine-tenths of the people who call themselves Atheists or Freethinkers have been frustrated in their school lives by the failure to reconcile religion as it appears in the Bible with the scientific knowledge of the present."

The Rector has really stumbled on what is a significant fact, but his religion has prevented his seeing it. The fact that when the scholars leave school a great many of them drift away from religion is not because there is a special teacher. Special teachers for special subjects are quite common in all schools. Language, history, literature and other subjects all are given by different teachers, and if all subjects do not dovetail they do not conflict. But the Christian religion does not fit into what the pupils have given to them as scientific, social or literary truths. Children with one mother and one father do not fit in with a child that has one earthly mother but no earthly father. The history teacher will, if he does his work properly, indicate the crass ignorance involved in evil spirits, in men rising from the dead, etc. Moreover, in other subjects the pupil is open to ask question after question until the teacher has driven home the lesson. Mix the religious lesson with other lessons and the consequence is unbelief in religion.

The shameful thing is that the lack of knowledge shown by young children is taken advantage of by teachers of religion who give to them teachings they would not dare to offer to youths. Even the B.B.C. which through its religious morning talks goes as far back in culture as it dares, when asked privately to explain how did Satan take Jesus to the top of a hill and show him all the nations of the globe, says that "The temptations of Christ were something that took place in his mind and in his imagination." In other words "Christ" was suffering from a well-known form of mental disorder. It should be said that this statement did not come "over the air." The medium was a letter, which lies before us as we write. There is no "frustration" needed to explain why so many pupils after leaving school turn their backs on Christianity. It is due to the fact that the discussion of whether the Christian religion is false or not is to-day a question not for intelligent discussion. The only question at issue is the origin of this particular group of superstitious beliefs.

The "Church Times," in their notice of the late Lord Lang, said that "the coronation of King George VI was probably the most moving religious act ever broadcast." Well, we doubt if a ceremony in which a king was made a god or a semi-god was ever before broadcast—though perhaps most of the listeners never knew what was really happening. But the "Church Times," as was only to be expected, is very proud that "what might have been only a splendid historical pageant" was turned by the Archbishop "into a tremendous act of Christian worship." That seems rather a good description of turning a king into a god. However, Lord Lang was "a really holy man," his life was "hid with Christ in God." These clichés fit so well, not only archbishops and parsons, but priests and Popes, that no obituary of any dignitary of the Church would be read without them.

In reply to a question in the House regarding the abolition of compulsory church parades in the Army, Mr. Jack Lawson, the Secretary for War, refused to alter the Law. It was a Law

and until that Law was abrogated church parades must stand. Mr. Lawson refused to discuss the matter further, and the claims of large numbers of men in the citizen Army were completely ignored. Yet a man is allowed to declare himself an Atheist and often has permission to absent himself from church parades. What a farce it all is! But the one point to note is that few, if any, parsons ever stand up for the rights of an unbeliever in the Army to be free in his unbelief. "Compel them to come in" is still the motto of the Church.

According to the "Daily Herald," six "sturdy" Canadian soldiers, armed with Bibles and tracts, attempted to join in the service the latest Christian sect, The Christian Reformers, were holding the other Sunday. It will be remembered that the C.R.s believe that Hitler is the Messiah sent specially by God to scourge us, and they have formed a Hitler cult to spread the good news, with a bust of their Fuehrer, no doubt, to worship. Unfortunately, the C.R.'s chief sentry, a Mr. Jones, refused to let the Canadians join in the worship, and so one of them started to expound the Scriptures thumping his Bible, and the others left their tracts—and Messiah Hitler possibly lost a few disciples. God knows we'd like to help both sides!

Christianity is "Brotherhood." But we must not be too rigid in our interpretation of the term, for brothers are often ill-friends with each other and hate each other with a bitterness that only develops with people who have lived together in close quarters. So we are not surprised to find that Mr. W. L. Sperry has just issued a book dealing with the number of different Christian sects in the U.S.A. and presents us with not less than 256. It will be said that the differences between these Christian bodies are not very great. We do not know, but it is evident that the differences are great enough to split Christians into different groups. The Roman Church is, of course, the largest and the most wealthy, and for that reason the most dangerous. The heads of that Church are always plotting for more power, and it has considerable wealth. It is interesting to note that there appears to be, for the moment, the greatest hope for a distinctive Christian culture amongst the Negroes. Probably this is because the white Christians to some considerable extent boycott the coloured ones.

Someone has said that the Roman Catholic Church never learns. People who say that make a very great mistake. There is no other body of men that are more definitely alive than are the heads of the Roman Church. In our early years, as an advocate for Secularism, we soon noted a very marked and dangerous difference between the Roman Catholic advocates and the Protestant ones. The latter seemed often to be selected because of how much they did *not* know concerning their opponents. The former knew pretty well all that they could say, and were prepared for some kind of retort. The mass of Roman Catholics may be less intellectual than the mass of Protestants, but those who are sent forth to uphold Christianity are fairly well prepared for the fray.

For the reason above stated we record the significance of Archbishop Downey's warning of the growing danger and strength of Secularism. "It has been a steady, gradual process extending over centuries." Having gone so far he proceeded to take almost every crime and inconvenience as due to Secularism. Which is merely nonsense—it is not dignified enough to be called a lie—but we would wager that the Archbishop knows it to be a lie. But there, it was not without justification that Home called the Archbishop's Church "the great lying Church." After all, it was the Church that was ready to treat Holland, England and other centres of Protestantism as Hitler treated the world—and for the satisfaction of the same desire—that of world domination. Perhaps it is worth-while reminding Archbishop Downey that the world war was organised and launched by Germany, and that Germany was one of the strong-holds of the Catholic Church. We are not foolish enough to say that the Roman Church launched the world war, but there is food for thought in the fact that it had its origin—as much as any war could have it—in Germany.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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SUGAR PLUMS

We are grateful and appreciative of those who send us from all parts—including overseas—items of news which they think will be of interest to us. Even when some items are not printed, they are yet useful. But for the information of British friends we beg them to remember that there is very little chance of any item getting to the "Freethinker" unless it is received the Monday before publication. To make it quite plain, an item intended for the seventh must reach us on the first.

The World Union of Freethinkers London Committee require part-time secretarial help for a conference on Humanism in the spring next year, typewriting essential. Reply to C. B. Bonner, 92, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

Mr. F. W. Skinnard was a school teacher before he became a Member of Parliament for Harrow East. We believe that he was a teacher of great ability. What he will become in the House of Commons it is difficult to say. He may quite easily make a name for himself, but the price is often heavy. It is not the rule—or even a common fact—that men of outstanding personality will rise to the top in an elected assembly. He may receive a post because he tells the truth, or because he refrains from doing so. At all events good teachers are scarce, while possible politicians are plentiful. Personally we believe, with a great Frenchman, that the character which is fitted for a teacher is not one that is fitted for a politician. For the essential quality of a politician is compromise—getting as near as one can towards what ought to be. That of the teacher is to stress what is right or wrong, just or unjust, irrespective of immediate possibilities.

In the course of a debate in the House one of the speakers said that the majority of teachers were anti-Christian. Now we know that there are a large number of teachers who are anti-Christian, but we should be surprised to learn that the majority deserved that compliment. Mr. Skinnard would be with us as regards numbers, but against us as to the quality of these Freethinkers. For he appears to have taken a compliment for an insult. And that will not do at all. Very indignantly he assured the House of Commons that the majority of teachers were Christians "in a very true sense," and that set us musing. What is the distinction between a Christian in a "true sense," and one who is a Christian in a false sense? Protestants would certainly wipe out all Roman Catholics as not being, in the "true sense," Christians. And Roman Catholics would retort in the same way to Protestants. It looks as though a "true Christian" is one with whom we agree, and a bad Christian is one with whom we disagree. In that case we divide on a vital matter and in a place where there should be as little

serious diversion as is possible. For the matter is not one of difference of opinion, which is healthy enough, it is a separation in school life on a matter which should never be brought up before children. It is a blow to unity, where unity is essential.

The curious thing about this is that Mr. Skinnard has a strong conviction that of all teachers the clergy are the worst. That of course we agree with. For the clergyman is not a teacher, and never will be. His function is that of being an instructor, and an instructor on the lowest level. He does not explain why things must be regarded as true, and he substitutes the instruction that religion—his religion—must not be regarded as being possibly untrue. Mr. Skinnard would agree with us on that point for he actually gave the following example from the visit of a parson to his school. He says: "Clergymen who came in for the examinations proved themselves rather poor at understanding the minds of the children. I have writhed time and time again as some clergymen or nonconformists asked boys of 13 to explain the chronology of the Pentateuch, to put in order the messianic prophecies of some obscure Old Testament prophet."

It is a pity that, knowing the value of preachers in the schools, Mr. Skinnard did not seize the opportunity of saying bluntly that the proper place at a school for a parson is outside. Mr. Skinnard did go far enough to say that he was suspicious of the motives of the clergy when they enter the schools. That is warranted, but to be just to the clergy they do not disguise their aims. In language that is as plain as it can be the leaders of the various Churches say plainly that their object is to see that children leave school, not with an understanding of religion, but with a misunderstanding that will be so deeply rooted the odds are that many will never understand the way in which they have been prevented from knowing the truth. Hitler gave the world nothing fresh in his methods by which he intended to train a generation that should be so saturated with "Hitlerism" that they would never free themselves from it. Minus the severe brutality, Hitlerism was adopted by the Christian Church centuries ago.

We think that the present Government has a number of officials that will class well enough with the pets of "public schools" and with university training. Of course, we have no ill-will against either universities or public schools, or if we have it is because the public schools are not public enough and the universities are not universal enough. Could we have our own way we would have universities open to everyone, male and female, and we would have every "public" school open to everyone, man or woman, rich or poor. We believe it would prove to be the greatest of our assets, and that for two reasons. We should eliminate most of the fools—one must allow for one here and there getting in—and would rope in men and women who would reflect credit upon those who trained them. For in spite of the very common belief that this or that man belongs to a good "stock," it is certainly not a stock that provides us with nothing but men of ability.

If we can trust the dictum of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cardiff our choice to-day lies between "Moscow, Wall Street or Rome." Well, there are agitations to control Wall Street; but the power of money developed in the shadow of religion, and the Church in the U.S.A. pocketed much from some of its devoted followers. Much of the strength of the Church in the U.S.A. came from the support of notable figures on Wall Street. As to Moscow, that at least is theoretically trying to develop a country where mere money will have lost its power, and there will be a more satisfactory distribution of national wealth. At least Russia claims to be aiming at a fair distribution of wealth. At least it places in theory the destiny of man in the hands of men. And Rome? What are we to say of the Papacy? Only that whenever the Church has enjoyed complete power the result has been so disastrous that sooner or later the civic power had to take steps to curtail the power of the Church. And in that fact lies its condemnation.

We note that Sir Philip Baker, first Church Estate Commissioner, told a Church Assembly that the Church had lost £150,000 a year in mining royalties. We do not know whether this covers smaller returns or refers to property sold. In either case one should keep an eye on the enormous properties belonging to the Church which continuously hints at its poverty.

SOCIAL DREAMLAND

IN one essay of the "Yogi and the Commissar," Arthur Koestler complains of the "Banality" and "Nostalgia" of authors painting beautiful pictures of cottages with roses round the door, and a girl with a handful of flowers. And in another essay he states that it is no use "Screaming atrocities to a healthy lack of imagination," which is like a smoke screen with which we endeavour to defend ourselves. In obscuring the tragedies, it enables us to retain our sanity, "Without it we should go mad." It is difficult to see whether he realises that the two essays refer to two aspects of the same thing.

There is no need to "Drag in a refugee with scars on his back" to spoil the picture. This picture of a cottage with roses round the door is itself a tragedy. Its beauty is conventional and traditional. We might enjoy a fortnight's holiday in such a place, because it would give relief from the monotonous routine of our daily life. It would be nice in the summer, but in winter we should realise the inconveniences of such an anachronism. As Mark Twain said about Venice, it looks beautiful by moonlight but very different when the sun comes out. An oriental bazaar is very picturesque, but if you get too close you smell the stench. Like the age of chivalry and the golden age, this traditional picture of an antiquated countryside does not bear close attention.

This obscuring, impenetrable smokescreen which sees only the banality, the roses round the door, and fails to penetrate into the gloomy anachronistic interior of the cottage is neither unimaginative or healthy. We delude ourselves by idealising the past and this psychological fact of self-delusion is as great a tragedy as the scars on the refugee's back, because it is unconscious. The scars heal, the refugee dies, but this is an example of the continued practice of myth-making. The individual smoke screen of excuses becomes crystallised in the social myth and mystery. This cottage with roses round the door is situated in the garden of Eden. It is not the dynamic expression of "Deep and unconscious cravings." It is a static expression of social inertia; it is the dead hand of the past strangling the desires of the present. It is a social and not an individual fact. To quote Chapman Cohen, man cannot live in a vacuum, and it is only in a social context that these things have a meaning. Personal dreams may be deep and unconscious cravings, but that is very different from these socialised dreams which are hallowed by convention and sanctified by tradition.

The idea that a thing of beauty is a joy forever is false. A world of conventional beauty would be as appalling as the Christian Land of Unfulfilled Desire, hence the persistent revolt in art. The study of aesthetics involves not only an appreciation of psychological misunderstanding, but also the cultural development. Our ideas change according to expediency; at one time the beauty of the countryside was of no consideration: when slums were sprawling all over Industrial areas. Next, the idea was to build Garden Cities, later it was thought that ribbon development spoiled the beauty of the countryside. Now we are coming to the opinion that slums piled one above the other may be quite beautiful. Beauty is only skin deep and civilisation a veneer. We see beauty in a country cottage but none in slums. We enjoy the tragedy in novels, on stage, screen and radio, but we have no stomach for the real tragedy of our own lives. It is said that we cannot think seriously while there are games like cricket and football, and that G. I. Joe's war aim was to get back to the ball game. We prefer the make-believe to the reality.

The complete and unadulterated lunacy of the ancient mysteries is plain. Bread and the Circus did not preserve the sanity of those who enjoyed the bloody spectacle. Nor was the *auto-da-fé* conspicuous for sanity. The Caestus has given place to the Padded Glove, but that does not alter the basic characteristic of the mystery. These mystical wish-dreams are forms of insanity.

As Schopenhauer said, insanity is a long dream, a dream is a short insanity. The function of the mystery is the production of specific psychological states which can only be understood in relation to the prevailing state of cultural development. The function of these mystical traditions is not to help the individual to retain his sanity, but to enable him to tolerate the intolerable. According to Freud the function of the dream is to ensure sleep, and the function of these social dreams is to let sleeping dogs lie.

To blind ourselves to facts, to ignore the obvious, to give a life of pretence, is no way to solve problems, social or personal. The need for emotional outlet is admitted, but emotional satisfaction gained in this way is entirely spurious; it leaves us exactly where we were, and to the precise extent that it perpetuates anachronisms and injustices it is socially harmful. This explains the cumulative sense of frustration which baffled Koestler, is thus seen to arise in the static character of this wish-fulfilment. With conditions becoming increasingly more desperate this results in social insomnia; mass hysteria, industrial unrest, political revolution, or war.

This fatal social somnambulism needs an antidote. To regard all this dialectically indicates either complete amnesia or periodic outbursts of mass hysteria. Those who dance the tune must pay the piper. The humour of the situation is rather sardonic, and it requires some courage to be the complete sceptic, pessimist and cynic; at the risk of being considered Philistine and kill-joy.

But must all this be regarded as a Divine Comedy? Surely not, for a recognition of the facts is a step on the way to common sense. Extremes are a useful guide and are worth considering, but the real need is a balanced judgment.

H. H. PREECE.

CHANGING TASTES

I RECENTLY had the somewhat chastening experience of re-reading a number of articles on literary topics which I had written for various journals (including this one) over a period of some years. I say that the experience was chastening because it brought home to me the fact that my literary style does not seem to have improved as much as I should have expected, and also because it showed me how my literary taste has altered.

When I was a schoolboy, about twenty years ago, my literary gods were Stevenson and H. G. Wells. The Wells of that date, of course, was not the depressed old gentleman of the present time; he was a buoyant optimist, full of excitement at the hopes for the future which science held out. And I, interested in the chemistry and physics lessons at school more than any other, thought that here was a prophet fit for any followers. Just at what stage I lost my belief in Wells as a prophet it is difficult to say. But now I think of him almost exclusively as the writer of "Kipps," "Mr. Polly," and all the other delightful serio-comedies of his middle life. In any other role it is difficult to take him quite seriously—except possibly in his denunciation of papal power, and even there I think the job he tries to do has been better done by Joseph McCabe, F. A. Ridley, and Edith Moore. As for Stevenson—well, as one gets older one loses one's taste for swashbuckling romance.

At a later stage I intensely admired Bernard Shaw. I still do for that matter, but in a somewhat different way which is not at all easy to define. And in the years immediately before the outbreak of war in 1939, my main admiration was given to the Powys brothers, H. E. Bates, and L. A. G. Strong. (Remember that I am dealing in the main with the imaginative writers; I have always admired people like Joseph McCabe, Chapman Cohen, J. B. S. Haldane, H. Levy, and suchlike writers, but my admiration is devoted more to what they have

to say than how they say it. In the present article I am dealing with writers who must, for want of a better term, be called artists (in words).

During the war years, however, I have found the emphasis shifting. And this is really the point of these random jottings on one man's literary taste. If I were asked to define the men whose writing gives me most satisfaction to-day, I should reply: Herbert Read, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, and Alex Comfort. "A queer quartette," you say? Well, maybe they are. Yet there is something in common between the four men, and it is something which I sense as badly wanting in the chaotic world which we inhabit. Partly this is a matter of social emphasis. All these men look upon the individual as important. They do not regard him as merely a cog, either in a State machine or a Church machine. They can see through the contortions of the world, no matter whether those contortions be excused as a matter of old school tie ethics, or as a "party line."

They regard the lunatic State which demands absolute obedience as something to be opposed for its own sake, and they have declared their opposition. Herbert Read possibly puts it as succinctly as it can well be put, in "Poetry and Anarchism," when he says: "There remains only the path I have chosen; to reduce beliefs to fundamentals, to shed everything temporal and opportunist, and then to stay where you are and suffer if you must." To my mind this links on to Alex Comfort's denunciation, in "The Power House," of all the tendencies of the absolutist State. It also corresponds to much that has been said by Arthur Koestler, in "The Yogi and the Commissar," and even, in a more savagely flippant mood, with George Orwell's still entertaining pre-war novel, "Coming Up For Air."

So you see that my quartette have a unity all their own—a unity of belief, even if this does not altogether involve a complete unity of style. And in the matter of style, I feel that the writers I have brought forward are well ahead of the vast majority of their generation.

In a recent article here ("Survival Value in Literature") published in the issue of October 28, 1945), I put forward a list of books which I thought would appeal to future generations. The perspicuous reader will no doubt have observed that those books do not altogether correspond with the list I have given here of my present-day literary gods. That is as it should be. I feel that the books of Orwell and Koestler are too much of their own time for one to be sure that they have any survival value. As to Alex Comfort—he is too young as yet for one to be able to say with any certainty just where his work is going to lead.

I wonder whether my literary taste will change in the years that remain to me, as it has changed in the past? Are there writers who are at present unknown to me but who will nevertheless be my favourites in the years ahead? I hope so. I am still on the right side of forty, and I hope it is as yet too early for ossification of the brain to set in. When one's mind is closed to new writing, one might as well be dead in the intellectual sense. Koestler and Comfort were unknown to me six months ago; other writers are unknown to me to-day. So I trust that my readers will bear in mind that this article can be nothing but what I understand from my friends in the Civil Service is known as a progress report.

S. H.

BOWLER HATS AND BEETLES

A million bowler hats are going to Town
Each morning gaily;
In either hand a rolled umbrella and
A folded "Daily."
Do you see nothing strange in that, my Clown?

A million crawling things in human guise
Let loose to plunder—
To rob and cheat—to buy and sell—and beat
Each other under.
And he who hits the hardest gains the prize.

A million human beetles in a tub
Of muck delighting;
Pushing their balls of filth the game enralls—
Such greed's exciting.
Though piles grow bigger yet for more they grub.

A million homes depend on beetle dung
For beetle feeding.
Thin females fat with young will see to that—
But won't stop breeding.
O praise those paunches pendulously hung!

A million graves—when beetle kings decide
To slay the masses.
Young beetles dead may be so quickly bred—
So Cheer, you Asses!
Perhaps a beetle god knows why they died.

A million bowler hats are going to Town—
You still see nothing strange in that, my Clown?

W. H. Wood.

OBITUARY

JOSEPH CRABB EDWARDS.

The funeral of Mr. Joseph Crabb Edwards of Chester who died at the City Hospital on Sunday, took place at Landican Crematorium, Birkenhead, on Thursday December 6, 1945.

Mr. Edwards, who was aged 80, was a member of the Chester Branch of the National Secular Society and was a reader of the "Freethinker" for over 50 years. He was well known for his progressive opinions and never hesitated to further the cause of Freethought.

He held the position of manager of the furnishing department at the Chester Co-operative Society and retired 15 years ago. He continued to interest himself in the Movement and served on several committees.

He was a member of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, being founder of the Chester Branch, and held a long service certificate for same.

Mr. Edwards left definite instruction as to his funeral and expressed his wish for a non-religious Service.

He is survived by his wife and two sons to whom our deepest sympathy is extended.

His wishes were strictly adhered to and a short Secular Burial Service was conducted by Mr. A. D. Hodgkinson, Chester Branch Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—
Sunday, 6-30: "Brains Trust."

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

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

KOESTLER, PREECE AND H. L. S.

H. H. PREECE ("The Freethinker," November 18, 1945) and H. L. S. ("The Freethinker," December 2, 1945) seem to be as psychologically bemused as Arthur Koestler, whose neurotic declamations they have so naively swallowed. Both, it appears, have scarcely an immature conception of the real significance of the U.S.S.R.'s achievements since 1917.

Mr. Preece has been adequately dealt with by your contributor Athoso Zenoo ("The Freethinker," December 9, 1945).

H. L. S. has resuscitated the old charge of "Totalitarianism," pointing out that, "... the State, if given all power, is bound to act like a criminal lunatic." But there are States and States, although H. L. S. is chary of definitions. "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a Socialist State of workers and peasants," so reads Article 1 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. Article 3 declares, "In the U.S.S.R. all power belongs to the working people of town and country as represented by the Soviets of Working People's Deputies."

Perhaps, like Koestler in his morbid scepticism, H. L. S. is suspicious of paper constitutions. Then let competent observers speak from experience. Hewlett Johnson in his "Socialist Sixth of the World" (Gollancz, 1939) says that "No franchise in the world is so wide as the franchise of the New Stalinist Constitution." Professor Leonard Barnes in his "Soviet Light on the Colonies" (Penguin) prompts his hypothetical Russian traveller to say of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "I dare say you think of the Party as a dominant clique that exists to monopolise the plums and spoils of office. . . . If so, you merely add one more to the toll of your errors where Communism is concerned. Actually the Party is an organisation of special service troops trained to carry out certain particular tasks of engineering in the social field. It is a non-hereditary aristocracy of political labour chosen purely on merit from every race and culture in the Union and including representatives from every village as well as from every factory." Theodore Dreiser visited Russia in 1927. He said at the beginning of his report on the visit, "Dreiser looks at Russia" (Constable and Company Limited, 1928), "... I am an incorrigible individualist—therefore opposed to Communism." Yet he was able to affirm after his visit that "... out of Russia, as out of no other country to-day, I feel, are destined to come great things, mentally as well as practically."

These are only random quotations from a mass of reliable opinions by persons who have seen the Soviet system in action. Further interesting evidence will be found in the fact that in 1932 there were 5,500,000 in the Union of Militant Atheists, as well as 2,000,000 in its junior organisation. History has never revealed Atheism to be compatible with "Totalitarianism." Atheists are persons with the ability to think for themselves; And where outside of the U.S.S.R. will be found such freedom from racial prejudice or such equality for all peoples irrespective of nationality or race? Certainly not in the "free" British Empire.

But does all this convince H. L. S.? If he is aware of the facts it seems not. He says, "Only if we are able to emancipate ourselves from the tyranny of State and Church can we be free to work out our own philosophy and our own economic salvation." How can we free ourselves from the "tyranny of the Church" without action by a State expressing the will of the people? There is no tyranny of the Church in the U.S.S.R. because the State decreed otherwise. How can we "work out our own economic salvation" without the introduction of necessary measures by the State? The answer will be of special interest to those who voted for the present British Government.

H. L. S., like Koestler, is more concerned with his egocentric intuition than with inductive reasoning. He prefers anarchical chaos to a stable and orderly society. Koestler, he says, "... gives to rebels and the Freethinker new courage to fight against the tendencies of the day." Merely, it seems, for the sake of a fight. The "tendencies of the day" are leading towards a new world where greed, want, and poverty will be abolished, where a new and greater freedom will reign for all peoples, whatever their race, colour or creed. The Freethinker will not be deceived by Arthur Koestler's introspective lucubrations nor by the imprudence of H. H. Preece and H. L. S.

S. B. WHITFIELD.

IF THE CAT FITS

"A DEAD religion is like a dead cat—the stiffer and more rotten it is, the better it is as a missile weapon," so said Mr. H. G. Wells to the British Association, forecasting gloomily a coming epoch of insincere wars of religion. It is a question for zoology and not for comparative religion, but I doubt whether being stiff and being rotten really go together like this, and are not alternatives. Still, Mr. Wells wrote a text book of zoology, and knows these things. He also said that dead religions cumber the earth to-day. On the other hand, it is notable that dead cats are rare, so rare that the theory has grown up that cats never die. It is natural for us to be interested, because there is no sort of doubt that in his mind we are no more than putrescent pussycats, with the annoying habit of going on and on, and really much more like live nine-life cats than dead ones.

Mr. Kensit, on the other hand, at Bognor, likened those Anglicans who are co-operating with us in the work of the sword of the spirit to the sort of fool-hardy people who throw their hats into the lion's pit at Whipsnade and go in after them.—From "More Talking at Random" by Douglas Woodruff.

"PALPABLE NONSENSE"

(Concluded from page 471.)

Experience depends utterly upon the human mind and its relationship to things outside. Experience is not a thing in itself, existing independently outside the mind. It is a condition of relationship between the mind and the object—a new factor that arises out of both mind and object when they meet.

A mug of ale lies on the tavern table. Dr. Joad stands outside. He may have some previous experience of ale in general, or taverns in general. But he cannot have experience of that particular mug of ale until he has seen, smelled, touched or tasted—it might be bad for all he knows. Experience cannot arise until the two come into relationship—Joad and his mind, the mug and its ale. From this homely example we can wander into the outermost reaches of the universe. There can still be no experience, to Joad, without Joad to experience it. And what goes for Joad goes for you and me, too, whether it be Joad we are experiencing or some idea about god almighty.

To confirm which I must point out that none of us had any experience even of Joad's "almighty" until Joad recently introduced "him" to us.

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

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